CONSTITUTION: (1958)

- **As amended 2004 04**
- **As amended 2006 10**
- **As amended 2007 10**
- **As amended 2008 10**
- **As amended 2010 01**
- **As amended 2014 01**
- **As amended 2014 04**
- **As amended 2015 05**
- **As amended 2015 10**
- **As amended 2017 04**
- **As amended 2018 10**
- **As amended 2019 10**
- **As amended 2023 04**
- **As amended 2023 10**
- **As amended 2025 01**
- **As amended 2025 04**
- **As amended 2026 04**
- **As amended 2026 10**

A. ARTICLE I - Name

The name of this church shall be:

The Evangelical Free Church of Lac La Biche

B. ARTICLE II - Statement of Faith

The Evangelical Free Church of Canada is an association of autonomous churches united in a common commitment to God's evangel - the gospel of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again to give us eternal life. To God's glory, the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Our essential theological convictions are vitally connected to this gospel.

God's gospel originates in and expresses the wondrous perfections of the eternal, triune God.

1. We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.

God's gospel is authoritatively revealed in the Scriptures.

2. We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavour should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.

God's gospel alone addresses our deepest need.

3. We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God,

and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.

God's gospel is made known supremely in the Person of Jesus Christ.
4. We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus—Israel's promised Messiah—was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.

God's gospel is accomplished through the work of Christ.
5. We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.

God's gospel is applied by the power of the Holy Spirit.
6. We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in Him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

God's gospel is now embodied in the new community called the church.
7. We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

God's gospel compels us to Christ-like living and witness to the world.
8. We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.

God's gospel will be brought to fulfillment by the Lord Himself at the end of this age.
9. We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ with His holy angels when He will bring His kingdom to fulfillment and exercise His role as Judge of all. This coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

God's gospel requires a response that has eternal consequences.
10. We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen

C ARTICLE III - Purpose

The Purpose of this Church shall be: to glorify God through the preaching of the Word of God to the mutual edification, instruction and discipline of its members and other believers; the winning of the unsaved to Christ; helping the young Christians to develop the spiritual life; instruct the children in the Word of God, and the furtherance of the Gospel work on the Mission Fields at home and abroad.

D. ARTICLE IV - Membership

This Church shall receive as members those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, being born again, and in their lives are manifesting the fruits of a true faith in God.

E. ARTICLE V - Governing Authority

The congregation, at its annual, quarterly, or special business meetings shall elect its Governing Board and Officers and transact such business as concerns the work of the Church. A special congregational meeting may be announced at any time by the Chairman with approval of the Governing Board, and sufficient notice to comply with the By-Laws. In the election of Pastor, Staff and all other Officers, voting shall be done by closed ballot.

F. ARTICLE VI - Standing

This Church shall remain free and independent and shall not join itself to any other denomination or synod. It shall remain its own highest authority under the Lord Jesus Christ and conduct its business through its business sessions. The Church shall cooperate with the Evangelical Free Church of Canada and its branches, and with the Evangelical Free Church Parkland District Conferences by sending delegates to conferences, support Home and Foreign Missions and unite in any mutual efforts for the furtherance of the Gospel as the Church itself may officially decide.

G. ARTICLE VII - Amendments

Amendments to this constitution may be made at any annual business session of the Church by a two-thirds majority of votes cast, when said proposed amendments have been presented in written form and discussed at a business meeting at least three months prior to the time of its adoption.

To make an amendment to Articles I, II, VI and IX there must be a 75% quorum and 75% majority vote at the meeting specially called for this purpose.

H. ARTICLE VIII - Provision for By-Laws

A supplement to this constitution known as By-Laws shall embody the number, officers and structure of the Governing Board and the stated qualifications for Staff and Officers and their duties, conditions for membership, parliamentary rules and regulations for the activities of the Church. Rules and regulations adopted at any officially called and announced business session shall be written out in good form and added to the By-Laws when so decided by a meeting.

I. ARTICLE IX - Property Rights

If division occurs in the Church, the name and all property are retained by those adhering to the constitution.
If the Church ceases to function and its organization is dissolved, the property shall return to the Alberta Parkland District of the Evangelical Free Church of Canada to enable said Conference to renew the work or use the values thereof for further enterprises.

