

Imago Dei Initiative Outline
by Rachel Freeny and Iris Jasmin
June 2022

Our welcome statement at MCC reads as follows:

*Middletown Christian Church is a faith community that recognizes and affirms that **all people are made in the image of God**. We welcome people of every race, gender identity, age, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, economic circumstance, faith background, and political affiliation to participate fully in the life of our church.*

The sacraments of baptism, communion, marriage, ordination, and parent/child dedications are open to everyone. We value a diversity of beliefs and are committed to real conversations as we share life together in this community. Wherever you find yourself on your faith journey, you are welcome here.

Imago Dei is the Latin phrase for “image of God.” Building on our statement that all people are made in God’s image and all people are welcome here, the Imago Dei Initiative is an intentional effort by Middletown Christian Church to create a church environment where all people can flourish and participate. Through this initiative we will examine our current inclusion efforts, accessibility, strengths, and growth opportunities. This initiative will include an Imago Dei Team to guide our efforts through both education and intentional action.

The Imago Dei team will consider how welcoming Middletown Christian Church is when it comes to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, social class, and/or religion. The Imago Dei team will serve two purposes: 1) Review Middletown Christian Church’s efforts to fully live into our welcome statement; and 2) Develop opportunities to introduce our community to a diversity of perspectives.

Proposed Imago Dei Team:

- A team of up to 6 congregation members with some level of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) experience or interest.
- Inaugural team will include Rachel Freeny, Iris Jasmin, and 4 church members
- Interested team members will fill out an interest form, which will be open to the entire congregation (see sample interest form below).
- Members will serve on a rotational basis for at least 12 months; initial team will be staggered between 1.5 years & 2 years to begin the rotation.
- This team is not a decision-making body. Its purpose is to gather information from the broader congregation about issues of inclusion. They will report findings and potential recommendations to the appropriate decision-making bodies.
- This team will do some basic training on issues of diversity and inclusion together before beginning their work.
- Will set a mission & vision for the team's purpose & goals.
- Will create opportunities for congregational conversations around inclusion (i.e. listening sessions, small groups, surveys, etc.) and use feedback from conversations to create recommendations for action items.
- Will have a staff liaison, potentially the future Director of Outreach.
- Will host conversations and education opportunities on relevant topics for the congregation.
- Will provide quarterly report with updates to the Board

Examples of Imago Dei Ministry in practice at Middletown Christian Church:

Improving the welcome and inclusion of our worship and ministries at Middletown starts with asking the right questions. The following is non-exhaustive list of sample questions the Imago Dei Team might ask and make recommendations of how to address.

- Is the building accessible for disabled people? How can we improve the building's accessibility?
- Do our ministries meet the needs of our neurodivergent members? How can meet those needs?
- Do our sermon series engage with relevant issues in society?
- How do we make sure the voices of racial and ethnic minorities in our congregation are heard and included?

Asking questions about how our church can be more welcoming and inclusive is not new. The following are examples of a few questions and answers around inclusion we have already engaged:

Q: How can we make our worship services more accessible for people with hearing challenges?

A: Brando put lyrics for every song played during a worship service on the screen, even if it is not a congregational song. We also include captions on our online worship services. We are researching sound system improvements that will improve audio quality of the person speaking.

Q: How can we provide a safe space for transgender members to use the restroom?

A: We changed the signage on the single stall bathrooms outside of the church offices to indicate they are both all gender restrooms.

Q: How can we have difficult and faithful conversations about issues that matter in our current polarized society?

A: Brian has preached multiple sermon series, such as Diverse by Design, Finding the Promised Land, and The Gospel of the Nobodies, that introduce a diversity of

perspectives and guidelines for having conversations with people who are different than us.

Q: How can we engage with social issues affecting our community?

A: In the fall of 2021, we hosted three conversations about the history of West Louisville and the current challenges of poverty, racial justice, and immigration in Louisville as a whole. In January 2022, a new small group called In Action began meeting weekly to learn more about the issues affecting the city and how to take action community.

Q: How can we be more welcoming for LGBTQ+ church members and their families?

A: In fall 2021/February 2022, we started Rainbow Christians and Rainbow Families, two small groups that provide a safe space for LGBTQ+ people and parents to explore the unique questions and experiences they have in life and in faith.