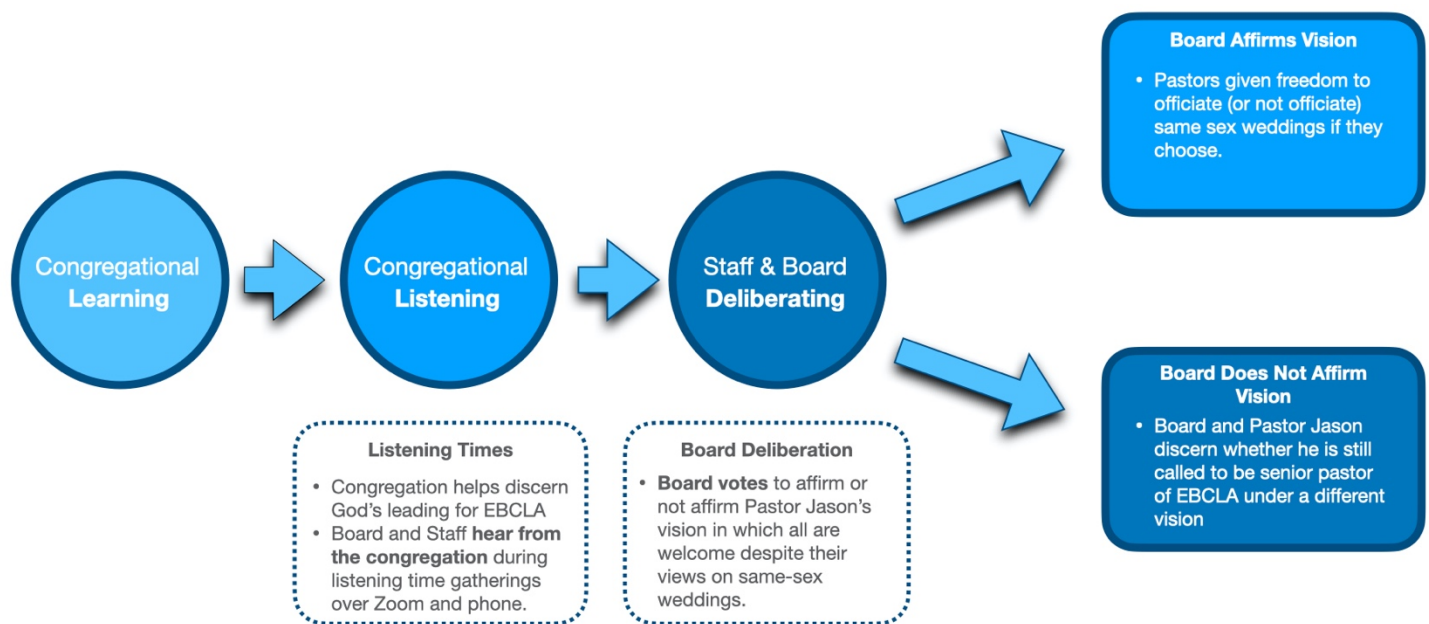


## Welcome to our Family Ties Listening Time.

I hope this process has helped you see the beauty of becoming a *Home for the New Humanity* – a church of affirming and non-affirming Christians who are called together to embody the family of God. In this community, our pastoral staff would be allowed the soul freedom to act out of personal convictions regarding same-sex weddings, with the common agreement to love and embrace all LGBTQIA+ members. I would love for us to become this church, but the decision is not mine alone.

You are being asked to participate in this process through prayer and reflection to help the board determine God's direction for the church. The decisive vote will be cast by the Diaconate Board on behalf of the congregation on whether to affirm or not affirm this vision. If the board votes not to affirm the vision, it would present a significant misalignment between the congregation's direction and my sense of God's call. To put it plainly, I would feel I am being disobedient to God if I were to follow a different vision. And if God is leading this church down a different path than what I am suggesting, I would not be the right leader to take you on that journey. Your important task is to discern how Evergreen will follow God's leading. I trust you. I trust God. And my family and I are at peace with wherever God leads you.



