

Discernment Committee Recommendation
Faith Baptist Church
October 15, 2021

Discernment Committee Members:

Mike Collins, Greg Earwood, Jawanna Herd, Shelby Napier, Cynthia Insko - Chair

I thank the members of this committee for their prayerful, whole hearted, clear minded, and time-consuming work on this task. It was an honor to work alongside them. We thank the congregation for prayerfully entrusting us with this work and for engaging the process to help us listen carefully and discern the desire of the congregation and the Spirit's guidance on these matters. --- Cynthia Insko, chairperson

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I. Summary of the Church's Charge to the Committee

On August 15, 2021 the moderator appointed 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?

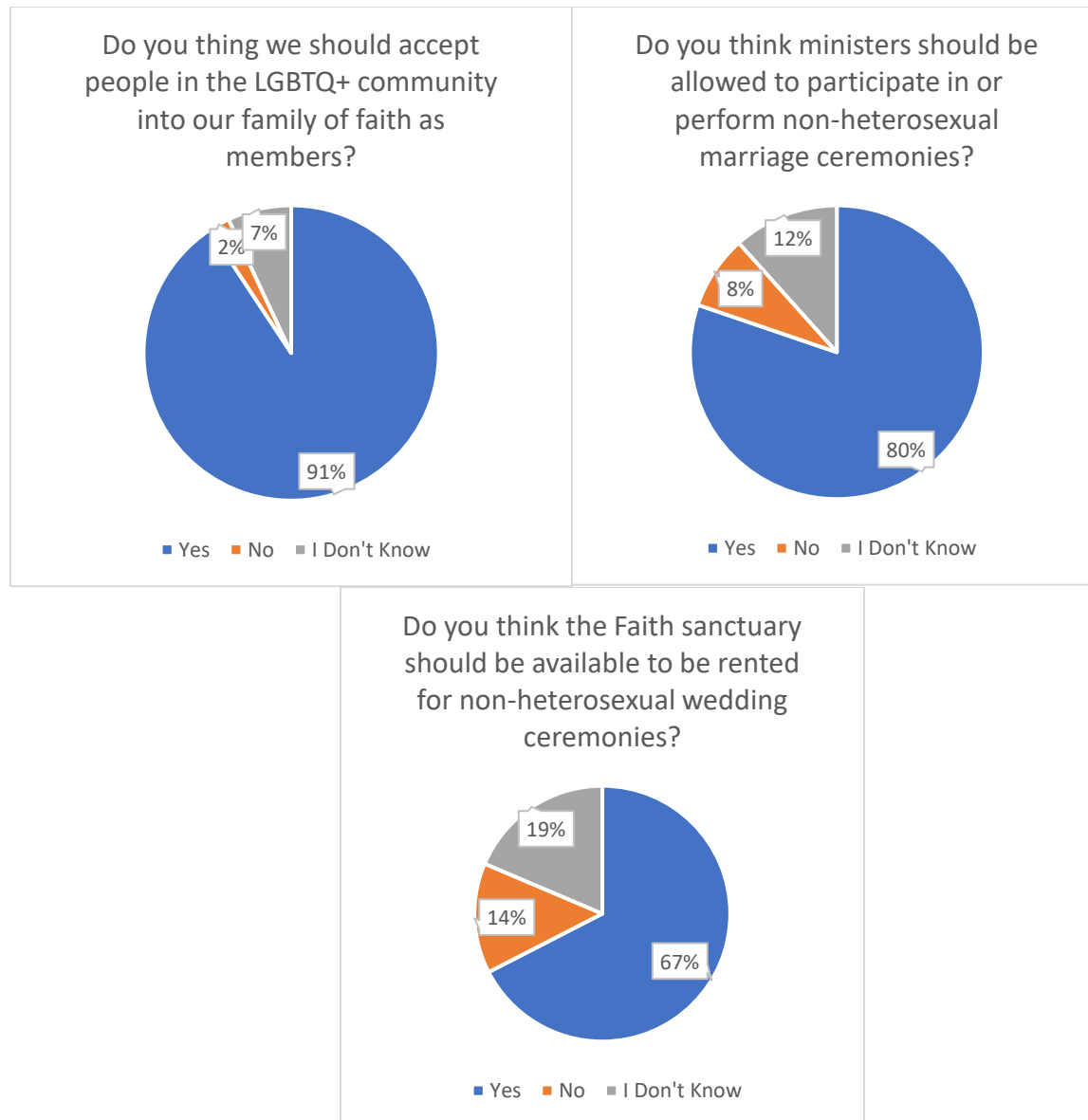
II. Outline of the Committee's Work

The church voted to approve a process for the task. The Discernment committee has followed this process carefully and prayerfully in the following ways:

- Weekly committee meetings
- Praying daily and offering a daily scripture and prayer guide for the congregation
- Communicating with the congregation via a committee webpage, worship announcements, Faith File emails, the newsletter, and providing hard copies of resources and reports to those unable to access the internet or attend in person
- Receiving questions from church members who sought to share their opinions and concerns with us in person or via email
- Carefully planning and hosting of a Listening Session to engage small groups in sharing their hopes, fears and questions
- Crafting and distributing on line and hard copy surveys for feedback on the questions we are addressing
- Summarizing what we heard from the congregation in the listening session, survey and individual conversations and reporting this back to the church
- Studying current church documents including The Constitution and By Laws, the Facilities Usage Policy, the Personnel Manual and making these available on our webpage
- Inviting feedback from church ministerial staff and key leadership
- Intentionally pursuing input from Christian people in the LGBTQ+ community
- Researching statements from over 25 other churches including those in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Network and others
- Distributing the recommendation via email, hard copy and mailing to those who do not receive emails
- Encouraging participation in the pastor's Sunday School Class to study scripture related to our task
- Listening to the stories of church members who shared their journey with this topic
- Organizing a Town Hall Meeting for questions and feedback one week before the business meeting and vote on the recommendation

III. Summary of Feedback from the Congregation

86 people completed the survey and the results mirrored the responses we received in the listening session that was attended by 60 people and private conversations with several more. The graphs on the following page show the results of the survey.



Consensus from the congregation around the following hopes emerged:

- That we would honor our church’s history of welcoming the marginalized. References to the inclusion of African students into membership and women into leadership were named specifically.
- That we would prayerfully and carefully consider the teaching of Scripture.
- That we would seek unity in diversity by respecting the conscience of each member on matters of difference and foster this environment moving forward.
- That as we move forward, the welcoming of the LGBTQ+ community would not become our sole focus, but one of many ways in which we are a family of faith sharing God’s love in a spirit of hope.

IV. Recommended Statement of Welcome

Considering the feedback we received from the congregation and our own discernment, the committee recommends the church adopt the following statement to clarify our posture of welcome for people in the LGBTQ community.

A Statement of Welcome from Faith Baptist Church, Georgetown, KY

We believe that God, Creator of all people, placed God's own image in each person, and that Jesus welcomes all who receive him as Lord and Savior to be disciples, and that the Holy Spirit gifts believers to serve in a myriad of ways.

Therefore, compelled by the triune God's boundless love, we joyfully welcome and affirm people of every race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, marital status, ability level, education level, socioeconomic status, and religious background into full membership in the life and ministry of our church.

We welcome and encourage all members to participate in the lifelong blessings and ordinances of our congregation such as communion, baptism, marriage, family/child dedication, ordination, and all offices and positions of leadership.

We pledge to support our staff as they carry out these ordinances and blessings.

As Christians in the Baptist tradition, we commit to love each other despite our differences. No member's full participation in our community binds anyone else's conscience on an issue about which they may differ.

We are a family of faith, sharing God's love in a spirit of hope.

V. An Explanation of the Statement

We believe that God, Creator of all people, placed God's own image in each person, and that Jesus welcomes all who receive him as Lord and Savior to be disciples, and that the Holy Spirit gifts believers to serve in a myriad of ways.

This reflects the Purpose of our church as stated in our Constitution, p.2.

Therefore, compelled by the triune God's boundless love, we joyfully welcome and affirm people of every race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, marital status, ability level, education level, socioeconomic status, and religious background into full membership in the life and ministry of our church.

This honors our congregation's history of hospitality and inclusion of the marginalized while addressing the question of whether or not we will welcome the LGBTQ+ community into full membership.

This supports Membership Qualifications described in our By-Laws in Article 1A

"Membership in this congregation is open to all who confess a personal faith in God through Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord, who have expressed this faith through the ordinance of baptism by immersion and who sincerely desire to associate themselves in this mutual effort to advance the cause of the Kingdom of God.

