

CBWC Identity Statement and Motions - What Is This About?

The Canadian Baptists of Western Canada is the denomination that First Baptist is affiliated with. About five years ago some CBWC churches in central Alberta discovered that two churches in BC had adopted an “inclusive” policy of allowing LGBTQ people to become church members. They wrote to the CBWC board demanding that these churches be forced to change their policy or else be removed from the denomination. Since that time, two additional churches have adopted inclusive policies as well.

Back in 2003, in response to the Government of Canada’s decision to create marriage equality for same-sex couples, the CBWC assembly voted on a resolution to define marriage as a life-long union between a man and a woman (only). Under the principle of local church autonomy, member churches of the CBWC up to this point, have not felt obligated to uphold this principle when it comes to their own membership practices.

To address this issue, the Board of the CBWC had crafted a “CBWC Identity Statement” which includes the traditional definition of marriage. The CBWC has given notice of three motions which will be voted on at the next Assembly in Calgary in May 2022. The first motion is that the Assembly adopt the new Identity Statement. The second motion is that the member churches must *uphold* the Identity statement and all other assembly resolutions when it comes to their church membership practices (including the principle that people in a same sex marriage would not be accepted as members in a local church). The third motion is that all local church staff who are credentialed by the CBWC, the CBWC denominational staff and the CBWC Board members must *uphold* the Assembly resolutions on traditional marriage and sexuality and all other past and future Assembly resolutions.

What are the specific implications of all this for First Baptist Church?

Our church as well as the other 164 CBWC member churches are expected to discuss these motions before the May, 2022 Assembly and to instruct our delegates how to vote on them. The churches are also invited to propose amendments or alternate motions which must be submitted 90 days before the Assembly.

There are three main issues for us to discuss.

- 1.) Traditionally, Baptists believe in the autonomy of the local church. The FBCPG constitution affirms that our *“membership reserves the exclusive right to determine who will be Members of this church and the conditions of membership.”* For the sake of our affiliation with the CBWC, are we willing to sacrifice our autonomy to decide who can be a member of our church, and instead to be bound by resolutions, both past and future, passed at CBWC Assembly meetings?
- 2.) Do we believe that the CBWC should require uniformity of the issue of including LGBTQ persons, or do we believe there can be diversity on this issue within the CBWC

church family? Do we agree with the use of a creedal statement such as this to remove other Baptist churches from the denomination?

3.) How would we describe our own church's attitude about the possibility of a LGBTQ person joining the membership of *our* church? Adopting the Identity Statement may also require the exclusion of divorced persons from church membership as they too do not meet the CBWC's traditional definition of "life-long" marriage between a man and a woman.

These issues are important to our church and our denomination for several reasons.

- Our society will be watching how we treat LGBTQ issues and LGBTQ people, which affects the witness and mission of our church.
- If the motions are passed, a number of 'progressive' churches will voluntarily leave or be required to leave the CBWC. If the motions are defeated, the churches in Alberta that brought the criticisms may leave the denomination.
- If FBC's delegates were instructed to vote against the motions for any or all of the issues described above, but the simple majority at the Assembly passed them, would FBCPG be willing to "uphold" the Identity Statement, or would we not? If not, our continued association with the CBWC may come into question.
- If a member of our staff was not willing to "sign off" on the Identity Statement and related resolutions and subsequently lost their credentials with the CBWC, would FBC terminate their employment? And if so, would our church be allowed to continue our membership with CBWC?

Obviously, these motions have serious implications for us. The Leadership Team has created an Identity Steering Committee to plan a process for the congregation to be informed, to have opportunities to discuss the issues and to eventually have a process of deciding how to direct our delegates. A good first step is to read the CBWC cover letter, Identity Statement and Motions that you can find using this link.

The various members of the Identity Steering Committee would like to have personal one-on-one meetings with each family to answer questions and to hear your initial reactions to this denominational initiative. Then in the Fall, there will be some Town Hall Meetings to explore the issues further together. While there are some aspects of all this that can seem disagreeable, it is also an opportunity for us to break new ground and have a clearer understanding of our identity as a local church and of our relationship with the CBWC.