

“Kaleidoscopic”
October 11, 2026

Galatians 3:23-29

“We, the members of Wapping Community Church, United Church of Christ, recognize the foundational importance of the prayer of Jesus: “That they may all be one” (John 17:21) by inviting all people into the full life, ministry, leadership, fellowship, sacraments, mission, and responsibilities of our congregation.

The sacred worth of all people as unique individuals made in the image of Christ is welcome here. Whatever age, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, or physical, cognitive or emotional ability, we invite you to find a safe and nurturing spiritual home at Wapping Community Church. All are welcome to participate in the life, leadership, ministry and mission of this church as we seek to grow together in our faith community.”

What I have just read for you is the Open and Affirming Statement this church officially adopted at our Annual Meeting on January 22nd, 2017. After months of study and prayerful reflection as a congregation, the overwhelming vote to become Open and Affirming marked one of the most significant days I can remember in my ministry here at Wapping Community Church.

It’s been nearly a decade since we’ve gone on public record with our Open and Affirming status. Yet our mandate as a congregation remains unchanged. Namely, how do we make sure our Open and Affirming covenant is a living, breathing, relevant statement? In other words, it’s one thing to say we are an Open and Affirming church. But claiming we are Open and Affirming is only a part of what God calls us to do. The more critical task for this church is how we go about **being** Open and Affirming.

To that end, I offer you a few thoughts this morning. Starting with the concept of Open and Affirming itself. My contention is that we tend to have an easier time with the first part of the phrase. It’s relatively simple to say we are “open” as a congregation. Here at Wapping, we pride ourselves on being open to groups from the community who want to use our building. We believe we are open to anyone who walks through the doors on a Sunday morning and sits down in this sanctuary for worship.

The choir is open to new people who want to sing, the church school classrooms are open to any child who wants to learn more about their faith on a Sunday morning, and the doors to our Youth Rooms are open to any youth who wants to find a community where they can feel safe and welcome on Sunday afternoons.

We are open to any couple who wants to get married in this sanctuary, regardless of whom they choose to love. This church building is open to people of various physical abilities, although we are constantly striving to make this church even more accessible

than it already is. We are open to people of different faiths, committed to honoring what makes other faith traditions unique and lifting up what people of faith share in common...

All in all, I think Wapping Community Church is doing pretty well with the “open” part. But being “open” and being “affirming” are not the same thing, despite the fact that the two words are supposed to go hand in hand. When we affirm someone we go out of our way to offer them emotional support, we purposefully validate their dignity and humanity, and we acknowledge their feelings and their character. When we refer to the “sacred worth” of people in our Open and Affirming statement, what we’re describing is the affirming part of open and affirming.

An open church says “it’s fine that you are here because anybody can come into a church.” An Open and Affirming church says “we welcome you here at this church with open arms and we want this to be a grace and hope-filled place where you can feel the love of God and the love of other people who share this faith community with you.

An open church puts signs around its property giving people information about the best way to get into the building. An Open and Affirming church puts rainbow-colored chairs outside the church and rainbow-colored banners and posters inside the sanctuary letting people in the LGBTQ community who pass by and come in for worship know that they are created in the image of God and fully accepted as fellow disciples seeking to follow Jesus Christ. And we do those things for more than one month or one day in the year so no one forgets...

To affirm another human being is powerful and transformative. And churches that are Open and Affirming say so through our words and our actions. If you are male or female or non-binary, we affirm your gender identity and however you choose to express your identity. If you are transitioning from one gender to another or you have already transitioned, we affirm who you are, we affirm your courage and we invite you to be a part of this place without fear or judgement. If you are in a same gender marriage, we affirm that you have found someone to share abundant life and love with and we welcome you with open arms.

And we can’t forget about the remaining parts of our Open and Affirming covenant at Wapping Community Church. From the moment you are born until the moment you take your last earthly breath, we affirm the fact that God loves you in Jesus Christ even more than you will ever know. We affirm the color of your skin and the ethnic heritage you hold dear, along with your own sacred history and culture, and we honor the diverse gifts you bring to share.

Whether your wallet is full or your bank account is empty, your presence in this church enriches all of us. If you are single or divorced or newly married or you have lost a spouse or partner along your life journey, we embrace you with compassion and care. If you are an abuse or assault survivor, we support you in your healing and we stand in solidarity with you. If you have a physical disability or you struggle with your own mental health or you are neurodivergent, Wapping Community Church affirms you in all

the fullness of your personhood. And we pledge to support you and advocate for you in any way possible, knowing we are all part of one body in Christ Jesus...

“There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

From the time I was a small child until now, one thing I have always loved in my life are kaleidoscopes. When I was growing up, we used to have a fancy kaleidoscope on the coffee table in our living room. It was carved out of wood in three dimensions in the shape of a triangle. On one end of the kaleidoscope, you could look through the hole or the lens, down the long triangular tube. On the other end of the kaleidoscope, there was a wheel of colored glass, much like a stained-glass window, that you could spin with your fingers while you were looking.

Sometimes I would spin the wheel slowly and watch each image unfold, one color melting into another. And sometimes I would spin the wheel quickly so I could watch colors speed by in a dizzying pattern. I spent all kinds of time with that kaleidoscope, especially when I was trying to avoid doing my chores or my homework.

It didn't have to be the kaleidoscope on our coffee table, though. I loved the small kaleidoscopes I occasionally found in my stocking on Christmas morning. I have always been fascinated by the kaleidoscopes where you twist the end and it makes a shaking sound while little shards of colored plastic rearrange themselves in bold new designs.

I even loved the kaleidoscopes you could make in school or at home where you gathered a few small household items and a paper towel roll. You closed off the end of the roll, creating a prism with some kind of reflective sheet and a little plastic wrap. Then you filled the tube with tacks and paper clips and beads before decorating the outside of the kaleidoscope. Until finally you enjoyed watching homemade kaleidoscopic images appear with every turn...

If you ask me, God looks at human beings and the world through a giant kaleidoscope. Turning and twisting all the time to reveal people with different skin colors. And people with different gender identities. People who have plenty of material resources. And people who are poor and marginalized and struggling to survive every day.

When God spins and turns and twists the kaleidoscope, God sees people with varying physical and emotional and cognitive abilities. And people who have chosen love in so many different forms. And people of all ages. Human beings, every one of us, seeking to live full and abundant lives here on God's magnificent earth.

Can you picture God peering through a great big kaleidoscope? Watching God's people mix and come together in all our precious diversity? Knowing that each and

every one of us have been shaped and fashioned and nurtured in God's own holy image. And God delighting all the while in the incredible beauty God has created.

God affirms you and me and each of God's people. And God, in Jesus Christ, asks us to affirm one another. There is nothing we do here at Wapping Community Church that is more important. Or more worthy. Or more sacred. Amen.