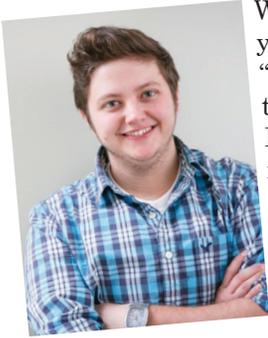


*"For you were once strangers yourselves..."*



# Welcome

## Greetings from Alex McNeill, MLP Executive Director



Welcome! Thank you for joining us at the More Light Presbyterians National Conference. "For you were once strangers" but are not any longer, for you are part of the MLP family. I've heard "welcome to the More Light family" a lot since I began my time as executive director. I've heard that welcome extended to new individual members and new churches that have joined us, and I've also heard it said to me by folks who have been long time advocates with MLP. What I really love about this welcome is that it embodies two key elements: unconditional love and mutual support.

For many of us whose families of origin have not been emblems of either sentiment, either because we are LGBTQ or for other reasons, having a family in More Light is deeply important. I also value thinking of More Light members and congregations as family because in the movement for LGBTQ welcome and equality, disagreements, misunderstandings, and hurt feelings are bound to come up. What's important to me is not that conflict happens, but that underneath it all we know there is an undercurrent of love for each other and for our shared ministry and mission. Through unconditional love we will refuse to let disagreements end our partnership.

Lastly, I am grateful to consider the members and churches of More Light family because families show up for one another no matter what. In the past five years, more has been accomplished for LGBTQ rights and justice both within the PCUSA and our world than ever before. Many people are finally getting a glimpse of the kingdom of God where all are able to live in their wholeness. However, you and I both know we aren't there yet. We have much more to do in our denomination and in our communities so that all can live as God calls them.

This weekend you will be getting a sample of some of the work left to do around marriage for all loving and committed couples in our denomination, and the role people of faith can play in ushering in marriage equality in the states where we live, caring for LGBTQ seniors, for transgender persons, or for those living with HIV/AIDS. We will hear about ministries for immigration reform and learn skills to help our churches become more welcoming for all people. Since we are a MLP family, we are called to show up when one of our members is hurting or being hurt by unjust laws or policies.

I have been inspired these past few weeks by your passion and commitment for justice. May the Spirit work within us so that we leave this place restored, renewed, and reconnected to work to broaden our family so that no one is a stranger anymore.

In peace,

Alex Patchin McNeill  
Executive Director

## Greetings from Rev. Heidi Peterson and Nathan Sobers, MLP Co-Moderators



Welcome! On behalf of your National Board of Directors, we welcome you to "...for you were once strangers...". We are so glad you are here. Our hope for the weekend is that you have a chance to create new networks, reconnect with trusted friends in Christ, and recommit to the work yet to be done in our church toward the day when no one is regarded as a stranger. It is our particular joy at this conference that we have the opportunity to introduce to many of you for the first time MLP's new Executive Director Alex McNeill!

Much has been accomplished since our last conference; marriage equality is now a reality in 13 states, and the District of Columbia. With the passage of G-2.0104, qualified candidates for ordered ministries within the PCUSA can no longer be rejected based solely on who they are and whom they love. In the words of the old spiritual, "We've come a long way, a mighty long

*St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, Tucson, Arizona*



way” Thanks Be to God!

The National MLP Board is grateful for the hospitality of our host, St. Mark’s Presbyterian church in Tucson and for the amazing planning and support provided this conference by the Committee on Local Arrangements.

Even as we gather here, we look ahead to GA 2014 in Detroit, with hope for marriage equality in the church. We look forward to sharing with you the preparation that MLP has already begun in coordination with our partner organization Covenant Network toward this end.

Again, we are delighted you are here. We celebrate and take courage in our common resolve to continue to work for a church where all persons are recognized as sacred, where love and faithfulness are what matters most in relationships, where all gifts for ministry are honored, and where the church calls and works for peace and justice in civil society.

Peace,

Rev. Heidi Peterson and Nathan Sobers

Co-moderators, National More Light Presbyterians Board of Directors

### Greetings from Rev. Scott Opsahl, Host Pastor



Greetings from St. Mark’s Presbyterian Church!

We are so pleased that you have arrived in Tucson to attend the national conference of More Light Presbyterians. The rainy season is now over here in the desert southwest and you can expect beautiful sunny weather for this weekend together. The leaves may be turning color up north but here in Tucson it is still summer! And we love it!

Though I was ordained in the Presbyterian Church some 37 years ago, for several years I served in the United Church of Christ so that I could be open about being a gay man. When Amendment 10-A passed I decided to look again in the PCUSA. Somehow in the providence of God St. Mark’s and I were brought together. Here my gifts for ministry have been affirmed and my struggle to serve the church as an openly gay clergy person has been appreciated and supported. I feel very fortunate to be sharing this time of transition with this remarkable congregation.

One of the unique characteristics of St. Mark’s has been their willingness to take risks for progress on social justice. Since their founding sixty-five years ago they have embraced advocacy on behalf of civil rights, all-day kindergarten, shelter for vulnerable women and children, the Sanctuary Movement, justice and safety for immigrants, and the full inclusion of LGBTQ people in the life of the church and society. A commitment to justice is in the DNA of this congregation!

As you meet members of St. Mark’s over the course of the weekend I encourage you to share your stories. You and the stories you have to tell can help us and empower us to do even more to work for justice for all in the LGBTQ community. I thank you in advance for that gift!

Finally, let me apologize for my absence this weekend. When same gender marriage was approved in Washington State last November my brother and his partner made plans to get married. They selected the 20th anniversary of their first date which, unfortunately, was also the date chosen for the More Light Conference. I will greatly miss meeting all of you, but my place this weekend needs to be standing beside my brother as his best man and to celebrate with family and friends the love and commitment Dick and Larry have found in each other. I know we all rejoice in the progress towards justice that we have recently seen. This weekend I will be claiming my participation in that ceremony as an act of hope, confident that in time full equality will be the reality for our entire community.

Blessings to you all!

Scott Opsahl

Interim Pastor, St. Mark’s Presbyterian Church