Highland Celebrates Pride in Worship This Sunday

This Sunday, we celebrate LGBTQ Pride and God’s inclusive love in worship! Covid-19 and the current historical moment for black lives have radically altered what Pride month looks like this June in our city and country. As trans health care was attacked last Friday by the current administration, the Supreme Court ruled just yesterday that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects LGBTQ rights and prohibits LGBTQ discrimination in the workplace. Pride is always celebrated amidst the long, hard fight for justice; to do so in worship is to proclaim God’s love and ongoing participation in the work of LGBTQ liberation.

In worship, we will hear a Gospel message from guest preacher Rev. John Russell Stanger, liturgy crafted by Highland member Lillian Glover, and LGBTQ pride woven throughout the liturgy. Committee Members include: Bob Cunningham (chair), Alec Fuller, Kathy Belcher, Tyler Swim, Earl Shelp, Noah Cooksey, and Carolyn King.

A huge word of thanks to the entire Pastor Search Committee for the tireless work they have done over the past two years. Their countless research, phone calls, interviews, meetings, and discernment made the call process and voting possible, and all of us in the Highland Baptist community owe them a huge debt of gratitude. Committee Members include: Bob Cunningham (chair), Alec Fuller, Kathy Belcher, Tyler Swim, Earl Shelp, Noah Cooksey, and Carolyn King.

Church Approves Rev. Mary Alice Birdwhistell As Pastor

On Sunday, the Pastor Search Committee announced that Highland Baptist Church overwhelmingly approved Rev. Mary Alice Birdwhistell as the next pastor of Highland Baptist Church. Voting via online and phone calls to the church, members and voting affiliates voted 386 in favor and one opposed. The approval rate was just over 98%. The church bylaws require at least an 80% “yes” vote to call a pastor. Joy overflows as we look to end these days of interim and see what God has in store as we begin living out our faith with a new Pastor.

A starting date has yet to be determined, but the Personnel Ministry Group and the church staff have already begun work to make sure that everything is in order when she arrives. Until she begins her work among us, you may continue getting to know Mary Alice by way of the wealth of videos and documents produced as part of the Call Weekend. Some are listed below.

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More Church News

The Rev. John Russell Stanger is a minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and a psychotherapist in private practice in Louisville, KY (https://www.johnrussellstanger.com). He has previously served as the pastor of United Presbyterian Church in Lebanon, KY, and the executive director of Parity, a faith-based LGBTQ advocacy organization in New York, NY. John Russell’s call story is featured in the documentary Out of Order Church: www.outoforderdoc.com/out-of-order, which tells the story of LGBTQ peopleclaiming their place in the pulpit. He takes part in the life of Highland Baptist Church alongside his husband and HBC deacon Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons.

Call for LGBTQ Voices at Highland

In recognition of Pride, Highland invites LGBTQ community members to offer daily devotional/ reflection videos to be shared at 10:00 a.m. on Facebook starting next Monday, June 22, through next Friday, June 26. The videos do not have to be long, just 15 minutes or less, and Perry will help those interested in contributing. Email perry@hbclouisville.org and he will communicate submission guidelines and offer a framework to use.

Groups Work on Plan for Safe Opening of Pews

While our state released guidelines in May for in-person worship to resume, Highland’s leadership is working diligently to think through carefully how we can welcome people back into the pew. Highland’s staff have formed two groups of church members to work on plans for how we safely welcome people back into our pews. These two groups will research and create recommendations for staff, deacons, and Ministry Council. Once leadership discerns that Highland is ready to invite people back into our pews for worship safely, we will include a re-opening date and guidelines in the newsletter. Throughout this process, worship will continue to be open online for all people to participate safely from home. We anticipate that worship will continue online throughout these months as the pandemic presents risks to many people in our community.

The first group is our Attend- ance Group. They are exploring the number of people who can attend at one time, the process for registration to attend, and a covenant for how we can be together safely. This group includes David Bannister, Amber Burke, Phil Collier (chair), Jan Forrest, and Doris Hornback. The second group is our Logistics Group. They are exploring how we safely welcome people into the building, abide by state guidelines, offer appropriate hospitality, and help people exit the building.

Our staff is offering a word every weekday at 10:00 a.m. on our Highland Facebook Page. Our schedule is as follows: Lauren Jones Mayfield on Monday, Jim England on Tuesday, Carol Harston on Wednesday, Renee Purtlebaugh on Thursday, and Perry Dixon on Friday. These are also being uploaded to our YouTube channel within a day or two of their creation.

We worship from the sanctuary on our Facebook page at 7:00 p.m. on Friday nights and 10:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings. These streams also appear on our YouTube page.

