

PASTORPEDIA™

Cutting Edge Conversations for Pastors and Church Leaders

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Homosexuality and the church

Feelings do matter . . .

The feelings of our church people matter to us as leaders. Very much, in fact.

The feelings of our culture and people tied to it are a strong concern to us. We all wish they would give our church a try very soon.

The feelings of practicing or struggling homosexuals matter to us, and we do not want them to have negative feelings toward our churches. No question.

And, as human as we are, we do not like the frustration and trapped feelings we have when we are misunderstood by outsiders and insiders on this issue.

But...

The feelings and opinions of our God and Lord of the church matter most to us. That is part of our ordination vow and also our commitment to our Savior, Christ, who gave clear teachings on homosexuality as the Creator of sexuality.

We must put God's teachings and feelings first, no matter how we feel.

So, let's go to the questions!

Humbly, as fellow strugglers,

Knute, for Jeff and Jim

What elements should be included in a Biblical statement about this? Should it be in the constitution?

Jeff Bogue

- Clear documentation of the church's position on sexual morality and sexually alternative lifestyles should be made and it should be in your constitution and in your documents.

The Constitution and Bylaws of Grace Church of Greater Akron, July 1 2016 Pages 7-8

5.01 – Article 5 – Statement of Faith

D. Beliefs on Cultural Issues

Grace Church is further committed to addressing changing cultural questions:

1. Marriage and Sexuality:
 - i. We believe that the term “marriage” has only one, legitimate meaning, and that is marriage sanctioned by God, which joins one biological man and one biological woman, as that gender was determined at birth, in a single, covenantal union, as delineated by Grace Church will only be those ceremonies sanctioned by God, joining one biological man and one biological woman as that gender was determined at birth. Whenever there is a conflict between the church's position and any new legal standard for marriage, the church's Statement of Faith, doctrines, and biblical positions will govern. (Gen. 2:24; Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:10; Eph. 5:22-23)
 - ii. We believe human sexuality to be a God given and God defined gift. (Gen. 2:24; Gen. 19:5, 13; Gen. 26:8-9; Ex. 20:14; Lev. 18:1-30; Rom. 1:26-29; 1 Cor. 5:1; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:1-8; Heb. 13:4)
 - a. We believe that sexual activity is reserved for the covenant of marriage ordained by God between one male and one female.
 - b. We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of marriage between a biologically born man and a biologically born woman. We believe that the practice of any form of homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, bestiality, incest, fornication, adultery, and pornography are sexual perversions of God's gift of sex.
 - c. We believe that God disapproves of and forbids any attempt to alter one's gender by surgery or appearance.
2. The Sanctity of Human Life:

We believe that all forms of abortion, euthanasia, or enslavement of human beings are violations of Scripture. Each life is given by God and should be cherished in the highest possible manner. (Psalm 139:13-16; Ex. 20:13; Matt. 22:36-40)
3. Love:

We believe that we should demonstrate love for others, not only toward fellow believers, but also toward those who are not believers, those who oppose us, and those who engage

in sinful actions. We are to deal with those who oppose us graciously, gently, patiently, and humbly. God forbids the stirring up of strife, the taking of revenge, or the threat or use of violence as a means of resolving personal conflict or obtaining personal justice. Although God commands us to abhor sinful actions, we are to love and pray for any person who engages in such actions. (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 5:44-48; Luke 6:31; John 13:34-35; Rom. 12:9-10, 17-21, 13:8-10; Phil. 2:2-4; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; Titus 3:2; 1 Peter 3:8-9; 1 John 3:17-18)

Grace Church reserves the right to refuse to perform or have performed marriages in our buildings for any reason not in complete accordance with this Constitution.

Grace Church further reserves the right to continue to address pressing issues in our culture and address them as we deem necessary in the future.

Jim Brown

- Bible references crafted with clear, loving beliefs.
- The statement should not only include what but why.
- Yes, in some fashion it should be included in the legal documents of your church; we included it in the addendums.

Knute Larson

- For sure, a policy that is very official should be either in the constitution, the main bylaws, or policy papers of the church. This is to avoid the appearance of deciding on the basis of a person or persons rather than on the basis of a belief and commitment.

By the way, some states insist that the church make known its policy on discipline or restoration when a person joins the church rather than surprise them with it later. Churches have lost suits filed by members who were expelled and who had not been notified of the policy properly when they joined the church.

- The statement should include the foundational issues of marriage at creation and the related verses, and the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul. These will be backed up by the doctrinal statement related to the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible. That is rather central.
- The samples above in Jeff's answer are excellent. You are welcome to use them.

How do we avoid the accusation that we are homophobic?

