



**FREE
METHODIST
CHURCH
IN CANADA**

April 12, 2022 - Communication Regarding the Purpose of the LGBTQ2S+ Task Force

1. What is the purpose of this document?

This is a living document and will be periodically updated as feedback is received. The purpose of this document is to address questions frequently asked of our task force.

2. What is the purpose of the LGBTQ2S+ task force?

The purpose of this task force is to implement the FMCiC's Strategic Plan for equipping churches to minister more effectively to LGBTQ2S+ people. In addition to providing pastoral resources for churches (see below), **it is leading the denomination in asking the Lord the following three questions:**

- 1. Should we include a statement in our manual encouraging celibacy for LGBTQ2S+ people, and if so, what should that statement entail?*
- 2. Can people with an affirming theology of same-sex sexuality (including LGBTQ2S+ people) be members in our churches, and if so, under what conditions?*
- 3. Is it possible for our clergy who do not align with the FMCiC on our doctrine regarding same sex sexuality still to minister in our movement, and if so, under what conditions?*

3. What answer is the task force hoping/expecting we will arrive at for each of these questions?

The task force does not have a predetermined answer in mind for any of these questions. All our team members and the NLT are committed to leading objectively regardless of our individual personal opinions about them. Our ideal outcome is not a particular answer to any individual question, but that by the end of the process our denomination will agree that we asked each question with an openness to hearing from God, in the spirit of the Methodist practice of Christian Conference, and that, whatever the outcome, we can truly say that the answers we arrived at "seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit" (to borrow a phrase from Acts 15:28).

4. What is the "end-goal" of this task force? Where is it trying to take us?

The goal of the task force is to provide opportunities for the denomination to learn, discuss, engage with ideas, pray, and explore the Scriptures together in regards to LGBTQ2S+ issues. It is doing this to help us ask the above three questions as objectively as possible. Outside of this,

the task force does not have a particular “end-goal” in mind, except seeing the denomination arrive at an answer to each of the above three questions that “seems good to us (our denomination as a whole) and the Holy Spirit.”

5. Is the task force’s mandate to move us towards being affirming?

No. The task force is not a decision making body. Its mandate is to help us answer 3 questions as listed in #1.

6. What is an affirming denomination?

Commonly, one might define an affirming denomination as a denomination that a) performs same-sex marriages, b) ordains non-celibate gay clergy, and c) teaches that same sex sexuality is in keeping with the Creator’s intention for sex. None of these three things are included in the Team’s mandate (see below). We do not consider being hospitable toward LGBTQ2S+ persons to be an exclusively affirming view.

7. Does the task force have a unified view about same-sex sexuality?

No. Our task force is made up of people with diverse views. This is by design. The task force’s mandate is to help us answer 3 questions, not to act as a decision making body. All the task force members are committed to working in alignment with the denomination’s doctrine as stated in ¶630.2.7 of our Manual.

¶630.2.7: In keeping with our reading of the scriptures (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans1:21-27; I Corinthians 6:9-11), we do not believe that the above biblical vision is fulfilled by same-sex sexual intimacy. We maintain a distinction between same-sex sexual activity and same-sex sexual attraction. Furthermore, we acknowledge that the church has often rejected, condemned, and mistreated LGBTQ2S+ people. As followers of Jesus, this grieves us, and we strive to live out our convictions about sexuality in ways that are gracious and Christ-like.

8. Haven’t we already settled the question about our stance on same-sex sexuality?

The present work of the task force is not about “settling our stance” on same-sex sexuality. It is about asking the practical, pastoral, and ministry-related questions that arise from our official position, as we seek to minister from this starting place in the Canadian context.

The FMCiC’s current position on same-sex sexuality was adapted from the position of the US Free Methodist Church by the Canadian SCOD. It was brought to the Canadian General Conference for approval in 2002. It was adopted as the official position of the FMCiC at that Conference in 2002. In 2013, SCOD recommended that the FMCiC re-examine our Manual statement “with a view as to how better to communicate our love for all persons while we remain faithful to Scripture.” At the 2014 General Conference, SCOD led a Sunday evening session about “relating to people different than me,” and used ministry to the LGBTQ2S+ community as a “case study” for this discussion. This was not a session about “settling a

question” on same-sex sexuality however, rather a discussion about how best to relate to LGBTQ2S+ people given our doctrinal position. Our BOA believes that further conversation must take place around application and implication of our statements.

9. Why do this? Since this is such a volatile question, and since the church is already struggling with so many challenges, why tackle this issue now?

The Free Methodist Church in Canada feels this work is important for a number of reasons:

1. The FMCIC believes that **the Holy Spirit is calling us to**. The way in which these questions continue to present as pressing issues in our churches, the regular requests from our pastors for opportunities to explore these issues more forthrightly, and the growing calls from our LGBTQ2S+ brothers, sisters, family, friends and neighbors for clearer answers to these questions all suggest to us that the Holy Spirit is calling us to tackle this issue in a more direct way.
2. The FMCIC believes that **LGBTQ2S+ people have inherent worth and dignity as people made in the Image of God**, and we acknowledge the growing witness of same-sex attracted Christians and/or gender non-conforming Christians who have been harmed by some of the non-affirming church’s practices and teachings.
3. The FMCIC believes in a **high view of Scripture**. This involves humbly acknowledging that human interpretation is fallible. Therefore we should always seek to submit our teaching and application to the scrutiny of scripture. This means that as a community we are continually asking how the Word of God speaks into our present cultural context.
4. The FMCIC believes that **our churches are asking their leaders to give clear leadership on this issue**, especially their pastors, who have been trained to do careful biblical exegesis and applied theology, and who have a breadth of ministry experience and spiritual insight to bring to bear on pressing issues like these.

10. How was this task force formed?

The BOA established it in the fall of 2020 to implement the Strategic Plan developed by the LGBTQ2S+ Strategic Planning Team established in 2017.

- At the 2018 SCOD meeting, the SCOD proposed developing a strategic plan to help the denomination respond to LGBTQ2S+ issues more intentionally and consistently. Until that point SCOD would respond to queries and requests for resources from pastors and lay-people on an ad-hoc basis, but as these were increasing in frequency it felt a more organized response would be helpful.
- Bishop Cliff brought this proposal to the BOA, where it was approved. The BOA tasked Dale Harris to organize and lead this team.
- This Planning Team worked from 2019-2020 to develop a Strategic Plan. This team consisted of: Derek Spink, Dustin Schellenberg, Evan Garst, Joan Stonehouse, Greg Pulham, Alan Guenter, Cathleen Getchell, Amy Bratton, and Dale Harris.

- After extensive research, prayer, and discussion, this Planning Team drafted a 7-point strategic plan and presented it to the BOA in the fall of 2020.
- The BOA took a day of intentional discernment regarding the strategic plan and approved a plan for implementation, and tasked Jared Siebert to develop a timeline for implementing the Strategic plan and organize a task force to lead it. The current task force is the group that he organized for this purpose.

11. What is the timeline that the task force is working with?

