

the **PROM**

**Resources for
Audiences & Advocates**

THEATRE AT
ST **LUKE'S**

Pastor & Director Notes

At Theatre at St. Luke's, we believe storytelling is sacred work. Theatre has the unique ability to gather people who may never otherwise sit beside one another and create space for laughter, reflection, empathy, and honest conversation. At its best, theatre helps us encounter humanity through someone else's perspective while still recognizing ourselves within it. That is why *The Prom* matters here.

This production is not about attacking communities, mocking faith, or creating division. In many ways, the musical critiques self-righteousness and performative behavior from every direction. Instead, it invites compassion, understanding, and deeper conversation about how we care for one another and respond when people feel unseen, unheard, or afraid.

This story feels especially important for Central Florida and for our nation right now. We are living in a culture shaped by polarization, outrage, fear, and isolation, where people too often speak at one another instead of with one another. *The Prom* reminds us that behind every debate, headline, and disagreement are real human beings searching for dignity, belonging, understanding, and love.

This production is for **students** who have ever felt isolated.

It is for **parents** trying to navigate a changing world.

It is for **communities** struggling to communicate across differences.

It is for **people of faith** wrestling with how to love others well.

It is for those who feel **unseen**.

It is for those still **learning** how to see others clearly.

Centered in our values and vision, this production approaches every character with humanity. Even those we disagree with are not portrayed as cartoons. The goal is not condemnation. The goal is understanding.

This show asks us to examine what fear does to communities, while also imagining what courage, honesty, humility, and compassion might make possible instead. Our hope is that audiences leave entertained, joyful, emotionally moved, and perhaps just a little more open-hearted than when they arrived.

With Universal Love,

Steve MacKinnon, Director

Rev. Corey Jones, Lead Pastor

Resource Guide developed & curated by
Rev. Melissa Cooper



**THEATRE AT
ST LUKE'S**

About *The Prom* at St. Luke's

What Is *The Prom* About?

The Prom tells the story of Emma, a high school student in Indiana whose school cancels the prom rather than allow her to attend with her girlfriend. A group of Broadway performers, eager for a public cause after receiving bad press, travel to Indiana to support her. Their arrival brings attention, conflict, comedy, and eventually transformation. Along the way, the adult advocates have to learn that allyship is not about taking over someone else's story. It is about listening, showing up, risking comfort, and helping create space for the person directly affected to be seen and heard.

Why Is St. Luke's Producing *The Prom*?

Because the gospel is **good news** for people who have been told they are an exception to God's love. *The Prom* is a joyful, funny, and deeply human story about what happens when a young person is excluded, when well-meaning adults learn humility, and when a community has the chance to become more loving.

The musical matters because its central conflict is not imaginary. LGBTQ+ youth face rejection, bullying, religious shame, family conflict, and higher risks of depression and self-harm. A church production of *The Prom* can become more than entertainment; it can become a **public witness** that love, safety, and belonging are holy work. For St. Luke's, this show is not a departure from Christian ministry; it is an expression of it.

The show gives us a chance to say clearly:

- LGBTQ+ people are **beloved children of God**, just as they are.
- The church should be a place of **safety, dignity, welcome**, and **discipleship**.
- **Inclusion** is not merely a social trend; it is rooted in our understanding of **Scripture, grace**, and the ministry of **Jesus**.
- Advocacy matters, but **the way we advocate** matters too. We are called to **center** the people most affected, not our own need to be seen as heroes.

At its best, *The Prom* is a story about a community learning to **choose love over fear**. At its best, the church is too. St. Luke's offers this production as an act of hospitality, theological clarity, joyful witness, and pastoral care. We do not need to pretend that every question is simple. We do need to be clear that LGBTQ+ people are not problems to be solved. They are **beloved people** to be honored, protected, celebrated, and included in the life of the church and society, just as they are, for who God made them to be.



