

Discernment Committee Report
Faith Baptist Church
September 29, 2021

(Submitted by: Cynthia Insko, chair on behalf of members Mike Collins, Greg Earwood, Jawanna Herd, Shelby Napier)

INTRODUCTION:

On August 15 the church elected our committee for the following task:

To discern the congregation's opinions and potentially recommend policy and resolutions that reflect how our church will function in regard to welcoming people in the LGBTQ community.

The specific questions to be considered are:

- 1) Would one of Faith's ministers get in trouble if they performed a same-sex marriage?
- 2) Will our facility be available to rent for same-sex marriage ceremonies?
- 3) Will we welcome people in the LGBTQ community as full members, including the potential to serve in leadership?

You also voted to approve a process for the task. We are now midway through our process. Over the next few weeks our committee will create a statement that we believe best represents the congregation's input. We will send that statement out to the church the week of October 11 for your prayerful review.

Our discerning is not over. We are still depending on you to participate in this process and help us complete the task you gave us to do. We still welcome your emails, calls, conversations, and questions all along the way.

We will hold another listening session in the form of a **Town Hall Meeting on Nov. 7** that will be focused on questions about the statement we propose in October. This will be followed by a vote on **Nov. 14** at our **church business meeting**.

REPORT:

Approximately 60 people including group facilitators attended the listening session on 9/19. In addition, 78 people have completed an anonymous survey which also allowed space for comments, and many have reached out to our committee members privately to share insights. The following report reflects not our committee's opinion, but the feedback which the congregation has given through these sources. Quotes are anonymous and taken from both the survey and the listening spaces.

Hopes Centered Around These Themes:

- **To learn more about LGBTQ people and to learn from them**
"I hope as we go there through this process we can learn more about the struggles LGBTQ individuals experience."
"I hope we stop looking at the LGBTQ community as a completely separate community from us, to see them as a part of us. "
- **That if our church makes a statement on this issue, more people in our Georgetown community will encounter the love of God.**
"All people should have access to Jesus...Anything that draws people to Our church and the Kingdom of God is what we should do. All marginalized people should be loved and invited to worship with us. Love above all else."
"I hope that we can be a place for LGBTQ people to encounter God because there aren't a lot of places that is possible in our area right now. I hope that this is another example of us getting to be a family of faith, sharing God's love in a spirit of hope."

- **That as individuals and as a church we will grow in our faith as we study, pray and discern together**
"I hope that we will continue to live our values of loving as God loves, and honoring The Spirit that calls each of us to the church."
- **That as a congregation we will be able to reach a decision that will be in synergy with who we have been and who we are**
*"That in doing this, our church will continue to focus on missions and other great things for which we are known."
"That Faith will continue to be a place that shares love unconditionally where ALL people can freely express themselves and their faith in an inclusive and welcoming environment."*
- **That all members will be included and choose to engage in this process of discernment**
*"That we as a family of faith will listen and respect each other's thoughts and feelings on this subject."
Someone who is choosing to engage says, "I am still wrestling to make sure I am not ignoring/explaining away/dismissing any pertinent scriptures that may be instructive on this topic."*
- **That we will be able to continue to welcome many voices and experience diversity of opinion in our church that is helpful to all of us**
"I hope we don't create a homogenous congregation where we just sit in an echo chamber and don't have differing voices@ the table anymore"

Fears Centered Around These Themes:

- **That people will leave the church**
*"That I will have to leave my church home."
"That I will have to find a new church because of a decision not to include all people who come to us for a faith home the ability to participate as full members."*
- **That if we make a statement affirming LGBTQ+ community, our church's identity will be focused on this issue and that we might lose sight of other important aspects of our purpose and ministry**
"My fear is that this becomes the only thing we care about (on any side). My fear is that people will let their fears get in the way of doing the right thing. My fear is that we will get so caught up worrying what people think that we won't worry about what God thinks."
- **That we will further harm people in and out of our church who are part of the LGBTQ+ community**
*"I will no longer feel safe expressing who I am nor will I be able to share Faith BC with my friends because it won't be a place that accepts my friends for who they are and who they love."
"That our LGBTQ members, particularly our children and teens, will be abandoned by the church in this decision and their relationship to God and the church permanently damaged."
"My fear is that if we do not pass all three resolutions we will contribute more pain and hardship to persons who are in the LGBT+ community, discouraging their faith journey and diminishing their personhood."*
- **That other churches and people in our community might think less of us, judge us or disassociate with us.**
"How do LGBTQ people think about Faith BC now? And how might that change if we make some changes?"

“How do these decisions work with our partnerships? Are there organizations that we currently collaborate with who will have an issue with this kind of change? If so, will we not be able to partner with them? Thus diminishing our impact and work outside the walls of our church?”

- **That the minority position on these issues is not being represented in this process.**

As Committee chair, I would like to speak to this very clearly. The integrity of the process the church voted on is critical to our church seeking unity in our diversity. The people that you elected to this committee are people of character, deep faith, prayer and dedication to seeking God’s will. We take scripture seriously, we take your concerns and stories to heart, we deeply respect the history of this congregation, and we value the input of each person. We are sincerely doing our very best to be open to the Spirit’s guidance. We are doing all we know to do to communicate clearly how each of you can participate in this process of decision making. I have said before, we expect each member to engage prayerfully in this. If you have further concerns or questions that you wish to share with our committee, please submit an index card with your question in writing or reach out to one of our committee members.

Questions:

- **Will Bible passages that support both sides be discussed and presented?**

(William will be covering this in his SS Class in Oct. and Nov. all adults and youth are welcome to attend this in lieu of their regularly scheduled classes)

- **What do our current church policies say about these issues?**

(Links to pertinent church documents are now provided on our committee web page. We encourage members to review these documents to prepare for discussion. This link is sent weekly to members in Faith File via email.)

- **What are other churches in CBF and in our community doing about this same issue?**

(We have studied statements from over 20 churches from CBF and other denominations. We have had many conversations with other ministers and lay leaders from other churches who have been in similar discernment processes. Locally, Holy Trinity Episcopal and First Presbyterian both provide links to their denominational governing bodies that make clear statements of inclusion. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Global and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of KY do not dictate our congregation’s position on these matters. Within both of these groups already are congregations with varied positions on the inclusion of the LGBTQ community in their setting)

- **If we pass a statement, how will our children and youth be taught and educated about it? What education will our church need?**

(Our committee in consultation with the staff recognizes that our children and youth are already taught the Greatest Commandment as a guide for relationships. We also acknowledge that we have people in our church and youth who are part of the LGBTQ community and we don’t anticipate that a statement will change our teaching on relationships. We know that as followers of Christ we will continue to learn more *about and from* all people who are marginalized that we might strengthen our love for God and one another as Christ taught us.)

- **Are members who are only attending virtually able to participate in the process and the voting?**

(According to our Constitution and By Laws we are not able to provide hybrid voting, or voting both in person and digitally. In keeping with our procedures for discussion and our history and guidelines we

will provide ballot voting in person on November 14. We have provided on line links each week in the Faith File email and hard copies of the survey and other documents when requested.)

SURVEY RESULTS: 78 members responded

Do you think we should accept people in the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer) community into our family of faith as members?

71 people (91%) yes; 2 (2.6%) no, 5 (6.4%) I don't know

*88.4% of folks say this question is either very or extremely important to them

Do you think a minister should be allowed to participate in or perform non-heterosexual marriage ceremonies?

63 (80.8%) yes; 7 (9%) no; 8 (10.3%) I don't know

*84.6% of folks say this question is either very or extremely important to them

Do you think the Faith sanctuary should be available to be rented for non-heterosexual wedding ceremonies?

52 (66.7%) yes; 11 (14.1%) no; 15 (19.2%) I don't know

*75.6% of folks say this question is either very or extremely important to them