



November 8, 2016

Dr. David Hardage
Dr. René Maciel
Mr. David Russell

Texas Baptists
77557 Rambler Road, Suite 1200
Dallas, Texas 75231

Dear David, René, and David;

The First Baptist Church of Austin received an official letter following our meeting last week informing us that we are no longer welcome as part of Texas Baptists. The letter states that any church that welcomes and affirms members of the LGBTQ community “effectively chooses to withdraw itself from harmonious cooperation with the churches of the Convention.” Later, it more specifically states that our affirmation of LGBTQ people “results in [our] church no longer being in harmonious cooperation with the BGCT.”

As committed followers of Christ and as humble participants in the endeavor of being Baptist in accordance with our historical distinctives of biblical freedom, soul freedom, church freedom and religious freedom, we do not agree that we have made this decision. It has been forced upon us.

We do not desire to argue over sexuality any further. As a church, we did our diligent theological work, being guided by the Spirit, meditating on sacred scripture and hearing the stories and struggles of our own members. As a result of that thoughtful process, we are proudly and openly welcoming and affirming of all God’s beloved children.

Instead our issue has more to do with what we perceive as a complete disregard for the fragile freedom of the local church as outlined in our historic baptist tradition.

It has become apparent through direct conversation with you that the voices influencing this decision belong to those who disagree with our theological affirmation, and as a result are withholding funds from the Texas Baptists until the First Baptist Church of Austin is excluded from fellowship.

We hope you realize the long-term implications of this decision. Where will “the line” be drawn? What happens when, two years down the road, these same churches don’t agree with female ordination and withhold funds until all churches who ordain women are removed? What happens when those same churches hold to a theology of Calvinism or another issue on which Baptists are divided and ask that all those who do not hold similar beliefs be removed? What happens when these churches begin to push for a

return to affirm the inerrancy of Scripture? When will you draw the line on what you will or won't hold as a required belief for being a Texas Baptist?

Once we begin to listen to the voices who wield their power and financial strength in this way, we have begun a slippery slope to fundamentalism and irrelevancy.

This is a familiar road we have already been down.

From our perspective, the current model of discernment being used by the leadership of Texas Baptists is based on money and influence, far from the model that Jesus set forth in the Gospel. The convention's expressed theology of deciding who belongs in God's kingdom is regressive and does not represent the forward-thinking theology of our Christ where walls are torn down to make room for all people, marginalized and Pharisee alike.

The current actions of the Texas Baptists' leadership are blatantly against our very Baptist heritage of the autonomy of the local church, where each church has the freedom under the leadership of Christ and the Holy Spirit to make its own choices and stances. This decision-making is credal. Our belief is that this kind of restriction is more credal than faithful, and that we must not confuse cooperation with conformity. As Baptists we hold to Christ and not to a creed.

A religious system that drifts into listening to those with money and prioritizes those in power is the very thing Jesus Christ criticized and fought against – in fact, this is where the line is most often crossed between being a faith community and becoming an empire.

As our independent Baptist forefather Sam Houston said while driving a stake into the property he chose as the original location for the First Baptist Church of Austin, "I am a Baptist and right here we will build a Baptist church."

We are standing where we have always stood: in unity with our fellow Baptists and believers, and with respect and love for all people.

The First Baptist Church of Austin