THEATRE AT
ST LUKE'S

Contemporary Theatrical Storytelling

The Prom's PG-13 Content

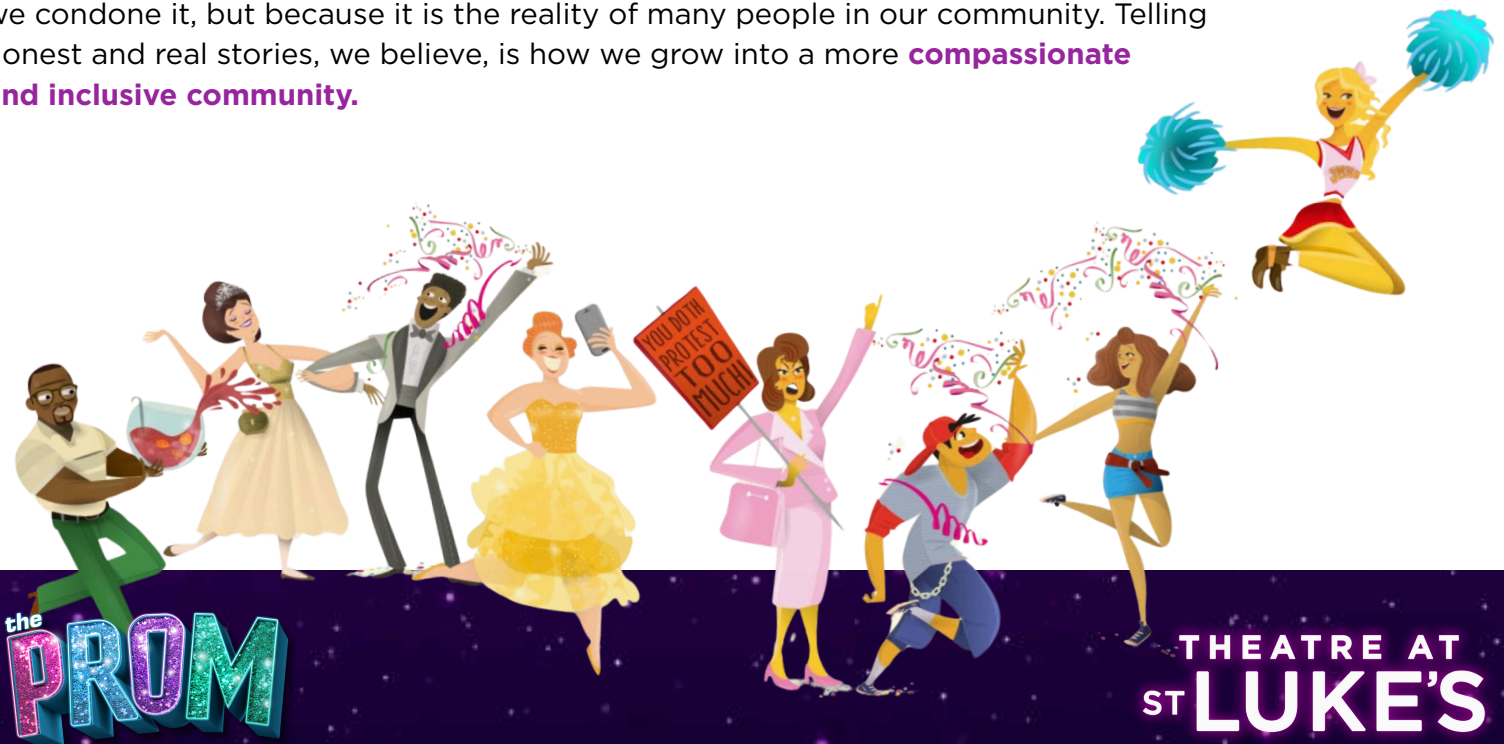
Churches have long used art to spark reflection. This has been true for Theatre at St. Luke's, where we have addressed issues of racism, violence, domestic abuse, exclusion, prejudice, poverty, exploitation, nationalism, church harm, and other relevant contemporary issues throughout our history. *The Prom* gives us a story through which we can talk about belonging, courage, harm, repentance, and allyship. It also is a contemporary musical that includes **offensive language, including profanity, harmful slurs, and sexual themes.** We know this may make some cast or audience members uncomfortable, especially within the walls of a church.

Our goal is not to add to any hurt or harm that individuals may have already experienced in a church setting, but rather to paint a picture of the real world we find ourselves in as a way to **inspire transformation** in individuals who can use their actions, influence, voice and vote to transform our community, state, nation and world. In addition, we are not seeking to platform gratuitous profanity or flippant innuendo. The purpose of theatre is to **portray our world as it is**, not just as we dream of it to be.