BY-LAWS:

1. MEMBERSHIP

1.1. New Members

New members may be received at any regular Business Meeting of the Church in the following manner:

1.1.1. Minimum age for membership is 18.

1.1.2. Application shall be made to the Pastor or to any member of the Elder Board.

1.1.3. The Elder Board shall investigate as to the faith and life of the applicant and then make recommendation to the Governing Board who in turn will recommend them at the following Business Meeting.

1.1.4. The Board recommended applicant shall give a testimony of their personal faith in Jesus Christ in writing to be published in the bulletin at least three (3) weeks prior to the Business Meeting.

1.1.5. The Church decides by vote the acceptance of any applicant.

1.1.6. If any member should have a concern regarding the acceptance of any Board recommended applicant for membership, their concern must be expressed in writing to the Board Chair at least nine (9) days prior to the Business Meeting. The concern will be discussed with representatives of the Elder Board who may wish to inquire further into the matter, and only if the Elders deem the concern valid will their recommendation of acceptance be withdrawn.
To facilitate this procedure, the names of all Board recommended applicants for membership will be published in the church bulletin three (3) consecutive weeks prior to the Business Meeting.

1.2 Membership Status

1.2.1. Active Membership

1.2.2. Inactive Membership

- if an Active Member moves away from the Lac La Biche area, they shall automatically be re-classified as an Inactive Member when they move.
- If an Active Member is continuously absent from the church for a period of 12 months, they shall automatically be re-classified as an Inactive Member. (Active Member status shall automatically be regained if they begin to once again attend the church.

- following a period of 12 months as an Inactive Member, a letter will be sent advising them of our intent to remove their name from our Membership Roll unless they request otherwise.

NOTE: The Elders shall be responsible for initiating and following through with the procedure stated above.

1.3 Privileges

1.3.1. Active Members shall qualify to vote in Church Business Meetings.

1.3.2. Inactive membership: no voting privileges.

1.4 Discipline

1.4.1. If the Pastor, or any member of the Board, or of the Church is found to live or teach contrary to the Word of God and the Statement of Faith of this Church, he shall be admonished in love. If there is no repentance, exclusion from the Church shall follow according to Matthew 18:15-18; II Corinthians 2:5-11; I Corinthians 5; Galatians 1-2.

1.4.2. No accusation shall be taken up by the Church against the Pastor or Elders except by the complaint of two (2) or three (3) witnesses. I Timothy 5:19

1.5 Termination

1.5.1. Anyone who has withdrawn their Membership or had their Membership removed shall not have any privileges in any Business session of the Church.

1.5.2. Withdrawal from Membership will be accepted upon request and Members will receive a letter of recommendation upon request when moving to other localities or congregations.

2. ORDINANCES

2.1 Baptism

2.1.1. The mode of Water Baptism practiced by this Church shall be immersion upon confession of faith, except when a person's physical condition prohibits immersion. Other modes of Baptism, if received on confession of faith, are recognized.

2.2 The Lord's Supper

2.2.1. The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated regularly, preferably monthly. Participation shall be open to all believers. I Corinthians 11:23-24

2.3 Marriage & Gender

2.3.1 The Evangelical Free Church of Lac La Biche has adopted the Evangelical Free Church of Canada Definition of Biblical Marriage.
(See Appendix A)

The Evangelical Free Church of Lac La Biche has adopted the Evangelical Free Church of Canada Statement on Gender and Human Sexuality.
(See Appendix B)

3. PROCEDURE OF BUSINESS MEETINGS

3.1 Notice of Business Meetings

3.1.1. The Church shall be given official notice of each regular Business Meeting at least two (2) weeks prior to the holding of the meeting.

3.1.2. Special meetings may be called on shorter notice, should emergencies arise, at the discretion of the Governing Board.

3.2 Order of Business Meetings

3.2.1. All regular meetings shall include the following:

- Scripture reading and prayer for spiritual guidance
- printed Agenda
- minutes of previous meetings and current printed reports to be given out prior to the meeting (Financial Ministries report is the only required report for the January mtg.)
- tabled items
- new business

3.3 Business Meetings

3.3.1. Normal evening meetings start at 7:00P.M. and cease no later than 10:00PM with ten minutes extension to finish business in progress. Times may be adjusted by the Chairman.

3.3.2. All ordinary business shall be transacted at the regular Business Meetings of the church, of which there shall be two (2) per year (January, April).