Bible study & children’s gatherings via Zoom. Several adult Bible study classes and Pastor Renee are gathering weekly via Zoom which allows connectivity via computer or phone. If your child would like to connect, email Renee. If your Bible study class would like to begin meeting this way, email Carol at carol@hbclouisville.org or Walter at walter@hbclouisville.org.
For the Living of These Days—A Word from Renee Purtlebaugh

What a historic week in the life of Highland this has been! Looking back on this past weekend and to Sunday, after 30 months of interim life, it feels almost like a dream where I have woken up wondering, “did that really happen?” Yes, yes it did.

We crafted profiles of Highland Baptist Church and the kind of person we were seeking as a pastor. I thank Roy Fuller, Diane Brewer, Chip Miller, and Molly Braun who references and discussed the gifts of those applying. I give thanks for the Committee and their hard work and affirm each of them for the gift they have given to the church.

Carolyn King. Each of them has given a considerable amount of time and energy to this process. I want to emphasize what a team process this has been as we reviewed over 50 applications, read resumes and essays in response to our questions, conducted numerous interviews, talked with countless references, and discussed the gifts of those applying. I give thanks for the Committee and their hard work and affirm each of them for the gift they have given to the church.

I also want to thank Michael DeWhately and Billy Flood—both of whom served on the committee before moving away from Louisville. Both were a vital part of the process as we crafted profiles of Highland Baptist Church and the kind of person we were seeking as a pastor. I thank Roy Fuller, Diane Brewer, Chip Miller, and Molly Braun who served alongside us on the Transition Team earlier in the process. The four of them brought energy, wisdom, and insight.

I thank our current ministerial staff as well. Carol Harston, Lauren Jones Mayfield, Perry Dixon, Renee Purtlebaugh, Kathy Collier, and Austin Echols have inspired us, cared for us, and led us forward through this interim period. Each of them was a source of support and encouragement to me personally in leading the search process and I so appreciate all they have done and continue to do.

Thank you to Jim England. Jim has been like a pastor to our staff while providing us with words of comfort, challenge, and love over the course of this interim. He has been the very voice of God on Sunday mornings.

A major word of gratitude to Walter McWhorter for both the endless hours and energy he has put into keeping us connected through worship on Facebook and YouTube, as well as a wonderful job with coordinating videos, documents, and Zoom meetings during the Call Weekend. The process could not have happened without him. Thank you to Andria Eadens for all her work in editing and putting out several publications as part of the Call Weekend.

At the risk of stating the obvious, thank you to Mary Alice for responding to God’s call to the ministry and listening to God’s Spirit in coming to Highland. I believe deeply she was provided with many gifts of encouragement and formed as we formed the church, doing justice, and sharing God’s love with the world.

Two others I wish to thank. One, you—the members of Highland Baptist Church who shared with us your vision for the church and a new pastor; who prayed for us and waited with hope over this whole process; who asked us important questions and offered us support and encouragement. We are so grateful you stuck with us as we navigated Zoom forums, town hall meetings, technical difficulties on Sunday morning, and then embraced Mary Alice and celebrated by overwhelmingly affirming her as our new pastor. Two, God’s Spirit, for I believe when all is said and done, it was the work of the Spirit that led us to Mary Alice and her to us.

Even with the technological difficulties on Sunday morning, I still believe God was present in all of the events we experienced. I’ve been fascinated by the way God’s Spirit guides us and leads us where we need to be. I am certain this Sunday as we gathered online led us to this moment of clarity with Mary Alice.

I want to say two things about God’s Spirit. First, I’ve been reminded that God speaks to us in many ways. We might not hear it as a spoken word, but we can recognize it by the way it moves us. I am certain it guided us to our new pastor.

Mary Alice Birdwhistell has led us to this moment of clarity with Mary Alice as a pastor. It is with great joy that I affirm her as our new pastor. Two, God’s Spirit, for I believe when all is said and done, it was the work of the Spirit that led us to Mary Alice and her to us.

Mary Alice Birdwhistell as our new pastor.

Thank you to Mary Alice for responding to God’s call to the ministry and listening to God’s Spirit in coming to Highland. I believe deeply she was provided with many gifts of encouragement and formed as we formed the church, doing justice, and sharing God’s love with the world.

I am so grateful to have watched those who have traveled through Highland at some point on their journey being reminded of their fond connections to our community of faith in these moments.

Mary Alice Birdwhistell, the first woman to be called (virtually no less) by our congregation into the lead pastor role in our church.