Jeff Bogue

- You can't always avoid it. If people have an agenda they're going to accuse you of that no matter what you say or what you do. Ways you can try to avoid the accusation:

Don't make homosexuality the soapbox you jump on or the source of all cultural ills. There are *many, many* sexual sins in our culture and most of them are *much* more prevalent in our

churches than homosexuality. So, treat sin as sin and don't put one out there and focus on it above the others.

Speak with gentleness and respect. We have to remember, for most people *being whoever you want to be* and *doing whatever makes you happy* is what makes sense to them. They don't necessarily think of themselves as sinners. It's part of our job to help them understand God's heart and mind on this, but gentleness and respect go a long way in that process.

Make sure you're focused on their soul not their sexuality. Sometimes I'm afraid that we want people to be straight more than we want them to be saved, and when we start with the *let me cure you of your sin* position, instead of *let me take you to the heart of God* position, we're starting the conversation in the wrong place.

Jim Brown

- Just show each person you meet love in the same way.
- Do life with all people.
- Invite them to join you in worshipping God while making sure you are clear on what the Bible and Jesus say.
- Don't alienate people by making this a soapbox issue. Keep all areas of sin at the forefront.
- Don't be that church that is only known for what you are against and not what you are for.

Knute Larson

- It is impossible to avoid any accusations that people who do not understand throw our way. We must live with that.
- One way is to have clear policies and not allow any decision to be personal or based on one case, person, or couple. Some people do understand when you say, "I am bound by these church policies." That is so much better than saying, "Let me get back to you" or, "Allow me to think about this." Then it becomes personal.
- From the pulpit, do not make this issue a hobby horse or of singular importance. You will have people over 50 who think it is one of the worst sins around, and people under 30 who have good friends who are practicing homosexuals. Each will have strong opinions about your emphases!

Staying with the text, is a good guideline. Preach in an expository way and get your main thoughts from the scripture at hand!

- By being candid with church leaders and various "huddles" and groups of the church, urging them to show love and understand the church policies.
- By being as disturbed about gossip and lying and heterosexual sins as you are the homosexual deviations.
- By showing welcome and love to all individuals.

- By having clear policies about how far into the church any practicing sinner can go – most heterosexual believers face temptation all the time, as do the homosexual ones. But that does not mean they allow themselves to give in to those temptations. Policies must relate to the practice of sin, not our temptation by it.

A common practice of churches is to allow attendance and counsel for two homosexuals who are struggling with the temptation or practicing it, but draw a line when it comes to membership or service. But even then it is not an easy road to walk because of influence and concerns of parents and others.

Most churches will have policies about public display of affection for any kind of couple.

- By not making jokes or giving caricatures about people. I remember clearly apologizing to the people of The Chapel way back in the '80's because of a demeaning reference I had made the Sunday before. I promised also never again to make light of the subject or the struggle.

How can we really love the person and not like the sin? How will the person know the difference?

Jeff Bogue

- Sometimes they won't but oftentimes if a person's heart is truly open, they are truly searching for God, and they simply have a sexual temptation — if you love them, you're gentle with that, and you bear that burden with them, they will understand that you love them.
- Remember that homosexuality is a form of sexual temptation, there are many forms of sexual temptation, and we all struggle with some of them. We are sojourners fighting the same battle, and when you really believe that and connect with people that way, they tend to trust you.

Jim Brown

- Let's face it — people will know by your actions if you genuinely love them.
- Let the fruit of the Spirit permeate your life.
- Share your concerns and views with gentleness and respect.
- Become a good listener.
- Share your own struggles and how you live daily with temptation to sin.

Knute Larson

- They just will. ☺ We all know when someone is being condescending or cavalier toward us by the way they are talking or words they are using.
- By saying to the person, "I love you and this church loves you, but we are taught by our Lord not to like sin or practice it."

- By standing as a fellow struggler, while still trying to model obedience.
- And we just cannot expect everyone to understand where we are coming from. The mind without the Spirit of Christ has some blindness. That's just the way it is.

Once at the end of an interview, after about 25 years pastoring in Akron, the skilled reporter nicely said to me, “Now for my hard, last question; someone said you hate homosexuals - is that true?”

Of course I got a bit defensive and explained some of the things I wrote about here, but I'm sure it was because I had preached that it was wrong when the sermon text said it so clearly. Some people interpreted that as they wished, as dislike of the person.

Still we must try.

Pastorpedia is a resource provided to you by CE National, a church effectiveness ministry. Please contact us at cenational@cenational.org or 574.267.6622 if we may be of any help to you or your ministry!

Jeff Bogue, of [Grace Church](#), in several locations in the Bath-Norton-Medina areas of Ohio; Jim Brown, of [Grace Community Church](#) in Goshen, Indiana, a church known for its strong growth, family and men's ministries, and community response teams; and [Knute Larson](#), a coach of pastors, who previously led The Chapel in Akron for 26 years. Pastorpedia is brought to you by [CE National](#). Visit cenational.org/pastorpedia for more issues and to read the bios of our contributors.