3.3.3. The January Business Meeting shall include a written report from the Financial Coordinator and ratification of the budget and shall be the Annual Business Meeting.

3.3.4. The April Business Meeting shall include elections.

3.4 Conduct of Business Meetings

3.4.1. All Business Meetings shall be conducted according to the principles of the New Testament concerning relationships among believers with Robert's Rules of Order as a guideline.

3.4.2. All matters shall be determined by:
a) a simple majority vote except
b) by the decision of the session
c) or when otherwise specified in the By-Laws.

3.4.3. The quorum for all Business Meetings shall be 25% of the Active Members.

3.4.4. Active Members not present at the meeting give silent consent to the decisions of that meeting.

3.4.5. Active Members who desire to attend a Business Meeting but find it impossible due to one or more of the following reasons:
infirmity,
work commitments,
out of the area for work, vacation or family commitments
shall be allowed to vote in advance by written, secret ballot for regular elections, calling a pastor or other important items where the issue being voted on is known in advance.

3.4.6. A minimum of two (2) scrutineers shall be appointed by the Chairman of the meeting.

3.4.7. Voting, other than elections, shall generally be by show of hands. However, secret ballot may be requested by a member on any question.

3.5 Elections

3.5.1. Election and calling of a Pastor may take place at a regular or special Business Meeting by voting affirmative or negative on one candidate; but the final vote must be taken by closed ballots and 85% yes vote will be required before a call can be issued. He shall be called for an indefinite time with three months notice by him or by the Church in case of resignation or of dismissal.
Upon commencing ministry at the church, a Pastor and their spouse shall be received as members of the church.

3.5.2. Dismissal of a Pastor – A member may make a motion at a Business Meeting to initiate the dismissal process of a Pastor. A Special Meeting will be held within two (2) weeks to decide on whether the process will proceed. If the decision is to

proceed, another Special Meeting will be called within two (2) weeks time to vote on a motion to dismiss the Pastor. The vote will be determined by simple majority.

3.5.3. All paid staff will be evaluated annually.

3.5.4. All other elected persons shall require 51% of total votes cast.

3.5.5. All Board elections shall be for a three (3) year term.

3.5.6. The Chairman will develop a list of people to sit on the Nominating Committee, ratified at the October Board Meeting. The list will be posted after the Board Meeting. Any two (2) members that want to nominate a church member on to the list may do so up until the day before the Business Meeting. All nominees will be presented to the membership and a minimum of three (3) members will be elected at the October Business Meeting.

3.5.7. The nominating list will be posted by the end of January and closed the date of the April Board meeting. Church members will be able to nominate candidates for any of the positions. Notification of the nominating list shall be published in the church bulletin. Any individual wishing to nominate must:

a) be a church member
b) have the person's permission before they nominate them
c) have another member second the nomination

3.5.75 Elders nominate potential Elders, and if someone has a recommendation for a potential Elder they may communicate that name to the Elder Board. All potential nominees once approved by the Elder Board are then brought forward and voted on by the membership.

3.5.76 The Elders will elect a Vice Head Elder from one of the current elected Elders. In the event of a requested absence or a mid term Head Elder resignation, the Vice Head Elder assumes Head Elder duties until their return or a replacement Head Elder is elected by the membership following the nomination guidelines.

3.5.8. The Head Elder position shall be elected every three years. The Head Elder may serve on the Board indefinitely. All other elected Board positions may succeed themselves only once. No other elected person can serve more than six (6) consecutive years on the Board unless there are extenuating circumstances.

3.5.9. Special Committees may be elected at any Business session as the need arises.

3.5.10. Transition date for elected officers begin immediately after election.

4. GOVERNING AUTHORITY

4.1 Authority

4.1.1. Christ: The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church.
"And God placed all things under His feet and appointed (Christ) to be Head over everything for the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way." Ephesians 1:22-23

4.1.2. The Congregation shall remain its own highest authority under the Lord Jesus Christ and conduct its business through its business sessions by a Congregational vote.

4.1.3. The Governing Board shall exercise general supervision over the affairs of the Church. It shall see that the decisions of the Church Business Meetings are carried out, and shall consider and decide routine matters which may arise between regular Congregational Business Meetings.

