

# Executive Summary of EBCLA Congregational Discernment Process

Evergreen Baptist Church of Los Angeles endeavors to be a Faith Village that is a place of hope, humility, and hospitality for all who desire to follow Christ. We seek to draw out the same spirit of grace from all parties in the deliberation over how followers of Jesus Christ are to view LGBTQ issues.

The congregation undertook a church-wide discernment process over nine months starting in 2013 concerning how to love LGBTQ Christians and seekers. What emerged was a growing sense of a calling from God to become a place of safety and support for LGBTQ Christians and also seekers who want to know more about Jesus. We determined that no group of Christians, whether they are traditional or progressive on LGBTQ issues, should feel excluded or marginalized.

We affirm our senior pastor's conviction that the key challenge, for our church, is to move through the complexity of the issues toward a meaningful, authentic and Biblical simplicity—all while extending grace to all our Faith Village in this unfolding conversation and journey. Customary answers from the evangelical church strike many Christians in a pluralistic world as too simplistic, ironically lacking the confounding grace that is the essence of Christ's Good News. We feel called to go farther, for the sake of all whom Christ has called.

One example of this willingness to dive into the complexities—even as the ministry staff affirms the Church's historical understanding that the Bible teaches that homosexuality is a sin—is the serious weighing of a variety of Christian scholars' interpretations of the relevant and applicable Scriptural passages and emphases. We are convinced that we need Christians who identify as LGBTQ to partner with us in this effort.

We believe that God has given us a biblical framework to guide us now on our journey to become a church that loves and includes those Christians and seekers who identify as being LGBTQ. There are four simple, essential biblical truths that guide our community: 1) All are sinners; 2) All Christians are called to holiness; 3) All are included in the Body of Christ; and 4) All are expected to love others unconditionally. In light of these four vital truths, God's Spirit is leading us to be a church that submits more completely to Jesus Christ as the Savior, Lord, and sole Judge of all, and focuses on emulating his life-changing and life-giving mercy, justice, and love.

To be the church that God wants us to be, we are committed to pursue the following first steps:

- 1) The resumption of a standing "Biblical-Reconciliation Committee" to identify and find ways to support Christians and seekers of Jesus, who have not historically been welcomed or have been neglected by the Christian Church.
- 2) The ongoing education and spiritual formation of the Body to continue to teach our congregation how to interpret the Bible; to dialogue about and with LGBTQs, including scriptural studies; and to study issues relating to social justice.
- 3) The establishing of an "Open Door" LGBTQ support group to provide loving support and guidance to LGBTQ Christians and seekers, their families, and friends.

Evergreen-LA recognizes that this document represents the first steps of being obedient to God's calling for this church. We anticipate that the Lord will continue over time to reveal more of God's will to this church as to how to love LGBTQ Christians and seekers.