# Pastors embark on journey of understanding about LGBTQ+ issues in doc Leap of Faith



In August 2022, Mennonite minister Reverend Michael Gulker embarked on a groundbreaking initiative in Grand Rapids, Michigan, aimed at addressing the escalating polarisation within the US and Christian communities. Gulker, who has led the Colossian Forum for over a decade, invited 12 pastors from different denominations to participate in a year-long programme designed to explore their theological and social differences.

The initiative, labelled Sowing Seeds of Hope, was not merely an extension of the usual workshops and curricula that the Colossian Forum provides. Instead, it was an ambitious venture involving retreats and workshops over an entire year. The group included 12 pastors—seven men and five women—who held divergent views on issues such as gay marriage, women in leadership, gun violence, racial injustice, LGBTQ+ rights, and reproductive rights.

Rev. Gulker presented this cohort with an opportunity to view their divisions as potential opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable obstacles. Emphasising vulnerability, he implored the pastors to embrace it as a natural state of being. Despite the challenges anticipated, the pastors chose to participate in this experiment and even agreed to have their journey documented by filmmakers.

Nicholas Ma and Morgan Neville, the visionaries behind the celebrated documentary Won’t You Be My Neighbor? found Gulker’s work through an article and saw it as a compelling narrative for their next project. Their documentary, Leap of Faith, recently began a limited theatre release, charting the group's extraordinary journey towards trust and friendship amid their many differences.

Initially, the filmmakers and pastors agreed to avoid focusing solely on issues of sexuality, hoping instead to tackle pervasive topics like white supremacy. Yet, homosexuality persistently emerged as a significant discussion point, reflecting deep-rooted divisions. Particularly poignant was an early exercise where pastors revealed contrasting stances on various issues, leaving significant emotional impacts. Rev. Joan VanDessel, a Methodist pastor and married lesbian, found the visible opposition to gay marriage unsettling.

Throughout the year, the pastors grappled with reconciling their conflicting viewpoints. The candid interactions gradually deepened their bond, transforming what initially seemed like dissonance into a shared experience of vulnerability and empathy. The process revealed the emotional complexities of pastoral life in today’s world and highlighted the personal dimension of Gulker’s quest, motivated by his own experiences as the father of two LGBTQ+ children.

Leap of Faith offers a unique portrayal of contemporary pastoral challenges, capturing both the fears and aspirations of those leading Christian communities. The film transcends typical narratives of division by delving into the multi-faceted lives of these pastors, inviting audiences to witness the complexities they navigate.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.linkedin.com/in/revmichaelgulkerconflictcoach> - Corroborates Rev. Michael Gulker's background, his role as President of The Colossian Forum, and his work in reconciliation and conflict transformation.
* <https://www.threads.net/@sojogram/post/DA38UeUvvHt> - Supports the initiative 'Sowing Seeds of Hope' and the involvement of 12 pastors with differing views.
* <https://sojo.net/articles/culture/can-12-pastors-across-theological-spectrum-still-love-each-other> - Details the 'Sowing Seeds of Hope' program, including the year-long retreats and workshops, and the diverse theological views of the participating pastors.
* <https://worship.calvin.edu/event-programs/2023-calvin-symposium-on-worship/contributors/michael-gulker> - Provides information on Rev. Michael Gulker's role as President of The Colossian Forum and his interests in the intersection of faith and culture.
* <https://www.linkedin.com/in/revmichaelgulkerconflictcoach> - Corroborates Rev. Gulker's personal experiences and motivations, including his time at Duke Divinity School and his work in a church with historical pain and division.
* <https://sojo.net/articles/culture/can-12-pastors-across-theological-spectrum-still-love-each-other> - Supports the aspect of the program focusing on vulnerability and the emotional impacts of the discussions among the pastors.
* <https://www.threads.net/@sojogram/post/DA38UeUvvHt> - Mentions the documentation of the pastors' journey by filmmakers and the emergence of significant discussion points like homosexuality.
* <https://worship.calvin.edu/event-programs/2023-calvin-symposium-on-worship/contributors/michael-gulker> - Provides context on Rev. Gulker's long-standing interest in the intersection of faith and culture, relevant to the initiative's goals.
* <https://www.linkedin.com/in/revmichaelgulkerconflictcoach> - Details Rev. Gulker's educational background, including his degrees from Calvin College and Duke Divinity School.