



**LGBTQ2S+  
TASK FORCE**

**REPORT**

APRIL 2024

**IMAGINE**

PREPARED FOR THE 2024 FREE METHODIST CHURCH IN CANADA  
GENERAL CONFERENCE | APRIL 25-28 - TORONTO, ON

# BOARD OF ADMINISTRATION

Report to General Conference 2024

## BOA Report: LGBTQ2S+ Task Force

The LGBTQ2S+ Task Force (TF) has completed its work and has submitted their final report to BOA. We greatly appreciate the time, effort, and commitment the TF has put into this work, and we know that much of it was in the face of significant resistance and unfair criticism. We are aware that at least some of the TF members have faced what can be construed as personal attacks for their work on this, so we do not underestimate the challenge and difficulty the work has been.

### BOA Summary and Perspective

The background, formation, and BOA-commissioning of this TF have been reported in previous communication venues. The BOA began the process by committing to stepping into a journey of reflection and exploration, not presupposing any particular outcomes. The overall mandate was to implement the FMCiC's strategic plan for equipping churches to minister more effectively to LGBTQ2S+ people, and to do so within the framework of our theological position on human sexuality. From the BOA's perspective, this meant the TF was to help us all gain a better understanding of the complexities of this issue, to foster open, frank, and respectful conversations on this topic across our denomination, to help us learn how to show a Christ-like posture of love toward LGBTQ2S+ people, to gauge our churches' views and positions on this issue, and to explore if and how we can implement actual policies or guidelines via resolutions for amendments to the Manual that would clarify our positions and/or enhance ministry efforts. We believe the TF has been successful in all of these goals to varying degrees.

Early in the process, the TF centered on three important questions pertaining to 1) celibacy as a God-honouring lifestyle choice, 2) the degree to which members could hold alternative views of our theological position on sexuality and marriage, and 3) the degree to which pastors could hold a diversity of conviction on the interpretation of biblical sexuality. These were not the only questions or issues being considered and explored, but they tended to guide much of the ensuing discussion. In the final TF report, the BOA received results and recommendations arising from the exploration of these questions, including three possible resolutions for amendments to the Manual. One resolution, pertaining to question #1 (Celibacy) is being processed by BOA for amendment to Chapter 6 of the Manual. The BOA is seeking input and comment from the Conference on this Chapter 6 amendment and therefore the celibacy statement is being presented at the BOA Townhall meeting at General Conference.

As of this writing, the resolution for a proposed amendment to Chapter 6 regarding Celibacy is:

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### WHEREAS:

(1) The New Testament places a high value on the single life. Jesus addresses celibacy as a valid and commendable way of life for his followers, and the Apostle Paul also recommends celibacy (Matt. 19:10-12; 1 Cor 7:6-7, 17, 24).

(2) Some Christian scholars, as well as singles in our movement, have critiqued the church for failing to support singles as part of the family of God. (e.g. Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, p. 111; Ed Shaw, *The Plausibility Problem*, p. 253).

(3) Many Christian scholars have argued that increased support for celibacy will open doors for flourishing in the single life (e.g. Jenell Paris-Williams, *The End of Sexual Identity*, p. 136; Justin Lee, *Torn*, p. 237).

(4) The implication of the FMCiC's position regarding same-sex sexual intimacy (see ¶630.2.7 bullet #3) is that the primary counsel of the church will be celibacy for same-sex attracted followers of Jesus.

(The exception to celibacy is that any same-sex attracted people who are in heterosexual marriages should continue to live as such)

### THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT

(1) ¶630.2.7 be amended to read: (red text deleted; blue text added)

The biblical vision for healthy sexual intimacy is that it is a gift from God reserved for marriage between one man and one woman. Sexual intimacy creates a unique life-long bond that Scripture describes as “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:16). When expressed within the commitment of the marriage covenant, sexual intimacy can be is a great blessing and source of fulfillment. The marriage covenant is designed to protect this one man and one woman bond against that which is destructive and harmful to the couple, any of their children they may have, the extended family, and society as a whole when one acts contrary to God's design for sexual intimacy.