Transforming the World

All too often, we are drawn into controversy over minor issues as a way to distract us from the larger injustices at hand. The transformation we dream of requires us to take an honest and unvarnished look at the real lives of our neighbors, especially those who are marginalized, and especially when it requires us to **confront our own discomfort.**

This show will portray the messiness and complicated reality of our world and culture, including language used to do hurt and harm to our neighbors, not because we condone it, but because it is the reality of many people in our community. Telling honest and real stories, we believe, is how we grow into a more **compassionate and inclusive community.**



The United Methodist Perspective

The Image of God: Grace Comes First

In the book of Genesis, we read that human beings are **created in the image of God**. We believe that innate image is not marred or erased by sexual orientation, gender identity, family structure, or social rejection. To care about LGBTQ+ people is to honor the God whose image they bear. United Methodists believe in **prevenient grace**: God's love is already at work before we recognize it, understand it, or respond to it. This means LGBTQ+ people (and all people) do not need to become someone else in order to be loved by God. God's grace is already present in their lives.

United Methodist Social Ethics

For United Methodists, inclusion is also connected to **social holiness**: the conviction that faith is lived in community and that love of God and love of neighbor cannot be separated. We follow three General Rules:

1. **First, do no harm.** We must acknowledge that anti-LGBTQ+ theology, bullying, rejection, and exclusion have caused real harm, especially to youth.
2. **Do all the good you can.** Inclusion is active. It means creating safety, using respectful language, supporting individuals and families, and advocating for dignity.
3. **Stay in love with God.** Our advocacy is grounded in the practices of worship, prayer, Scripture, humility, and discipleship, not merely in cultural opinion.

The Current United Methodist Context

The United Methodist Church has changed significantly in recent years. The denomination has **removed** long-standing churchwide restrictions that targeted LGBTQ+ people, including prohibitions related to ordination and same-sex weddings. Local churches and clergy may differ in practice and conviction, but **St. Luke's can faithfully claim an LGBTQ+ inclusive witness** as part of our Methodist commitment to grace, conscience, pastoral care, and justice – including in both recommending and welcoming LGBTQ+ persons as **pastors**, and hosting and blessing **weddings**.

St. Luke's Values and LGBTQ+ Inclusion

St. Luke's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement (linked in the resources below) affirms a commitment to becoming a community where **every person is valued** and where barriers to full participation are named and addressed. In the context of *The Prom*, that means we do not simply say "all are welcome" in general terms. We name that LGBTQ+ people, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and nonbinary people, are included in the "all." Christian hospitality is more than politeness. It is a spiritual practice of **making room, honoring dignity**, and **seeing Christ in one another**.



THEATRE AT
ST LUKE'S

A Biblical Framework For Inclusion

How We Read Scripture

United Methodists often describe theological discernment through **Scripture**, **tradition**, **reason**, and **experience**. Scripture is central, and we read it carefully in conversation with the historic faith, the best of human reason, and the lived testimony of people in whom we see the fruits of the Spirit. This matters because many LGBTQ+ Christians bear witness to lives marked by faithfulness, prayer, service, compassion, and deep love for Christ and the church. Their testimony should not be dismissed.

A Biblical Framework for Inclusion

We do not affirm LGBTQ+ identities **despite** what is found in the Christian scriptures; rather, we believe that the Bible gives us a **mandate** to affirm and include the diversity of ways God created humanity. The Bible must be read responsibly, contextually, and always through the lens of Jesus' greatest command to love God and neighbor.

The Bible's Big Story

The broad movement of Scripture is an arc that moves humanity toward covenant, liberation, reconciliation, and the widening of community:

- God creates **all people** in **God's image**.
- The prophets call God's people to **justice**, **mercy**, and **care** for the vulnerable.
- Jesus consistently moves **toward** people pushed to the margins.
- The early church wrestles with who **belongs** and learns that the Spirit often moves ahead of the institution.

Key Texts



Genesis 1:26-27 ♦ All people bear God's image.

Micah 6:8 ♦ God requires justice, mercy, and humility.

