

On Love and Marriage

Evergreen Baptist Church of Los Angeles

June 25, 2021

Our Vision

Evergreen Baptist Church of Los Angeles (EBCLA) is on a journey to become what we call a **Home for the New Humanity**ⁱ where God's purpose in Jesus Christ of creating a family out of God's people can be realized. We see God forming our congregation to be a part of that divine household – which includes a spectrum of beliefs on Christian marriage. Through our commitment to love each other as equal members of God's familyⁱⁱ, we seek to reflect the beautiful diversity of people within the New Humanity.

Our Journey

For over a decade, God has led EBCLA to consider how we can better love LGBTQ+ Christians. Our journey has been difficult but valuable as we strived to educate ourselves on relevant scholarship, build meaningful relationships in the LGBTQ+ Christian community, wrestle with challenging ideas and stories, and ultimately be shaped by the Biblical scriptures. This led us to the formation of The Open Door (our LGBTQ+ fellowship)ⁱⁱⁱ and a decision from our Diaconate board which affirmed that church membership and service^{iv} would not be impacted by sexual orientation or gender identity. In 2020, as part of our ongoing journey, we embarked on a discernment process^v to learn, listen, and deliberate over God's direction for our church with regards to Christian marriage, resulting in the Board's articulation of our vision with the statement below:

Evergreen Baptist Church of Los Angeles, being a theologically-diverse church family, affirms the Baptist distinctive of Soul Freedom for our pastors in regard to weddings. Each pastor may discern according to their personal conviction whether they will officiate weddings between any two adults, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, under the supervision of the Senior Pastor.

Our Unity

Our shared faith in Jesus Christ and our membership in God's household is anchored in an understanding of the Gospel for all people, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. We are bound to each other as a wonderfully diverse family united in Christian worship, community, and mission^{vi}. We hold the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative revelation for our belief and practice. We also understand the liberty and responsibility with which every Christian is entrusted to interpret Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit within the community of faith^{vii}. This is the common ground that EBCLA chooses to stand on.

Our Diversity

Even as our core beliefs unite us with the historic Christian faith, we recognize that our individual convictions on LGBTQ+ marriage differ^{viii}. Our pastors^{ix} and congregants subscribe to a range of Biblical interpretations about LGBTQ+ marriage, from the belief that God blesses marriages regardless of a couple's gender identity or sexual orientation, to the belief that an LGBTQ+ Christian is called to singleness and celibacy^x. The binding love of Christ allows us to hold these differences in humility while celebrating our life together.

Our Life Together

We welcome all who profess their faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of gender identity and/or sexual orientation, into the full life of our church. This may include but is not limited to:

- a. Service in any leadership roles
- b. Baptism and Communion within the church
- c. Church membership with accompanying voting privileges
- d. Use of facilities for gatherings/events such as weddings or funerals

Our Future

Our journey has not been without our own mistakes or pain, and we recognize that the path ahead will require hard work, a commitment to each other, and the grace of God. We believe that the diversity within our church reveals some of the many facets of God's beautiful family. With Jesus as our bond, we continue toward this vision of God's New Humanity together.

ⁱ [Ephesians 2:14-20](#)

ⁱⁱ [Galatians 3:26-29](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [2014 Congregational Discernment Document](#)

^{iv} [2016 EBCLA Membership and Service](#)

^v [2020 Family Ties Sermon Series](#) & [Family Ties LGBTQ+ Resource Page](#)

^{vi} [Acts 2:42-47](#)

^{vii} Norman Maring & Winthrop Hudson. A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice; Bill Leonard. Baptist Ways: A History

^{viii} While these convictions guide how we live out our faith individually, we believe they fall under Paul's writings on "disputable matters" ([Romans 14](#)) and do not form a basis for exclusion from or division within the Christian community.

^{ix} We currently have some pastors who are willing to officiate LGBTQ+ weddings.

^x We see all LGBTQ+ siblings as 'fearfully and wonderfully made' ([Psalm 139](#)) in the image of God and reject conversion therapy as a path toward wholeness or salvation.