4.2 Board Member Qualifications

I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 2:1-8; I Peter 5:1-9; Acts 6:1-5

4.2.1. Blameless, above reproach (Titus 1:6,7; I Timothy 3:2)

4.2.2. Good marriage relationship - husband of one wife/wife of one husband (Titus 1:6; I Timothy 3:2)

4.2.3. Having children in subjection (Titus 1:6; I Timothy 3:4)
(see that his children obey him with proper respect)

4.2.4. Not self-willed (not overbearing) (Titus 1:7)

4.2.5. Not quick tempered (Titus 1:7)

4.2.6. Not violent, not quarrelsome (Titus 1:7; I Timothy 3:3)

4.2.7. Not pursuing dishonest gain (Titus 1:7; I Timothy 3:3)

4.2.8. Given to hospitality (Titus 1:8; I Timothy 3:2)

4.2.9. One who loves what is good (Titus 1:8)

4.2.10. Upright (Titus 1:8)

4.2.11. Holy (Titus 1:8)

4.2.12. Disciplined (Titus 1:8)

4.2.13. Self-controlled (Titus 1:8; 2:2)

4.2.14 Holding to the faithful Word (Titus 1:9; 2:2)

4.2.15. Able to teach (Titus 1:9; 2:2,3; I Timothy 3:2)

4.2.16. Worthy of respect (I Timothy 3:2)

4.2.17. Teach in accord with sound doctrine (Titus 2:1)

4.2.18. Not be a recent convert (I Timothy 3:6)

4.2.19. Soundness of speech that cannot be condemned (I Timothy 3:8; Titus 2:8)

4.2.20. An example of good works (Titus 2:7)

4.2.21. Good reputation with outsiders (I Timothy 3:7; Titus 1:6)

4.2.22. Good report within (Acts 6:3)

4.2.23. Full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3,5; Galatians 5:22,23)

4.2.24. Full of wisdom (Acts 6:3)

4.2.25. Willing to serve (work) (Acts 6:1-3)

4.2.26. Full of faith (Acts 6:5)

4.2.27. Conduct so as not to cause a brother to stumble (Romans 14:21; I Corinthians 8:9)

4.2.28. Member of the Church

4.2.29. Displays leadership qualities

4.3 Board Meeting Procedures

4.3.1. Two-thirds (2/3) of the elected Board Members shall constitute a quorum at all Board Meetings.

4.3.2. Regular Board Meetings shall be held on a monthly basis.

4.3.3. A Special Board Meeting may be called by the Chairman when the need arises.

4.4 Board Relationships

4.4.1. Each Coordinator is an ex-officio member to the committees in their department or may be a member of a committee.

4.4.2. Ministry heads, with Coordinator as initiator, meet at least twice a year.

4.4.3. Each Coordinator presents recommendations to the Board from all ministries represented.

4.4.4. The Coordinator of each ministry shall be the liaison person between their ministry and the Governing Board.

4.4.5. Each Coordinator is responsible to the Board.

4.4.6. The Pastors and Chairman are responsible to the congregation.

4.5 Board Structure

4.5.1. The Governing Board shall consist of:

- the Pastor (non-voting, ex-officio)
- Associate Pastors (non-voting ex-officio)
- Chairperson
- Head Elder
- Outreach and Special Ministries Coordinator
- Christian Education Ministries Coordinator
- Worship Ministries Coordinator
- Finance Ministry Coordinator
- Property Maintenance Coordinator
- Manager of Church Operations provides Board support

4.5.2. The Head Elder shall be the Vice-Chairman of the Church and the Governing Board.

4.5.3. The Legal Trustees shall be the Church Chairman, the Finance Ministries Coordinator, and the Property Maintenance Coordinator.
They shall exercise signing authority for all legal documents and papers on behalf of the Church in accordance with the wishes of the Church and shall provide for the safe keeping of all valuable documents and legal papers.

4.5.4. Signing authority for bank accounts shall be the Manager of Church Operations, Chairperson, Finance Ministries Coordinator, the Property Maintenance Coordinator, and the Head Elder.

4.5.5. The Elder Board shall consist of the Head Elder and a minimum of three elected Elders.

4.5.6. Elected members to non-Board shall consist of:

- Elders (minimum of 3)
- Missions Chairperson
- Evangelism Chairperson
- Worship Service Administrator
- Sunday School Co-Chairs (adult and children)
- Financial Secretary
- Cemetery Committee

4.5.7. The above elected positions shall be for a three (3) year term, and the duration of the appointed positions will be up to the discretion of the Coordinator for a maximum of three (3) years with no term limit.

