

July 11, 2019

Dear FPC Community,

Thank you for your commitment to our church during this season of Gracious Family Dialogues focused around LGBTQ and our church. This year we committed to learn and grow in how to discuss a difficult topic, and to gain tools for seeking understanding from God and from one another. We confess that in the ambiguity of this commitment, the end goal was unclear and the content felt deceptive to some; this was never our intent. If we had known at the beginning of the year what we know now, we would have done some things differently. We tried to create a safe place and to communicate clearly, but so often our best falls far short of God's best. This process has spurred us towards providing greater clarity, and we sit in the tension of discerning a way forward for our church body.

On Saturday May 11th, the FPC Session and Pastoral Staff met for our semiannual full-day retreat. It became evident at our retreat that there are many important tenets of the Christian faith that we all agree on, and the issue of same-sex marriage is not one of them. This illuminated the beautiful and difficult reality that Christians with sincere faith can come to different conclusions while seeking the peace, unity, and purity of the church. It has not been an easy process. Attempting to make a decision for our church family that closely resembles judgment, which we know is reserved for God alone, is challenging.

On the bright side, we recognize there is much we agree on. We are united in the essentials of the faith as expressed in the Nicene and Apostles Creed. We are a community that seeks to love God, love others, and help others love God. We seek to share a living faith across generations. We are committed to a Jesus centered existence. We strive to stand together in obedience to Jesus and under the authority of Scripture. We "have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who have faith" (1 Timothy 4:10). It is our deep desire for every person to know they are welcome at FPC in full love and hospitality.

We found that we are particularly of the same mind regarding:

- The sacred nature of the covenant of marriage. The principle of fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness upholds the seriousness with which we understand such a covenant.
- We affirm people and relationships centered on Christ and in whom the fruits of the Spirit are evident (Gal 5:22-23).
- We disapprove of actions that are abusive and destructive to the body of believers, including but not limited to sexual promiscuity.
- As believers in Christ we seek the Spirit's help in understanding God's standard for how each of us will choose to use our bodies.

Session has discussed this topic thoroughly. Though we disagree on whether the Bible points to same-sex marriage as a sin, we agree unanimously that it is uncomfortable to have a policy around any one sin. Whenever the behavior is mentioned in scripture, it is listed with other sins - greed, pride, deceit, gossip, idolatry, and more. We recognize that any decision made will cause strife in a subset of our congregation. Our hope is for peace.

The following proposal comes after much prayer, discernment, discussion, and longing for our church community to focus on the proclamation of the Gospel rather than sit in continued contention. We ask for your prayers over the summer as we consider this amendment to the policy:

Session will only ordain individuals willing to live in fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness. Out of respect for the disagreement in our church and session regarding biblical standards and same-sex marriage, weddings will no longer be allowed on the church property.

This policy neither affirms nor condemns same-sex marriage, it simply offers space for candidates for office to be understood in the realm of faith in Christ and how Christ has transformed and is transforming their lives. The decision regarding weddings is a way to walk a middle ground, knowing that to not allow certain weddings would feel like discrimination for some, while including all weddings may be a stumbling block for others.

The implementation of this policy could only occur after a consensus vote in September. In addition, due to an Elder's recent move, we are under our minimum of 8 Session members. We will not make any decision of this nature until we are at our minimum, for which we hope to have an election of a new Elder at our August 25th congregational meeting.

We are a church passionate to see the world be transformed by knowing Christ. We yearn to have our whole focus be dedicated to that reality. We pray for God's guidance in seeking healing and unity as we move forward together to proclaim the gospel through our words and our actions. Every person ought to know the intrinsic value they have as an image bearer of God. Please pray with us as we seek to be a church that loves and welcomes every person.

This letter is endorsed by most of the current Session of FPC,

Jean Hamilton	Nick Rubert
Jan Dougherty	Ron Snyder
Karin Clumpner	Rev. Doug Bunnell (moderator)
Carrie Chute	Rev. Becca Niemeyer