*Some Christians will be single and therefore celibate while they follow Jesus (Matthew 19:11-12). Scripture honours and blesses celibacy equally as one of God's gifts (1 Corinthians 7:7-8). Therefore, those who are unmarried, have become single through divorce or have been widowed, remain sexual beings even as they respond to the call of a celibate life, which necessarily does not involve sexual intimacy. Following the biblical vision of the new family of God in Christ,*

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*Churches should support people in the unique need for intimacy that celibacy creates for single people.*

- The biblical word for “fornication” or “sexual immorality” includes pre-marital sexual intimacy and lists it along with other forms of immorality as sin (Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:3-5). Bonding sexually to a person to whom one has not covenanted in marriage robs the bond of an eventual marriage of its exclusivity. Similarly, sexual intimacy outside of a marital union occurring after divorce or the loss of a spouse is also fornication and undermines the biblical design for healthy sexual intimacy (1 Corinthians 7:8-9).
- Extra-marital sexual intimacy, which Scripture calls “adultery”, transgresses God’s moral law and betrays the marriage covenant. Adultery damages the one flesh union in that it contaminates the exclusive bond of marriage and undermines trust (Exodus 20:14, Mark 7:20-23).
- In keeping with our reading of the scriptures (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:21-27; 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 LGBTQ 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.

In all of the above instances, all persons are accountable to God for their thoughts, words and deeds (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Because Christians are part of fallen humanity we must deal with many inclinations to sin. We trust the grace of God is available and completely adequate to forgive and transform (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 7:25, 9:14).

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The church has a corporate responsibility to be God's agent of transformation to persons as they learn to live a Christian life that pursues the best of God's design for healthy sexuality. This transformation can best occur as the church provides a loving and supportive environment. Because sexual desire is so powerful, counseling is recommended as a part of the church's pastoral care.

In summary, we recognize that this biblical vision contrasts with that of the prevailing culture, and we present it graciously as an alternative to the culture's view of sex and sexuality.

(2) ¶630.3.1.1 be amended to read:

*Sexual intercourse is one of God's gifts to humanity, for the intimate union of a man and woman within marriage. In this relationship, it is to be honoured (Hebrews 13:4, I Corinthians 7:3-5). Marriage is therefore the only proper setting for sexual intimacy. Scripture requires purity before and faithfulness within marriage. Scripture requires chastity: celibacy outside of marriage and faithfulness within marriage (see ¶630.2.8).*

The other two proposed resolutions, based on questions #2 and #3, were found to be untenable by the BOA. We recognized and appreciated the thorough work and gracious tone of those proposals. However, in light of survey data showing that a majority of survey respondents (2/3 at least) were not in favour of allowing exemptions on our theological position, and owing to an apparent conflict between those resolutions and our membership covenant requirements under the Common Constitution, the BOA could not endorse the proposed resolutions based on questions #2 and #3.

### Task Force Perspective

The following is an account of this journey from the perspective of the Task Force. This work has been ongoing within the FMCIC for many years. The BOA mandated our current Task Force in the fall of 2020 to implement the Strategic Plan developed by the LGBTQ Strategic Planning Team (established in 2017). In response to the desire to improve ministry engagement with the LGBTQ2S+ community, it became clear that our statements could not address all aspects of this effort. The lack of clarity and the diverse interpretation of our statements prompted the formation of this Task Force and directed much of our work.

Since its creation in 2021, this Task Force has prayerfully, thoughtfully, diligently, and lovingly tried to help move this denominational conversation forward as we worked to implement the FMCIC's Strategic Plan for equipping churches to minister more effectively to LGBTQ2S+ people. This work has involved a variety of strategies, including the creation of three sub-committees, the formation of

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a care group for pastors with family members who identify as LGBTQ2S+, an opportunity to examine the FMCIC's current statements regarding human sexuality, denominational forums, surveys, access to resources, a video and resource package reporting some of our findings, and feedback during the 2023 Regional Gatherings. As a team, we engaged in an intensive, in-person meeting in September 2023 to formulate recommendations and motions based on what we learned from everything we had done and heard, including the personal communications we received, surveys, Regional Gathering conversations/ input cards, and forums. We tried to respect and honour everyone's voice. In this journey, this Task Force has attempted to see the humanity behind each survey entry, each comment card, and each email. We continue to hope for the same respect in return.