4.5.8. All elected members are encouraged, when appropriate, to involve their spouse in their ministry.

4.5.9. Duties of Officers are listed in a supplement known as Job Descriptions.

5. COMMITTEES

- are listed in a supplement known as The Organizational Structure.

6. PERSONNEL

Personnel Committee:

a) Consists of up to five (5) persons, two of whom are to be the Chairman of the Board and the Head Elder
b) The Chairman of the Board is to serve as Personnel Committee chair
c) All must be church members
d) The Board appoints all members

Definition of Biblical Marriage- Appendix A

EFCC Resource Guide on Marriage and Sexuality

Moral precepts and instruction are universally recognized as an intrinsic part of religious teaching and practice. The Evangelical Free Church of Canada affirms the historic, theological and Biblical understanding of marriage and sexuality. These theological precepts and moral directions are derived from the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as well as the Trinitarian theology in which we find meaning and community.
Biblical passages that ground our historic theological understanding of marriage, sexuality and related conduct:

<u>On the purpose and origin of marriage:</u>
"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." Genesis 1:27-28a

"The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man." For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." Genesis 2: 23-25

In the Genesis story, Adam and Eve are formed together as God's "image bearers", a unique role within the created order. The Bible indicates that God's image is not adequately reflected by only one sex: both together are necessary for a full reflection of the divine character. Furthermore, it is clear from the Genesis account that man and woman are intended to be united as husband and wife, "one flesh", and to
create and nurture children. In Christian theology, the marriage union between a man and woman also reflects the plurality and unity within the Trinity.

Marriage in historic Christian faith is a symbolic expression of God's nature, where two complementary but different image bearers (man and woman), become one, exploring and revealing the mystery of God's
own Trinitarian plurality and unity as they mature together.

<u>On the permanence of marriage:</u>
In the Gospels, Jesus said: "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them
male and female', and said 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." Matthew 19:4-6

The description of marriage as a sacred union of a man and a woman, taught in the first chapters of Genesis, is affirmed by Jesus as a life-long commitment.

<u>Marriage in the Holy Scriptures involves significant theological & moral principles:</u>
The New Testament uses Marriage as an essential metaphor for understanding the relationship between Christ and the Church. For example, the Apostle John describes the relationship of Christ to his church

to that of a groom to a bride (Revelation 19:7).

In the Letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul uses Christ's love for the Church as a model for Christian marriage:
"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy,
cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body , but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church---for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." Ephesians 6:25-33

<u>On the sacredness of sex for Christians and its place in marriage:</u>
"The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body…Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom
you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. I Corinthians 6:18-20.

"But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband. The
wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer." I Corinthians 7:2-5a

Sexuality is a healthy and natural part of human experience, but its rightful expression, according to the Bible, is between a man and a woman, who have entered into a marriage covenant before God. In our faith tradition, sexual expression outside of this model of marriage is viewed as contrary to God's will and
a violation of the community of believers.

Summary: According to These and Other Sacred Scriptures, We Affirm That:

- In Christian teaching, marriage is a divinely sanctioned institution carrying significant theological implications, and which is foundational to God's plan for humanity and to the life of the Church.
- In the Holy Scriptures, God clearly intends marriage to occur between a man and a woman, and sexual relations are to be reserved for marriage.
- The Bible indicates that marriage is intended to be life-long union, and divorce is permitted only as a last resort, and for limited reasons.
- Monogamy is the New Testament norm, and polygamy is specifically condemned (I Timothy 3:2).
- According to both the Old and New Testaments, sexuality and fidelity are critical aspects of healthy bonding ("oneness") in marriage. Infidelity is therefore a serious breach of trust, spiritually, relationally and in the community of faith.

- Teachings about marriage and sexuality in the Bible are important aspects of our spirituality and religious faith. Far from being arbitrary lists of prohibitions, Biblical precepts and moral directions about sexual conduct and marriage are interconnected to foundational theological doctrines for our community.

EFCC Statement on Gender and Human Sexuality- Appendix B

How do we live out our Lord's grace and truth as we engage with issues of human sexuality that polarize people so dramatically in today's world?

- On the one hand, as followers of Jesus our calling is not to judge and condemn others (Matthew 7:1-6) and not to wield His truth (the Bible) as policemen or judges.

