



Dear FPC community,

September 17, 2019

We deeply appreciate the care and dedication so many of you gave this process as we navigated this season of our church. In a culture that is increasingly divisive, it is a privilege and honor to be part of a community willing to engage in hard topics, ultimately bringing us deeper into God's word and connection with one another.

On September 6-7th, we met for our annual fall Session and Pastoral Staff retreat. Our Gracious Family Dialogue year studying and discussing the topic of LGBTQ and our church illuminated a divide among us around Biblical interpretation. This left us at a crossroads regarding policy. While our Session is still divided on whether a same sex marriage is sexual immorality, we were able to agree together on a way to move forward. We had a summer of prayer, study, and conversation with many of you regarding the proposed recommendation the previous session sent out earlier this summer. The Session voted nearly unanimously to change the 2014 policy to:

Session will ordain only individuals committed to living in fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness. Per the Book of Order, weddings will be allowed on the church property at the discretion of Session.

We are reminded that any policy we create is in addition to standards for ordination found in the Book of Order¹. The Session is calling the congregation to participate in the important work of prayerfully electing elders and trusting those leaders to listen to the Spirit and act in faithfulness. This asks the congregation to trust God, the Session, and one another. Our Session trusts that our congregation can make wise decisions and that future Sessions will govern faithfully in Grace and Truth.

What has been removed from the 2014 policy is the definition that marriage be between a man and a woman. Removing this wording reflects our Session's discernment around our disagreement over what types of unions God condemns or commends. This policy allows for the possibility of a member of FPC in a same-sex marriage to be elected by the congregation into leadership and for a same sex wedding on the church property, at the discretion of the Session at that time.

This statement maintains the expectation that leaders in our church honor marriage by committing to fidelity if married and chastity while not married. Undergirding this language is a high value for the beauty and refining reality of covenant marriage. Marriage is defined as a legal, lawful, and lifelong union between two people. Fidelity means that each person will remain faithful and committed to their spouse in all ways. Sex is for marriage, and therefore chastity is our understanding of a faithful way for those not married.

We realize, that in a diverse church like ours, this is a very uncomfortable time. Many will not like this decision. For some it feels like a departure from traditional values, while for others it doesn't go far

enough in affirming the diversity of God's church. The Session has tried to carve out a middle ground so that we can go forward together, sharing a living faith across generations.

This has been a long and arduous process. It has been rich, challenging, eye-opening, and sometimes sad. We are thankful, but tired and a bit wounded from the work of gracious listening and seeking to understand. **The Session is calling for a night of Lament and Hope on October 1, 6:30-7:30pm in the FPC Sanctuary.** We will lament together, even knowing that at times we will be lamenting different things. We will pour out our grief together. We will lament, while holding on to the glorious hope of resurrection and restoration.

We do not lose heart because we can celebrate with Paul that

"... we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. (2 Corinthians 4:7-10)

We will invite those who have left our congregation in the past few years to lament with us. If you are in contact with brothers and sisters who are no longer worshiping with us, please extend your own invitation to them. While we know they are no longer a part of this particular body, we believe that together we belong to Christ's body. In this service, may we bless one another wherever Christ calls us. If you have found you can no longer continue in our church, may this service be a blessing to you.

This service will mark the end of this season in our church. We look forward to more Gracious Conversations around challenging topics, but we are moving on from this one. We look forward to what God has in store for His beloved children! May we all continue to grow and be refined in our journey of loving God, loving others, and helping others love God.

In His Hope and Grace,
The FPC Session

Andy Lewis
Bill Sygitowicz
Carrie Chute
Jan Dougherty
Jean Hamilton
Rev. Doug Bunnell
Dennis Veith, Clerk

Jeff Steensland
John Freal
Nick Rubert
Ron Snyder
Willie Truemper
Rev. Becca Niemeyer
Kerrie Bauer, Commissioned Pastor

1. *One excerpt from G-2.0104 "To those called to exercise special functions in the church—deacons, ruling elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament—God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God's people and the concurring judgment of a council of the church." (G 2.0104)*