I am indebted to the other five members of the committee: Kathy Belcher, Tyler Swim, Earl Shelp, Noah Cooksey, and Carolyn King. Each of them has given a considerable amount of time and energy to this process. I want to emphasize what a team process this has been as we reviewed over 50 applications, read resumes and essays in response to our questions, conducted numerous interviews, talked with countless references, and discussed the gifts of those applying. I give thanks for the Committee and their hard work and affirm each of them for the gift they have given to the church.

Andria Eadens for all her work in editing and putting out several publications as part of the Call Weekend.

In this six-week workshop series, the Baptist Seminary of Kentucky wants you to walk with us through these difficult issues. The life and theology of Martin Luther King Jr. inspires the arc of the course as a pilgrimage of pain, hope, and transformation. Dr. King boldly described protests as “the language of the unheard” and prophetically asked, “What is it that America has failed to hear?” He challenged all, especially white America, to move from chaos to community through transformation.

Virgil in the Primary

It is too late too request an absentee ballot. But you can vote early in person. Before Election Day (Tuesday, June 23), you can vote in person from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, at two sites:

- Kentucky Exposition Center, 937 Phillips Lane. No appointment is necessary.
- Jefferson County Extension Center, 701 West Ormsby Avenue. To vote, you must call to make an appointment at (502) 574-6100.

On Election Day, you can only vote at the Kentucky Exposition Center, 6:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. As long as you are in line by 6:00 p.m., you will be able to vote.

If you vote any day at the Kentucky Exposition Center, you can enter through Gates 2 and 4 (off Crittenden Drive) and 6 (off Preston Highway). Voting will happen at the Kentucky Exposition Center.

On Election Day, TARC will provide a shuttle from Union Station, 1000 West Broadway, to the Exposition Center for free. Shuttles will run every 30 minutes beginning at 6:00 a.m.

If you receive an absentee ballot and have not sent it in, it must be postmarked on or before June 23. You can also put your ballot in drop-off boxes at the Jefferson County Extension Center and the Kentucky Exposition Center.

Baptist Joint Committee Luncheon June 26

All are invited to attend a special webinar exploring the intersection of race and religious liberty. On Friday, June 26, the BJC will broadcast live from the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., from noon until 1:00 p.m. The webinar is a free event, open to all who register at https://tinyurl.com/y69f7tlh.

Our guest speaker will feature a conversation with Robert P. Jones, the author of the forthcoming book While Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity. Jones will be interviewed by MSNIC’s Joy Reid during the event. Jones is the CEO and founder of PRRI and a leading scholar and commentator on religion, culture, and policy. The 2020 virtual luncheon will also feature updates on our work, stories from members of the BJC community and information on the latest religious liberty developments.

The Alliance of Baptists Statement on Racism

With approval from Ministry Council, Highland Baptist signed on to a joint statement on racism sponsored by the Alliance of Baptists, Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, and the American Baptist Home Missions Society. You can read the statement online at https://tinyurl.com/yb6hrb7y

The Call of this Matter, Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis

One of my (Lauren) favorite pastors and preachers in our current context is Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis of Middle Collegiate Church in New York City. She will offer an exploration of racism and white supremacy, focusing on the intersection of race and religion.

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Our Mission
God’s Love compels us to cultivate a safe, welcoming community of faith where all are challenged to discover, grow, and serve, as together we boldly live out the worship that is our very lives.

Our Vision
We dream of being an engaging, vibrant Christian church, where transformed people are joining the work of God, creating a world where justice and Love are abundant.

Our Values
- We value a deeply spiritual, Christ-centered faith that opens us to life, equips us to serve, and calls us to action.
- We value a courageous, progressive theology whose relevance extends from the pew to the street, that engages both the mind and the heart, and that welcomes everyone from the skeptic to the devoted.
- We value all people, not in spite of, but precisely because of all that makes each one unique.
- We value being doors of the word, living out what Jesus taught: showing hospitality to strangers, confronting injustice, giving voice to those who have been silenced.
- We value a healthy community, where honest relationships provide all people safety, encouragement, acceptance, and healing, and challenge us to practice gentleness, forgiveness, and continued growth.
- We value embracing challenge and change: naming hard things, asking questions, and leaning into tensions and ambiguity.
- We value growing together across the lifespan, through multi-generational and intergenerational relationships and ministries.
- We value being grounded in our distinct and radical heritage that compels us to breathe new life into bedrock Baptist principles.
- We value broad and deep worship that invites us into the mystery of a loving God.
- We value being good stewards of all we have been given, discerning together how best to use our financial, physical, human, and spiritual gifts to follow Jesus and carry out our mission.

END OF NEWSLETTER