- On the other hand, we obey the Word and encourage each other to do so because we are convinced that it is good – it is God's good plan for human flourishing and for *shalom* (Psalm 119; Galatians 6:1-5). God's Word reflects His desire that we live lives of joy and peace in communion with Him. Yet, we sometimes obey His Word grudgingly (believing the worst about Him and His intentions) or we wield His Word as a weapon of rejection and condemnation toward others.

A proper view of our God, His Word, and ourselves helps us to embrace His Word in our own lives. It also helps us to commend it to others because we know it is perfect, beautiful, and life-giving. Thus, we find the beautiful account of God's creation of the universe, the earth, and all life (including human life) in Genesis 1-2. His creation was very good. God's original design created male and female in His image and all humans since have been 'naturally born' a man or woman (recognizing that on rare occasions, a mutation or birth defect may occur, and a baby is born intersex).

Humans display their Creator's image in many ways: we are creative, rational, moral, and relational... to name a few. The Genesis account shows the goodness of our Creator and His desire for the flourishing of all parts of His creation. He sees that it is not good for man to be alone and so provides an **ezer** for him.

The Greek word **'Ezer'** is used twenty-one times in the Old Testament. Sixteen times it describes how God rescues or helps us when we are helpless in the face of enemies and overwhelming circumstances. Three times it is used of other nations on whom Israel calls to help deliver them from their enemies. Two times it describes Eve. The English word for **ezer** is "helper" or "helpmate" but it hardly does the Hebrew word justice. An **ezer** is a partner at the most essential level – a comrade who has your back, works, fights, and enjoys life alongside you.

Hence, we see that God's good plan was for man and woman to commune with Him and each other, in a full, supportive, and beautiful manner. God created Adam and Eve as man and woman. Each of these two genders was created to embody the fulness of what it means to be human. They are physically compatible with one another, created for deep intimacy and relationship. The Creator's good plan is for a man to leave his father and mother and enjoy a deep oneness with one woman by "cleaving" or "clinging" to his wife (Genesis 1:27). Their Creator gave them a meaningful calling to co-rule with Him over creation, tending and nurturing it.

The calling to be "fruitful and multiply" is a testimony to God's beautiful plan for physical, sexual, and emotional intimacy between man and woman. God's plan for sex was both for procreation and for pleasure. God created male and female as sexual beings and throughout the Bible we see how He designed sex to be a source of joy for a husband and a wife (Proverbs 5:15-19; Song of Solomon;

I Corinthians 7:1-5). His plan was for one 'naturally born' man and one 'naturally born' woman to enjoy sexual intimacy in a committed, monogamous relationship (I Corinthians 7:9). God calls husband and wife to submit to and serve each other, ministering love, acceptance, and respect to each other in every area of their relationship (Ephesians 5:21-33).

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve rejected God's good plan. Instead, they chose to define good and evil for themselves. This human commitment to self-autonomy, self-promotion, and self-definition naturally creates challenges for human intimacy with God, His creation and each other. Genesis 3 tells of Adam's and Eve's original choice to ignore God's good plan and command, and to go their own way. Their choice led to sin, death, shame, evil, oppression (starting in Genesis 4) and to a brokenness in all of creation.

Like Adam and Eve, all humans are sinners by nature and by our own individual choice. No longer is there perfect harmony between creature and creation; humans and God; man and woman. Adam and Eve see their nakedness for the first time and cover themselves in shame. The oneness between God and humans and between man and woman is now replaced with a sense of "other". The one-flesh relationship where two become one (Genesis 1:27) now becomes difficult as identity becomes rooted in self. Genesis 3:16 speaks of a horrible consequence of the fall. Mixed with a love for each other will be a struggle for power. This disrupts oneness between husband and wife. In addition, the good desires given for things God has created can be twisted, directed at things contrary to God's original design and intent.

As a result, humans began to seek pleasure outside of the plan of God, using other humans (or created things) in the process (Romans 1:18-32), and it continues today. God's beautiful plan for husband and wife – to fulfill their sexual desires in a covenant relationship of oneness – gets twisted. Hence, human sexual desires can be fulfilled in a myriad of ways that are outside of a monogamous, loving relationship between a husband and wife.