Matthew 22:36-40 ♦ Love of God and neighbor is the heart of the law.

John 13:34-35 ♦ Jesus' followers are known by love.

Acts 8 ♦ Philip welcomes the Ethiopian eunuch without demanding that he fit expected categories.

Acts 10-15 ♦ The early church expands understanding of belonging as the Spirit works among Gentiles.

Galatians 3:28 ♦ In Christ, human divisions do not define spiritual worth or access to grace.

Romans 8:38-39 ♦ Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.



A Biblical Framework For Inclusion

What About the “Clobber Passages”?

Some biblical texts are often used to condemn LGBTQ+ people. These are sometimes called “clobber passages” because they have been used to wound rather than to invite faithful study.

A responsible exploration of any scripture text, especially these passages, should ask: What did these texts mean in their original context? What behavior was being addressed? Are these passages speaking about loving, mutual, covenantal same-sex relationships as we understand them today? The short answer? No.

- **Genesis 19 / Sodom and Gomorrah:** The story centers on violence, attempted sexual assault, inhospitality, and injustice—not loving same-sex relationships. The prophets themselves describe Sodom’s sin as arrogance, neglect of the poor, and abuse of the vulnerable.
- **Leviticus 18 and 20:** These texts are part of an ancient holiness code for Israel, with many laws Christians do not apply directly today. Interpretation requires attention to covenant, ritual purity, patriarchy, and cultural context.
- **Romans 1:** Paul is addressing idolatry, excess, lust, and exploitative practices in a Greco-Roman context. Many inclusive scholars argue this is not a discussion of faithful, mutual same-sex covenant relationships.
- **1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1:** The Greek terms are difficult to translate and may refer to exploitation, abuse, or economic/sexual domination rather than modern categories of sexual orientation.

This does not mean every Christian will agree. It does mean faithful Christians can read Scripture deeply and arrive at an affirming position without abandoning the Bible.

Transgender and Nonbinary People in Christian Perspective

The Bible does not use modern language about transgender or nonbinary identity. However, Scripture repeatedly shows God making room for people whose bodies, identities, or social locations do not fit expected categories or cultural norms. Isaiah 56 offers a promise to eunuchs, and Acts 8 shows an Ethiopian eunuch welcomed into the church through baptism.

These passages do not map perfectly onto modern gender identity, but they do reveal a biblical pattern: God’s covenant community is wider than religious gatekeepers often imagine, including those who do not fit into standard societal roles or ideals. Practicing inclusion means honoring transgender and nonbinary people by using their chosen names and personal pronouns, resisting ridicule, protecting privacy, and supporting access to pastoral care, community, and safety.

Frequently Asked Questions

“Isn’t this too political for church?”

Human dignity is not a partisan issue. The church should not be captive or beholden to any political party, but the gospel has real, public consequences. When people are bullied, excluded, or told God rejects them, the church has a responsibility to speak and act with love. Jesus engaged with the current events of his time, confronting unjust systems and structures. We are called to do the same.

“Are you endorsing everything in the show?”

Producing a musical does not mean every line, joke, or character choice is a prescriptive model of behavior. Churches have long used art to spark reflection. *The Prom* gives us a story through which we can talk about belonging, courage, harm, repentance, and allyship. It also is a modern musical that includes offensive language, including profanity, harmful slurs, and sexual themes. Part of the purpose of theatre and storytelling is to reflect our world, not just as we dream of it to be, but as it is, here and now. In order to seek transformation for our world, we first have to take an honest and unvarnished look at it, both our own experiences and the experiences of those who have experiences different than us, especially those who are marginalized. Truth-telling, including of the messiness and complicated reality of our world and culture, is how we grow into a more compassionate and inclusive community.

“What if I’m still wrestling with the Biblical questions?”

You are welcome in the conversation, and at St. Luke’s. This is a place where we can hold space for sincere questions while also making clear that LGBTQ+ people are not abstract issues; they are people, families, church members, artists, youth, and beloved children of God. Curiosity is welcome. Harmful speech or dehumanizing treatment is not. St. Luke’s pastors are always available for more conversation about these issues, and helping people wrestle with their inherited faith backgrounds.

“What should I say if someone asks why LGBTQ+ inclusion in the church and society matters?”

