

June 5, 2018

Dear FPC Family,

The present FPC Session has decided that the Spirit is calling us to find a new way forward together in love and faithfulness. This issue of Human Sexuality has been the elephant in the room for the last 4 years. We believe that the only way to move forward faithfully is to gather together in grace and truth and meet this issue head on. In the midst of disagreement about our policy, we are confident that God will lead us into a way that can include all the various positions represented in our diverse and beloved community.

We have planned a process based on the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. At that council the early church was in a similar disagreement. They met together, discussed the issue holding tight to scripture and the experiences of the disciples. The community stayed together and listened to all the voices that were present showing mutual forbearance. The leaders made a decision that brought a deeper clarity to the issue and a “third way” to move forward. They communicated that clarity to the whole church. Using this model we will enter into 3 different seasons:

- Listening and Studying- through *Living the Tension Gatherings* and a resource library (Oct-Nov, Jan-Mar)
- Dialogue and Prayer – through group discussions, individual conversations, and written correspondence (April-May)
- Session Clarity and communication (June)

It was about 7 years ago when the General Assembly of the PCUSA removed their restrictions around ordination and weddings of same sex couples. Each church and presbytery were then allowed and encouraged to find their own way amongst these divisive issues. The governing bodies would honor their decisions as long as they were reached through a faithful, decent, and orderly process. Four years ago, amidst a sea of difficult issues, the Session reached a temporary agreement to

“continue to uphold the long-standing stance of Session not to ordain individuals unwilling to live in fidelity in traditional marriage (between a man and a woman) and chastity in singleness nor to officiate same sex weddings within the church building.”

The Session was able to agree to move forward together, but there was no agreement on these hard issues.

We want to prepare the body for the Listening Gatherings coming up in the Fall. The hope is that the brothers and sisters of FPC will deepen our connection with each other by intentionally listening to each other around the divisive topic of human sexuality. The goal is to listen well and honor each other. We will not lobby or attempt to change minds. We will practice mutual forbearance by listening and dignifying those we disagree with. There will be more information about the process throughout the year.

When the previous restrictions were lifted, there were a host of dear brothers and sisters who felt lead to break fellowship with our community. We tearfully blessed them as they went on to join and serve other congregations. We recognize that the decision to dialogue around this issue is a challenging and scary way forward. We realize that even attempting this discussion may cause some in our body to want to leave. We honor this freedom of conscience, but the same time we implore you to stay with us in this discussion. We need your voice in this process. We want you at the table. We will be a healthier church with your perspective. We are convinced that our God will open a way forward for all of us to live together in Grace and Truth.

When the apostles had reached their decision and sent their letter to the church Luke writes that “When its members read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation.” It is our deepest hope that in engaging in this hard work of making a way forward and “doing theology,” we will end up with similar rejoicing and deeper church connection.

In Hope and Trust,

The FPC Session