

**THE DIACONATE BOARD'S DISCERNMENT OF GOD'S CALLING FOR
EVERGREEN BAPTIST CHURCH OF LOS ANGELES TO BE A HOME FOR LGBTQ
CHRISTIANS AND SEEKERS OF CHRIST**

10/30/16

In the summer of 2013, Evergreen Baptist Church of Los Angeles began a church-wide discernment process to seek God's guidance to discern how we should love followers and seekers of Jesus who identify themselves as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer). From this church-wide discernment process of listening to God, Evergreen-LA affirmed its purpose to be a Faith Village of biblical reconciliation which embodied hope, humility, and hospitality for all who desire to follow Christ. Based on its vision, mission, and values, Evergreen-LA became convicted to take the first steps to walk together with LGBTQ Christians and seekers, in shared humility and mutual submission to Jesus Christ.

One of the first steps was to create "The Open Door" ministry as a safe place of healing to address the unique challenges and needs which are faced by LGBTQ Christians and seekers and their families. Additionally, the ministry is to explore ways to contribute to the overall life and mission of the congregation and the larger community as well. Through this ministry, a lot of healing has taken place bringing back LGBTQ Christians and seekers to the church. Further, LGBTQ Christians and seekers have begun contributing to the overall life of Evergreen-LA. They have been part of ministry highlights during services, classes on how to help the Church understand and love LGBTQ Christians and seekers, and special presentations to different ministry groups about their walk in faith.

In light of this growing involvement and contribution to the church, Evergreen-LA has decided to address the issue of what does it mean for LGBTQ Christians to be part of Evergreen-LA. Specifically, what does it mean to be a member and serving in ministries and leadership at Evergreen-LA?

When it comes to issues relating to LGBTQ, many churches start by asking whether homosexuality is a sin. Unfortunately, the question often serves as a wall dividing the church and LGBTQ Christians and seekers. Evergreen respects the different views of the members of our congregation seeking to be faithful to scripture on how the Bible addresses homosexuality. We find that the different answers to the question do not change how we should address how LGBTQ Christians should be part of Evergreen-LA.

Instead, Evergreen-LA is guided by its vision, mission, and values which have led it to take the first steps to walk with LGBTQ Christians in their journey of being reconciled and healing with the church. Additionally, Evergreen-LA is guided by the congregational views from the survey conducted in December 2015 affirming Evergreen's current and future emphasis on biblical reconciliation of those neglected and underserved by the church. We also are guided by the reflections of the ministry staff. Above all, we are guided by God who helps us discern how Evergreen-LA is to love our LGBTQ Christian brothers and sisters.

Christians, regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation, are unified in our hope in Christ. We become a Christian and part of the body of Christ through our confession of

faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Being a Christian stands on our faith in Christ and not on our gender identity or sexual orientation. Through our confession of faith, we have equal worth and standing before Christ. Through our confession of faith, we are an inseparable part of the family of God.

Christians are united in humility before Christ. All of us, including those who are members and leaders of the church, have sinned and will continue to fall short of the glory of Christ. We have an equal need for the grace of Christ.

Christians are united in their need for and responsibility to extend hospitality in a local church to grow in their faith in Christ. Christians are called to live out our faith as an inseparable part of the body of Christ. The body of Christ benefits from the unique gifts and talents that each Christian brings to the Church.

These truths of equal worth and equal standing before Christ are already recognized in our bylaws on membership. One becomes a member upon: 1) confession of faith in Christ; 2) baptism as a believer; and 3) the satisfaction of the procedural requirements of membership such as taking a membership class, receiving a recommendation from the membership ministries, and a vote of the congregation. Our bylaws on membership do not draw a distinction based on one's gender identity and sexual orientation.

Similarly, these truths of equal worth and equal standing before Christ are already reflected in our bylaws as to the rights, benefits, and responsibilities of membership. The responsibilities of membership include becoming more like Jesus and using our gifts and resources to benefit others in the body so that the church can pursue its vision, fulfill its mission, and embody its values. All members are considered equally in their rights and responsibilities to vote and to serve in ministries and as leaders of the church. No distinction is drawn between members of the church as to the rights, benefits, and responsibilities of membership.

Based on the truths of equal worth and equal standing before Christ and our bylaws, Evergreen-LA believes that all Christians, regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation, are to be considered for membership at Evergreen-LA in the same way in the membership process. Each member of Evergreen-LA will have the same rights, benefits, and responsibilities of membership. All members will be considered in the same way for service in ministry and leadership positions within the church.

With this position, Evergreen-LA hopes that it can be a better church and home for all Christians, regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation. Evergreen-LA recognizes that there are other issues that may need to be addressed with respect to LGBTQ Christians and seekers. Rather than attempting to answer every question now, Evergreen-LA recognizes and embraces the conviction that the Lord will reveal more to us as a congregation over time. We eagerly anticipate the journey of faith and mutual discovery that comes as we journey together.