Try this: **“Because we believe every person is made in God’s image and loved by Christ.** We’ve also seen the harm caused when LGBTQ+ people are excluded in God’s name. As United Methodists, we believe grace comes first, love of neighbor is central, and the Spirit keeps widening the church’s understanding of who belongs.”

“How do we avoid making advocacy about ourselves?”

The Prom itself teaches this lesson. The Broadway characters initially want to be applauded for helping. Real allyship means centering on the people most affected, asking what support is actually needed, and being willing to do quiet, consistent work without needing credit.



THEATRE AT
ST LUKE'S

Practicing Allyship with Dignity

Allyship as a Lifestyle

Allyship is not an **identity** we claim once; it is a **practice** we continue learning, and we live out in our everyday lives. Helpful practices include:

- **Listen first.** Do not assume you know what an LGBTQ+ person needs.
- **Ask for, and then use, people's names and pronouns.** If you make a mistake, briefly apologize, correct yourself, and move on.
- **Do not "out" anyone.** Let people share their own story in their own time.
- **Interrupt harmful language.** Calmly challenge jokes, slurs, stereotypes, and dehumanizing comments.
- **Support parents and families.** Many families need care, education, and reassurance that loving their LGBTQ+ child is faithful.
- **Know crisis resources.** LGBTQ+ youth are at elevated risk when rejected or isolated. Keep The Trevor Project and other support resources accessible.
- **Advocate structurally.** Issues of inclusion are not just interpersonal, but systemic. Advocacy work includes supporting equitable policies, access to restrooms, and inclusive questions on forms, among others.
- **Stay humble.** Allyship includes repentance, repair, and continued learning.

A Simple Conversation Practice: CARE

Use this four-part framework when difficult conversations arise:

1. **Curiosity:** "Can you tell me more about what concerns you?"
2. **Affirm dignity:** "I believe LGBTQ+ people are beloved by God and deserve safety and respect."
3. **Root in faith:** "For me, this comes from Jesus' command to love our neighbors and from our Methodist understanding of grace."
4. **Extend invitation:** "Would you be open to reading, watching, or discussing one of these resources together?"

What Cast Members Can Say

Cast members do not need to be theologians to speak with care. Here are simple options:

*"This show is about **belonging**. It asks what happens when a community chooses fear over love, and what can happen when people find the courage to change."*

*"St. Luke's is doing The Prom because LGBTQ+ youth and families need to know that church can be a place of **safety, joy, and affirmation**."*

*"This show reminds advocates to **listen**. Helping is not about becoming the hero of someone else's story; it's about **making room** for the person whose story it is."*



THEATRE AT
ST LUKE'S

Recommended Resources

St. Luke's Resources

- [St. Luke's Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#)
- [People Over Definitions](#)
- [The Bible Says What?](#) (2018 Bible Study Series on "Clobber Passages")
- [The Bible in 12 Words](#) (2018 Preaching Series on the Bible)
- ["Why Can't We All Agree?"](#) (2018 Teaching on Biblical Interpretation)

Books for Deeper Study

- Steve Harper, [Holy Love](#)
- Colby Martin, [UnClobber](#)
- Brandon Robertson, [The Gospel of Inclusion](#)
- Austen Hartke, [The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians](#)
- Karen Oliveto, [Our Strangely Warmed Hearts: Coming Out into God's Call](#)
- Keegan Osinski, [Queering Wesley, Queering the Church](#)
- Matthew Vines, [God and the Gay Christian](#)

Online Resources

- Human Rights Campaign, ["What Does the Bible Say About Transgender People?"](#)
- The Reformation Project, ["The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships"](#)
- PFLAG [Ally Guide](#)

Video/Documentary

- ["Clobber Passages in 7 Minutes"](#)
- [1946: The Mistranslation That Shifted Culture](#)

Support, Advocacy, and Healing

- [PFLAG](#)
- [Glisten](#), formerly GLSEN, resources for LGBTQ+ issues in K-12 education
- Reconciling Ministries Network, [Parents Reconciling Network](#)
- [The Trevor Project](#) crisis support for LGBTQ+ youth
- Orlando Ballet's [Emotions in Motion](#)

