

When a Congregation journeys, sometimes we don't notice the "trip" until looking back at the footsteps that brought us to the present. Such a journey was one that Tucson Central took over a period of several years.

I am in my eighth or ninth year of being Pastor. I remember learning that pastor also means shepherd and a shepherd takes care of the whole flock. Early in my first years as Pastor, I was approached about the possibility of becoming a Welcoming congregation. I had heard, read and learned that there could be repercussions for the congregation to declare such a public statement. At that time, I was not prepared to begin that journey or lead the way through the process. I often thought about Doctrine and Covenants 163:11b: *"there are many issues that could easily consume the time and energy of the church. However, the challenge before a prophetic people is to discern and pursue what matters most for the journey ahead."*

Over the years, Chuck and Mike Hewitt were often in the Congregation visiting Chuck's parents, Ann and George. They became welcome visitors and enlivened our fellowship with their testimonies and enthusiasm. We were blessed when they moved to Tucson permanently in 2014. They hit the ground running with their joyful approach to life and people - they taught classes, invited people into their home to get to know them and volunteered, cooked and sang. They mentioned the Welcoming Statement. It was time to "discern and pursue" and we began to explore the possibility and process. We attended classes at the Mission Center that explained the steps to be taken. We had Chuck and Mike as volunteers to begin the process and Dick and Diana Hansen also stepped up. In the past we had classes on the subject in the congregation but this was the first time we got serious about getting it done. Chuck, Mike, Dick and Diana began the process of one on one conversations with everyone in the Congregation.

Like any journey there were starts and stops, a few detours, some rocky patches, the Hansens moved to Phoenix, and toughest of all, Chuck Hewitt died and we lost momentum. Mike moved back to Michigan. It took months, maybe even years. But in the end there was consensus among the members. It then took several months of input and suggestions to determine what our Welcoming Statement should be. Mike Hewitt had a suggestion from his former Independence congregation. Don Woster had a statement from his former Colorado congregation. A transgender woman in the congregation made suggestions. At our Nov 11, 2018 Business Meeting, we voted to be a Welcoming Community and the following statement is what was formed by the work of the Congregation in coming together in that Business Meeting by combining elements of every suggestion: *"The Tucson Community of Christ welcomes you. All are creations of a loving God. We uphold the dignity and worth of all persons and are glad you have chosen to worship with us. We extend the love of Jesus Christ to everyone, including those who are marginalized for any reason. Come as you are; be who you are; we have a place saved for you."* In some ways I feel we labored together in love, perhaps not what would have happened if we had begun those many years ago. The Statement is uniquely ours and in a way, also honors who Chuck Hewitt was and still is in our minds and hearts.

From Doctrine and Covenants 163:9: *"Eternal joy and peace await those who grow in grace...that flows from compassionate hearts without thought of return. Could it be otherwise in the domain of God, who eternally gives all for the sake of creation?"*

Respectfully, Wink