As we enter the second (**listening**) phase of our discernment process, remember that this is more about the journey than the destination. We are learning how a church wrestles with conflict in the safety of loving covenant in Christ. In order to help guide your time together, I want to leave you with some helpful parameters:

- 1) **Center yourselves on the mind of Christ.** Start each listening time reading and sitting in our vision passage ([Ephesians 2:11-22](#)) and create space for the Holy Spirit to speak and minister to you.
- 2) **Listen for how God is leading Evergreen.** How has God been speaking to you? What hopes has God been revealing to you? What questions is God bringing to mind? How is God calling you to respond? This is how a congregation discerns direction together.
- 3) **Value everyone's voice.** God speaks to everyone in different ways. I encourage you to pay special attention to the voices of our children, youth, and our Evergreeners with special needs. Empower everyone to speak, and discern God's voice within the community. If some need more time to process, you may email any additional thoughts or questions to the board after the meeting.
- 4) **Surrender.** End your time surrendering Evergreen to Jesus Christ. Reflect on how God has blessed you through this ministry and give thanks together.

May God's grace and peace be upon you all.

**Pastor Jason**

## Family Ties Discernment Process FAQ Sheet

**1. What is the primary question that our Congregational Learning and Listening process (Family Ties series) seeks to address?**

*We seek to discern whether the vision Pastor Jason has outlined is aligned with our church's direction – that being a “Home for the New Humanity” unites the spectrum of affirming and non-affirming views represented within the staff and congregation. One particular of his vision is to honor the Baptist distinctive and practice of soul freedom – which would allow each pastor to individually discern same-sex wedding requests in the same way they would discern any other wedding request.*

**2. Why is this important for our church family to go through during this “Safer at Home” time?**

*Our ministry staff had been praying and preparing for this discernment process since last year and scheduled its launch to begin after this past Easter. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic, our initial plans were drastically altered. We continue to feel that there would not be an ideal time for this journey, and the uncertainty of the pandemic's end led us to decide to start the process in June.*

**3. What is our Evergreen staff current theological perspective?**

*Our ministry staff affirms the direction of the vision, affirms their full love and embrace of our LGBTQIA+ Evergreeners, but falls on different places within the theological spectrum on same-sex weddings. We believe these similarities and differences help to strengthen our combined leadership and love for the congregation.*

**4. What is our Diaconate Board asked to discern and decide on?**

*Our Board functions as representative of the congregation as a whole and is being asked to discern whether to affirm the vision given by Pastor Jason. The Board is taking the appropriate time to listen well to and discern God's leading for our church family.*

**5. Will the church members be given opportunity to speak into or vote on the Board's decision?**

*The congregation will be given opportunities to connect with the Board and staff at various “listening spaces” throughout the month of August. If you would like to connect with a board or staff member individually, this can also be arranged. The Board will gather and reflect on all the feedback as they enter their discernment time.*

**6. What does “soul freedom” mean in our American Baptist tradition?**

*“Soul Freedom” is a Baptist distinctive that describes the liberty and responsibility individual Christians have to interpret and apply God's Word in the context of their community of faith. It recognizes a Christian's ability to hear directly from God and act according to personal conscience and conviction, and the ability of God to speak to individuals in different ways.*

**7. How would one of our pastors officiating a same sex wedding affect our standing in our denomination?**

*Pastor Jason and the Board have been in communication with our American Baptist regional leadership regarding our discernment process. The logistics of our process are informed by their guidance and recommendations. We will be allowed to stay in good standing no matter the outcome.*

**8. Based on the Board's decision, could a same sex wedding be conducted in our sanctuary?**

*This will be a part of what the Board will decide. Pastor Jason is suggesting that all wedding requests be decided case-by-case by our pastors with the option that any approved wedding within our church family could be held in our sanctuary.*

**9. What happens if the Board does not affirm Pastor Jason's vision?**

*If our Board discerns God's direction for the church does not align with the vision given to Pastor Jason, the congregation and senior pastor will jointly enter into a time of spiritual inquiry to determine if Pastor Jason is called to continue leading this church under a different vision.*