People are created to be part of intimate, loving, human relationships marked by mutual care and joyful service within the bond of friendship, family, community, and marriage. Human defiance of God and His good plan creates interpersonal challenges for each of these areas. The drive for intimacy is still strong in humans but our sin can motivate us to fill desires in sinful ways that do not provide lasting oneness and joy (Ecclesiastes). Jesus came to redeem humanity from slavery to sin (from giving in to evil desires). Jesus calls believers to ongoing repentance of sin and a submission to the Holy Spirit and His Word.

It is important to remember that being tempted by evil desires is not sin. James reminds us that giving in to and acting upon evil desires is what leads us into sin and death (James 1:12-15). We live in a world that presents a plethora of idols for us to worship, serve, and identify with. Among those idols are a wide range of sexual practices that are outside of God's intention for intimacy between a husband and wife. As followers of Christ our identity is in Him. Our desires do not determine our identity – they need not define me as an individual. Christians believe that all humans have value because they are made in God's image. Reducing identity to any one thing (such as race, gender, desires, social status, etc.) is not only a poor substitute to seeing each human as fully partaking in the fullness of God's image, but is often used by humans as justification for considering others to be "less human". This is never an option for a follower of Christ.

Since all humans are made in God's image, we cannot discriminate because of race, class, gender, or gender change. Christ loves all and came to save all (Galatians 3:22-29). Christ is active in redeeming humans and restoring relationships. Unfortunately, restoration will not be perfect and complete until He consummates His Kingdom in the New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 22). In the meantime, it should not surprise us to encounter people who are struggling with gender dysphoria. People will seek to address this felt disjunction between their biological sex and gender socially or through use of hormones or surgery. This does not alter the fact that they are still made in the image of God. It also should not surprise us to encounter individuals who have same-sex desires or who as heterosexuals attempt to satisfy their desires in ways that are outside of God's plan for husband and wife. We should remember that heterosexual sexual activity outside of marriage is just as much outside of God's beautiful plan as homosexual, transgender, polygamous, polyamorous, or other sexual activities. As followers of Jesus, we rejoice that our God loves to save us from our sin and restore us to Himself.

Ministry in our Contemporary Canadian Context as Evangelical Free Church of Canada Churches
Jesus came to "seek and save the lost". He left us here as His ambassadors to help others be reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5:17-20). As His children we are to live holy lives, but we are not to expect those outside of the church to believe or behave as we do (I Corinthians 5).

During His ministry, Jesus modelled a beautiful acceptance of very imperfect, sinful people. He called a myriad of sinners to follow Him. In fact, Jesus welcomed people to follow Him and to associate with Him long before they believed in Him. In essence, Jesus befriended them and welcomed them as part of His physical family/fellowship. Over time they come to believe in Him (which then would make them belong to the family of God). Subsequent to believing in Him, the Holy Spirit helped them to behave in ways that honored Christ.

In the North American church, we have often presented the church as a moral institution that should shun sinners. This approach demands that a person must first behave rightly, then believe rightly, before the church will befriend and fellowship with that person. When most in the culture shared a Judeo-Christian worldview (and its moral code) with us, this sort of worked (although it led many to embrace a nominal moralism instead of a vibrant relationship with Jesus as Lord and Savior).

Today, most Canadians do not share our view that God created two genders and that man and woman are to enjoy sex only in a marriage relationship. How should we respond to those who are living in sexual relationships that are outside of God's good, intended plan?

There are two common responses:

1. The first is for Christians to change their beliefs and to affirm the broader culture's doctrine regarding sex and gender. The common Canadian view now holds that sexual activity between any consenting adults is good. Additionally, there is a denial of "binary" gender categories (male and female). Instead, a growing number of genders are presented as equally legitimate. Gender identity is declared as something all individuals discover within themselves and choose to articulate. A person's gender may not match their biological sex and a person may change which gender they

self-identify as. As people who follow Jesus as Lord and who believe that the Bible is authoritative (and lays out God's good plan for us), this is not an option.

2. The second is for believers to reject all who engage in sex outside of marriage (of one man and one woman). This rejection is often not consistent. Churches may welcome promiscuous heterosexuals to church (or have a relationship with them) but bar same sex couples or trans individuals from the same things. As a group of churches and missionaries who believe in the dignity of all people and feel called to introduce people to Jesus, this also is not an option. We are not called to force people to behave and believe properly before we will be a friend and welcome them into our churches.

