

FBCDC Inclusion Team Report

2017

For decades, the congregation of The First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, D.C., has included active members--many of whom have served as lay leaders--who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). They have served Christ and our Church despite the absence of a formal Church policy about how fully they could be involved in the Church, including its traditional blessings of marriage and family. Their service in the silence of Church policy underscored their commitment to Christ and their faith.

FBCDC's governing documents make no distinctions among members, asking only that they profess faith in Jesus Christ and a willingness to follow Christ's example in the waters of baptism. In 2004, the Diaconate adopted – and the full congregation overwhelmingly affirmed – a policy explicitly stating that all are welcome in Christ's body and that the only criterion for membership at FBCDC is faith in Christ.

Since then, our congregation has felt a need to further clarify the role of LGBT people at FBCDC, including celebrating their marriages and families. In 2016, the Diaconate appointed an Inclusion Team to more closely study the issue and make recommendations to the Diaconate and the congregation.

After a process that involved both the team and the broader congregation examining Scripture to discern its wisdom on issues of human sexuality; studying the governing documents and history of the church; reviewing the experiences of similarly situated congregations around the United States; and sharing (in both small-group conversations and congregation-wide Bible studies) individual members' experiences around faith and sexuality, the Inclusion Team unanimously presents the following report:

- The confession of faith that has united us all is the same one that has united Christians in innumerable cultural and physical contexts throughout the millennia: The simple confession that “Jesus is Lord”;
- We are a people united in covenant to one another, with a mission to serve as an example of Christ's boundless embrace and as an outpost of God's Kingdom in the heart of our nation's capital;
- The FBCDC congregation includes members who represent multiple views – all based in their personal interpretation of Scripture – of questions related to human sexuality and faith. Similarly, the congregation includes members who have multiple views of questions related to other secondary and tertiary differences of biblical interpretation (including differences over interpretations of the end times, theories of atonement, how best to bring about social justice, and innumerable other issues);

- FBCDC is home to many members who identify with, or who have loved ones who identify with, the LGBT community;
- The sentiment in the congregation is, based on our conversations in the small-group sessions, that every member should be eligible to experience the life of the congregation fully, including participating in all ordinances and activities of the Church's life;
- Because FBCDC's governing documents do not explicitly address – positively or negatively – the full inclusion of LGBT members in the life of the Church, it is not necessary to implement any change in our governance in order to clarify our values as a congregation.

Therefore, the Inclusion Team recommends that the Diaconate and congregation affirm:

- That The First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, D.C., welcomes people of every race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, age, physical and mental ability, national origin, economic station, and political ideology to full participation in the life of our community;
- That “full participation in the life of our community” includes all members, without exception, being fully eligible to participate in the ordinances, blessings, benefits and responsibilities of Church membership – including communion, baptism, marriage, ordination, parent/child dedications, and all offices and positions of leadership;
- That any individual member's “full participation in the life of our community” does not bind any other individual member's conscience on an issue about which they may differ, but rather requires honest commitment to life together in the community of Christ regardless of differences;
- And that we re-commit ourselves to conscious efforts to make all people feel Christ's welcome in our congregation, including those with whom we disagree.

We recommend that the above statements interpreting and clarifying our existing governance be affirmed by the congregation.

-In Christ,

Alyssa Aldape, Zena Aldridge, Kate Campbell, Paul Clark, Chelsea Clarke, Rod Coates, Mel Doxie, Sadye Doxie, Doug Duvall, Charlie Fuller, Mike Henson, Rob Marus, Steve Nectcott, Allen Norfleet, Ellen Parkhurst, Julie Pennington-Russell, Wilma Prince, Erik Smith, Rose Smith, Dinh Tran, Kathy Whatley

FBCDC Diaconate, Inclusion Team and Pastoral Staff

**Text of the Discernment Card to be used by church members
on Sunday, September 24, 2017**

FBCDC Inclusion Statement

2017

The First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, DC, welcomes people of every race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, age, physical and mental ability, national origin, economic station, and political ideology to full participation in the life of our community;

“Full participation in the life of our community” includes all members, without exception, being fully eligible to participate in the ordinances, blessings, benefits and responsibilities of church membership—including communion, baptism, marriage, ordination, parent/child dedications, and all offices and positions of leadership;

Any individual member’s “full participation in the life of our community” does not bind any other individual member’s conscience on an issue about which they may differ, but rather requires honest commitment to life together in the community of Christ regardless of differences.

We re-commit ourselves to conscious efforts to make all people feel Christ’s welcome in our congregation, including those with whom we disagree.

_____ I believe that the above statements accurately reflect God’s leading in our church at this time.

_____ I believe that the above statements *do not* accurately reflect God’s leading in our church at this time, but am willing to remain a part of this body, if they are affirmed by the congregation.

_____ I believe that the above statements *do not* accurately reflect God’s leading in our church at this time.