



ST. ANDREW | Presbyterian Church

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To be the body of Christ, living in Christ's love and serving as Christ served.

May 14, 2017

Dear Members and Friends of St. Andrew,

Thank you for participating in the April 23 open forum and responding to the questionnaire on the proposed Statement of Inclusion and Wedding Policy. In addition to the comments heard at the open forum, 36 questionnaires were submitted. Of the 36 questionnaires, 15 included narrative comments. The ad hoc team has reviewed and considered the open forum comments as well as the questionnaire results, and we're reporting back to the congregation to summarize the feedback we received.

Overall, there was strong agreement with most of the items on the questionnaire (which were taken directly from the draft Statement of Inclusion and the draft Wedding Policy). However, there was disagreement with a few items including the final item about the gift of marriage being open to any couple who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and commit to living out marriage in a life of discipleship. Common themes in the comments from those expressing disagreement include the following:

- The congregation is not entirely in agreement on this question, and therefore the language in that sentence should be revised so as not to indicate that the "congregation ... believes" but rather to indicate simply that this is the policy of the church.
- Scriptural passages defining marriage as between a man and a woman were referenced, as well as scriptural passages stating that same-sex behavior is sinful or prohibited.
- Those in the congregation who hold the "traditional" view of same-sex relationships should not be made to feel marginalized.

Among those expressing agreement with the questionnaire items, the following common themes were noted:

- A strong desire and commitment to being inclusive of all people, including those with different opinions on the question of same-sex marriage.
- People should not be excluded based on any single characteristic because doing so creates "second class" members.
- Scriptural passages directing us to love our neighbor, and Jesus' teaching that whatever we do for others, we do for Him.

With regard to item #10 and the question of Christian marriage, based on the survey comments and the open forum we heard a clear objection to the opening phrase indicating that the congregation of St. Andrew believes this to be true – because not all in the congregation are in agreement on this point. Accordingly, we have revised that statement in the policy as shown in the excerpt below.

Another item with less overall agreement was item #4, which indicated that all who profess faith in Jesus Christ are invited to join in the membership, leadership, and offices of the church. The comments indicated disagreement over the question of whether leadership should be open to people in same-sex relationships. Some comments noted that there are other qualifications for leadership positions such as background checks for working with youth. We acknowledge that those other qualifications exist for anyone who is called to a leadership position, and those qualifications are specified in other policies that remain in effect, and so we did not find it necessary to restate those qualifications in the Statement of Inclusion. The purpose of this Statement is to make clear that we do not categorically disqualify people from consideration for leadership positions based solely on the protected classifications listed, including sexual orientation and gender identity.

In addition, there were specific comments about the wording of item #7 which stated, "We respect those of us within our fellowship who have been led to other conclusions through a prayerful and considered understanding of scripture and tradition." The feedback indicated that the language was marginalizing those who hold a "traditional" view. Based on this feedback, we have rewritten that part of the Statement of Inclusion to remove the reference to "other conclusions" and we believe the revision serves to emphasize our common purpose to explore Christian faith together while acknowledging a diversity of personal conviction.

The revised Statement of Inclusion is attached in its entirety, along with the excerpt from the Wedding Policy showing the section that was revised. These revised documents will be presented to Session at the May 17 regular Session meeting.

We sincerely thank you for participating in the open forum and for providing your comments. Your feedback has been very helpful to us, and we believe that the revisions made as a direct response to that feedback serve to strengthen the draft documents as well as our commitment to remaining in fellowship with one another as the body of Christ at St. Andrew Presbyterian Church.

Sincerely,

Ad Hoc Wedding Policy Team

Jan Waterhouse
Aaron Shileny
Sarah Brakke
Cindy Vonderhaar
Mark Beerends
Margaret Heidger

Note: The full draft of the Statement of Inclusion being submitted to the session follows on the next page. We have also included the changed statement from the wedding policy. Please go to the web site see the full version of the wedding policy draft being submitted to the session.

SAPC Statement of Inclusion - DRAFT 4 (05/03/17)

For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. - Galatians 3:26-28

The following statement grew out of recent changes to our denomination's constitution which grants sessions the discretion to decide whether to allow same-sex marriage ceremonies to be conducted on church property.

The congregation of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church affirms the worth and dignity of all people. We are all created in God's image, and in Christ we are the children of God. Just as Jesus welcomed everyone into his fellowship, even those who traditionally had been marginalized, we welcome all people to our congregation regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental ability, income, or political beliefs. All are welcome to worship, serve, and participate fully in the life and ministry of St. Andrew; and all who profess faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to become members of St. Andrew with eligibility for its leadership and offices.

In the spirit of this statement, we at St. Andrew are committed to providing a safe place for all to explore Christian faith through prayerful and considered study of scripture and church history, and to deepen our relationships with one another and with Jesus Christ. We acknowledge there is a diversity of personal conviction about matters that involve sexuality and Christian marriage. Living out our Christian calling, we welcome the presence, gifts, and companionship of all on the journey of faith. We at St. Andrew embrace our diversity in all its forms and celebrate our unity as the body of Christ.

SAPC Wedding Policy excerpt – DRAFT 4 (05/03/2017)

It is the policy of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church that the gift of marriage is open to any couple who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and who commit to living out marriage in a life of discipleship.