The EFCC motto is "In essentials unity, in non-essentials charity, in all things Jesus Christ". We are Christ-centred, believing that only Jesus can truly transform hearts and lives. This moves us to embrace a third approach – **'befriend, believe, behave'** – to interacting with those who do not yet know Him and are engaging in sexual practices that are outside of Jesus' intent:

- Every individual is made in God's image. We ought to welcome every person who does not yet behave and believe like us to first be a friend, and to get to know Jesus with us. Our primary calling is to love and welcome people as they are (as Jesus did), not to shun or demean them because of the identity or lifestyle (including our LGBTQ friends) they have chosen. We begin by befriending people where they are at, loving them with Jesus' love, and encouraging our church family to do the same. We earn the privilege of sharing the good news of Jesus. We then trust and pray that as they witness our journey and learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, the Holy Spirit will change them until they conform (more and more) to the image of the Son.

- In I Corinthians 5 Paul speaks to dealing with the sin of folks inside the church who represent the church. He notes that we do not judge those outside the church. In I Corinthians 6 he reminds his readers that they are all sinners who were once saved by Christ, are His people and are now saints. This knowledge ought to inspire us to humbly befriend and welcome others (including LGBTQ folks), no matter their lifestyle.

This 'befriend, believe, behave' continuum allows us to minister to folks who do not yet know Jesus. Our church signs often say, "Everyone is Welcome!" Indeed, everyone ought to be welcome in an EFCC church. Once a person places their faith in Christ and are willing to submit to His Lordship in all areas of life, we can invite them to become a member of the church. As we fellowship together, we expect and we ought to encourage each other as disciples of Jesus. We will speak the truth in love to each other, encouraging one another to be obedient to our Lord. As obedience to Jesus becomes normative for a believer, we encourage him or her to use their gifts to serve Him.

"Obedience" in our EFCC tradition bridges two themes from our forebears that we continue to embrace today:

1. The first is found in our *Statement of Faith*, where we state that, "We accept the Bible in all it teaches, obey in all that it requires, and trust in all that it promises."

2. The second was the Free Church cry for its churches – "Believers only, but all believers!" In this, we welcome all believers in the Name of Christ, and will encourage one another to live in alignment with all that God has provided in His Word.

As new believers mature through the work of the Holy Spirit, we then ought to invite these saints to be fully active in our churches, serving in ministries and leadership roles (I Timothy 3). Is this a perfectly clean, easy continuum to follow? Of course not! People are messy – and making disciples is messy too! The work of transformation in a believer's life may not immediately change all their desires! A person may still struggle with gender dysphoria or same sex attraction, or promiscuous heterosexual desires, or greed, or anger, or lying, or a host of other desires and temptations. Our call is to minister to people, to introduce them to Jesus, to walk with them as they seek to be obedient to Jesus' calling on their lives. Yes, we teach God's life-giving truth – but we allow Him to change people. This will not always be neat or easy. We believe that local church membership will be a key point of decision for a believer. They need to affirm that they know Jesus and are committed to following and obeying Him in all areas of life, as articulated in the *EFCC Covenant of Personal and Professional Ethics* and *EFCC Definition of Biblical Marriage*. However, decisions about who can participate in the Lord's Supper; when someone can be baptized; what the expectations are of members – these will necessitate much gracious dialogue in our churches. Yet seeing Christ redeem and transform lives is well worth our humble attempt at embracing truth and love.

Summary

In the Evangelical Free Church of Canada, we hold to the authority of the Word because God is good. His words are pure, true, just, and life-giving (see Psalm 119!). We dare not set aside His words, His good plan for man and woman, merely because it is out of vogue – we want God's *shalom* and good plan for people! The kingdom of this world has different values than the Kingdom of God. Our churches ought not to promote hate or reject people because they do not yet know Jesus and so do not obey Him. Further, as loving followers of Jesus, we do not embrace any coercive actions or therapies that try to force people to believe in Him or behave like Him. We have the privilege of befriending people (giving them a family to belong to). We have the joy of sharing Jesus so that people may believe in Him. And we are called to love and teach believers, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform lives – lives marked by joy, peace, truth, hope, faith, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control – until all together we are more and more conformed to the image of His Son!

Further Resources

Preston Sprinkle. *Pastoral Paper* (https://www.centerforfaith.com/sites/default/files/cfsg_pastoral_papers_14.pdf).
Wesley Hill. *Washed and Waiting.*
Mark Yarhouse. *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*.