This process has not been easy. We have heard hundreds of comments - both encouraging and discouraging - about this work. We received feedback rooted in deep conviction, some hopeful and some fearful. As we began this journey, we received derogatory, dismissive, hurtful, or angry language. In response to this, we introduced boundaries and guidelines for discussions. We spent considerable time responding to individuals who inquired, questioned, criticized, encouraged, or shared their personal convictions. We took extra time to offer a deep dive into the FMCIC's view on biblical sexuality, which resulted in a video resource. As a Task Force, having our mandate challenged and questioned multiple times was frustrating and time-consuming. No matter how hard it got, our commitment was to see it through. The journey for this Task Force was challenging, frustrating, exhausting, deflating, and isolating.

Our work surfaced two significant themes: the desire to adhere to Scripture and unity in the Body of Christ. With these in mind, we submitted three resolution/recommendation/motion documents for the BOA's consideration in November 2023: one regarding celibacy, one regarding membership, and one regarding clergy positions of conscience regarding same-sex sexuality. To our disappointment, only one motion advanced to the General Conference for a vote.

Even though the work was hard, we valued being a part of this Task Force and each team member. The experience was richer because the group was so diverse, drawing from various clergy and lay members from across the country, demonstrating depth and diversity of experience and viewpoints while all being part of the Free Methodist family. When things were difficult in the conversation, we took care - mentally, spiritually, and emotionally - of each other in addition to doing the mandated work of the Task Force. We were continually thankful for each other and were a strong team through this challenging denominational discussion.

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## BOA Response and Steps Forward

We begin by acknowledging that the TF work has been sincere, thorough, meaningful, and helpful. Here are some of the ways we believe this work has been beneficial to our FMCiC.

- We have generated open (albeit somewhat covid-constrained) conversation and refused to step away from the table even when the conversations became difficult. We have embraced a topic that has been suppressed or avoided by many, and one that is timely and relevant to, for example, what our kids are hearing at school and elsewhere. We have received dozens of notes, calls and visits of appreciation for being a movement willing to talk about this openly, while committing to do so within FMCiC doctrinal positions.
- Through that process, we did in fact gain a better understanding of the complexities surrounding this issue.
- We have had opportunity to remind ourselves that the Free Methodist theological positions regarding human sexuality, singleness and marriage, are beautiful, hopeful and to be celebrated, even when they are contrary to the prevailing societal views. They do not endorse hatred or judgement.
- We have challenged each other to pay attention to language and posture, to stop using hurtful talk, and have agreed to learn to show Christ-like love to LGBTQ2S+ people. We do not have consensus yet about what that looks like, but we are clear that derogatory, dismissive, hurtful or angry language does not represent our understanding of each person being made in the image of Christ, our calling to be missionaries, nor does it reflect Christ's love.
- We have begun to explore the question of "how can LGBTQ2S+ people be welcomed into our church families within the parameters of our FMCiC doctrines and beliefs?" Not, "if they can?". This has not yet been resolved. There appears to be general agreement on a positive response to the "if", but only incremental, nevertheless important, movement on the "how".
- We have resolved to develop a robust position statement on celibacy.
- We have learned some things about godly conversation. The Task Force has led us through a series of challenging discussions, and we have learned that we still have much to learn about having difficult conversations. Our goal was to have honest, rigorous conversations and healthy debates where anger, dismissiveness, and distrust did not impede "Christian conference", but some of those conversations have not been as gracious and forbearing as they should have been. By God's grace and by reflection back on those discussions, we endeavour to be a denomination that is better at having difficult, meaningful, sanctified conversations.

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The Task Force work has resulted in a resolution to amend Chapter 6 of the Manual to clarify our position on celibacy as a God-honouring lifestyle choice. The work has also prompted a recommendation from the TF for further study on membership in the FMCiC to bring more clarity and consistency across our churches. The BOA agrees, and SCOD has been instructed to examine and explore the bounds for our Free Methodist membership requirements, identifying essentials and non-essentials under our scriptural interpretations, all within the framework of the Common Constitution.

Furthermore, we will begin discussions with our new bishop to develop an implementation committee. This committee will draw on information and resource material from the Task Force work and will begin to develop strategies and a resource repository for pastors and churches dealing with potential legal implications and contextual challenges when ministering to LGBTQ2S+ people. This committee would work closely with NLT, SCOD, MEGaP, and our FMC legal advisors.