



ST. JACOBS MENNONITE CHURCH

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Being a Faithful Church Final Report to the Congregation St. Jacobs Mennonite Church Discernment Committee on Sexuality May 1, 2016

Background:

In 2009 Mennonite Church Canada began the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process to discern questions of faithfulness in the church, especially as they relate to human sexuality. A final BFC-7 report and recommendation will be presented to delegates in Saskatoon in July 2016. It recommends that 'we create space/leave room within our body to test alternative understandings . . . to see if they are a prophetic nudging of the Spirit of God.'

SJMC participated in most of the steps in the BFC process. Over the last year and a half, we have given this considerable congregational focus and attention by engaging in conversations, listening, learning and discerning in relation to people who are LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning). Leadership Council commissioned a Discernment Committee on Sexuality to guide our process, which has included a 6 week learning series in Winter 2015, a 3 week listening series and congregational survey in Fall 2015. (See Timeline)

In February, 2016, survey results were shared with the congregation and we had an opportunity to respond and test our way forward, by offering feedback on a draft welcome statement. The survey results indicated a clear mandate to move, as a congregation, in an affirming direction. There was also a strong call to do so in a way that holds together the unity of the congregation and respects the voices of those in the minority.

We are deeply grateful for the open, honest, respectful and full engagement of the congregation throughout this process. As a congregation, we have listened well and learned much. There have been tears and laughter, good questions and deep sharing. We hope that all voices have felt heard. Many shared that they are on a journey and open to ongoing listening and learning. We also acknowledge that we do not all agree or express our convictions on this topic in the same way. Like many conversations in the church, differences and diversity can test our unity. We trust that we will continue to offer and experience gentleness, grace and love as we move forward.

The following is a revised welcoming statement and an understanding of what it means for SJMC to live into this welcoming statement. We have intentionally used the language of 'living into our welcoming statement,' recognizing that we, individually and as a congregation, are on a journey and are growing into our calling. We can only live into this welcome through the grace of God.

SJMC Welcoming Statement:

Grounded in God's universal love, we are a community of faith growing into our calling to be the body of Christ. We welcome people who are LGBTQ to participate in the life and ministry of our congregation.

Living into our Welcoming Statement:

- We welcome people who are LGBTQ into the life and ministry of SJMC, including baptism and membership upon confession of faith in Jesus.
- We will trust and support our pastors in discerning requests to participate in marriages, including same-sex marriages.
- When we are in a pastoral search, we will consider individuals according to their particular gifts and calling for ministry, not their sexual identity.
- As we journey together, we welcome ongoing storytelling and conversations of listening and learning in a spirit of gentleness, grace and love.

Being a Faithful Church Timeline St. Jacobs Mennonite Church

- 2009 **Mennonite Church Canada formally begins its Being a Faithful Church (BFC) process.**
- 2012, Winter **BFC Adult Study series** on how we use and interpret scripture.
- 2012, Fall **Adult Study series responding to BFC-4 - 'Paths and Ditches' of Biblical Interpretation' and 'Taking our Temperature'** as we begin conversations on sexuality.
- 2013 **MC Canada releases BFC-5 - 'Between Horizons: Biblical Perspectives on Human Sexuality.'** Sunday morning sermon reflected on this document.
- 2015, Winter **6 week BFC Learning Series** (mostly Adult Study) including several guests, biblical study, stories, discussion, a Sunday morning sermon and responses, and helping host Ted Swartz drama 'Listening for Grace'
- 2015, Spring **Leadership Council forms Discernment Committee on Sexuality (DCS)** to guide next steps. Members include Michael Lutzmann (chair), Janet Bauman, Linda Kruger, Sue Shantz, Carly Annis and Mark Diller Harder (pastoral rep).
- 2015, Fall **3 week BFC Listening Series** (Sunday evening supper and conversation). We begin to tell our own congregational story in relation to LGBTQ family members and friends. Approximately 70 people of all ages attend.
- 2015, Fall **Congregational Survey on Sexuality distributed to congregation.**
Over 100 surveys received from all age cohorts.
- 2016, February **Results of Congregation Survey distributed to congregation.**
Hosted another Sunday evening supper and conversation to respond to the survey results and test our way forward
- 2016, May **Final SJMC BFC Report to the Congregation tested and approved** by Leadership Council, and distributed to the congregation