

## GLBT Sweet Home Alabama/Sweet Home PCUSA

Welcome to Birmingham!

At a wedding reception recently, when the DJ put on “Sweet Home Alabama” everyone sang – whether they were from NY or Boston or LA or Alabama. I did too. ...But I wondered why.

*There was no Sweet Home in Alabama* for its African American citizens when the fire hoses and dogs were unleashed on the Children’s march less than a mile from here.

*There was no Sweet Home in Alabama* for four little girls when a bomb exploded at the 16<sup>th</sup> St Baptist Church just across the freeway.

Yet the courage of Alabama’s African American citizens made the entire country a sweeter home for all people. Their fight for freedom has made Alabama sacred ground.

The civil rights movement in Alabama was the inspiration for the founding of University Presbyterian Church.

*There was no Sweet Home in Alabama* for a gay man from Sylacauga who was brutally murdered in 1999. Yet Billy Jack Gaither’s murder was a wake up call to UPC to do something about the suffering of GLBT persons in Alabama. We invited a More Light Team to visit us on their southern road trip in February of 2000. We took their painful personal stories to heart and began a discernment process which resulted in our becoming a More Light Church.

We made the decision to be a More Light Church in the midst of a campaign to build a longed for and much needed student center; knowing that our decision could jeopardize fundraising for the building. Two weeks after affiliating with More Light, we learned that UPC had been awarded the Presbyterian Women’s Birthday Offering which meant we could build the student center.

***These people standing here want each and every one of you to know that you have a sweet home in Alabama -- at University Presbyterian Church!***

But there is no sweet home in the Presbyterian Church USA for the GLBT community who still awaits its welcome.

This 217<sup>th</sup> GA can re-consecrate the sacred ground of Alabama by taking action to welcome GLBT members at the table ...or it can desecrate Alabama’s sacred ground by continuing the injustice.

O, that this General Assembly would act to make the **PCUSA a home – a sweet home** for its GLBT members.

University Presbyterian Church is deeply grateful to More Light for giving us courage and encouraging us on this amazing journey.