Membership is also open to members of other Christian communions who confess a personal faith in God through Jesus Christ the Savior and Lord, and who have been baptized by means other than immersion."

We welcome and encourage all members to participate in the lifelong blessings and ordinances of our congregation such as communion, baptism, marriage, family/child dedication, ordination, and all offices and positions of leadership.

This names the two ordinances of our Baptist Tradition in which all members may currently participate while highlighting a few other blessings commonly enjoyed by members. It elaborates on, but does not change, the Rights of Members in Article 1C of our By-Laws which states, "Privileges of membership include: right to vote, to hold office, to voice opinions in business sessions and to represent the church in extra activities upon designation by the church."

This part of our statement does not contradict procedures and current policies regarding weddings. Rather, it addresses the question posed as to whether our church building can be used for non-heterosexual marriages. In our listening, we became aware of consensus of the church around the importance of marriage and discovered that our current wedding policy does not express this value. Therefore, we are also recommending a suggested Policy for Hosting Weddings for the church to adopt (see below).

We pledge to support our staff as they carry out these ordinances and blessings.

This addresses the question about our ministers' freedom to officiate weddings of non-heterosexual couples. Our current Personnel Manual and Constitution and By Laws do not address weddings.

As Christians in the Baptist tradition, we commit to love each other despite our differences. No member's full participation in our community binds anyone else's conscience on an issue about which they may differ.

This statement reaffirms our Baptist principles of Bible Freedom and the Priesthood of All Believers which respects that every Christian has the freedom and right to interpret and apply Scripture under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

It also lifts up feedback from our congregation which highly values Scripture as well as diversity of thought.

We are a family of faith, sharing God's love in a spirit of hope.

This reminds us of our mission statement and invites us all to recommit to moving forward with faith, love and hope into the future.

VI. Recommendation of a New Wedding Policy

Policy for Hosting Weddings

A wedding ceremony at Faith Baptist Church is first and foremost a worship service. We ask that only couples who understand and affirm the basic tenets of the Christian faith represented by our congregation seek to hold their wedding ceremonies at our church.

In this spirit, the wedding service is to be performed either by one of Faith Baptist's ministerial staff, an ordained or licensed member of our congregation, or a visiting minister who can provide documentation demonstrating they are ordained or licensed by a recognized Christian congregation or denomination. No online ordinations will be accepted.

While more festive decorations may be used and furniture may be rearranged, the sanctuary should always remain a place that reflects our respect of God. At times during the year, especially around Christmas, there might be liturgical decorations that must remain in place.

The couple is permitted to incorporate communion into the wedding ceremony. Due to the inclusive nature of communion as practiced at Faith Baptist, if communion is to be shared with wedding guests it must be open to all guests regardless of denomination or religious affiliation.

Faith Baptist Church does not consider marriage to be an ordinance and does not guarantee anyone, including members, the right to be married in the church. Our trustees and ministers may elect to not host or officiate a wedding per their discretion. However, prior marriage status, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, and ethnicity will not disqualify anyone from using our space.

VII. An Explanation of the Policy for Hosting Weddings

Our current building use policy lists weddings as one of the events that our church may be rented for by both members and nonmembers. However, it does not set apart weddings as a worship service in which the basic tenets of the Christian faith are affirmed. This proposed wedding policy maintains the religious integrity of the wedding ceremony, allows the trustees and ministers of our church the freedom to decide whether a wedding takes place in our building, and clarifies that we will not discriminate solely based on things listed in the final paragraph.

VIII. Next Steps

Please prayerfully consider the Statement of Welcome and the Policy for Hosting Weddings over the next month.

We invite you to stay engaged in the process and

1. Reach out to our committee members with questions and concerns.
2. Attend William's Sunday School Class over the next few weeks to explore some Biblical Passages around this topic.
3. Attend our Listening Session on Sunday, Nov. 7 at 6pm. This will be a Town Hall Meeting format to allow for comments and questions about these recommendations.
4. Attend the business meeting on Sunday, Nov. 14 immediately following morning worship. Voting will be by ballot and members must attend in person to cast a vote.

It is with gratitude and deep respect that we submit this report and recommendations,
The Members of the Discernment Committee