



# A Statement Regarding Sexual Formation

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## People over Postures.

In line with our core values, clarity is kindness. We must be clear on our absolutes, which are our Statement of Faith (SOF), and our convictions, which are also defining beliefs.

When it comes to following Jesus, we also embrace there is a spectrum of spiritual maturity and thinking. Each of us may have different questions and opinions on matters found in the Bible. In difference, we wish to be clear and kind to the work of the Holy Spirit in all our lives to make us more like Jesus. We are different.

The heart isn't for you to be more like me but for all of us to be more like Jesus. To do this well requires truth and grace; convictions; and conversations. All this we express as people over postures. It is easy to say, more challenging to live out well in difference. Yet Jesus was clear, *"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* John 13:35

## Lord, in our difference, help us love one another well.

At Grace Church, we make every attempt possible to live from a faith identity, regardless of sexual orientation. Our heart is that each of us, in following Jesus, would grow to live, love, and be more like Jesus daily. Our posture of affection, for us to be clear, is not that anyone would become like us but that we would all be more like Jesus.

The way of Jesus calls us to key distinctives in how we relate to our sexual formation. We believe that living in the way of Jesus means embracing His vision of faithfulness in sexuality. This practically looks like abstaining from all sexual relationships outside of the historic vision of Christian marriage expressed in whole life covenantal union between a man and woman, avoiding pornography, inappropriate relationships that compromise our witness and pursuing life-giving holiness by the grace of God.

We are committed to seeking to understand and address the deep heart issues of identity and experience which draw some people into the LGBTQI+ practice; to reach out with love, compassion, and justice of Christ, and to reject and condemn all forms of hatred, verbal or physical abuse, and victimization of LGBTQI+ people.

In Jesus, we see grace and truth, engaging and abstaining, a call to obedience and a warning against disobedience. Various theories, beliefs, and identities regarding human sexuality intersect with our Statement of Faith and Biblical convictions.

Our Posture of Affection is not a statement of faith but articulates convictions regarding human sexuality and the Scriptures. It is also a response for clarity from the LGBTQI+ community, for us to better articulate our beliefs and clarify levels of desired church inclusion and where a difference of belief can create conflict.

The LGBTQI+ community is large and diverse, as is any community. Within the global church, local church communities adhere to a diverse spectrum of beliefs. Accordingly, Grace Church has beliefs based on the Bible, which we call convictions. These convictions shape us as Grace Church and, as such, have implications for membership, leadership, and staffing.

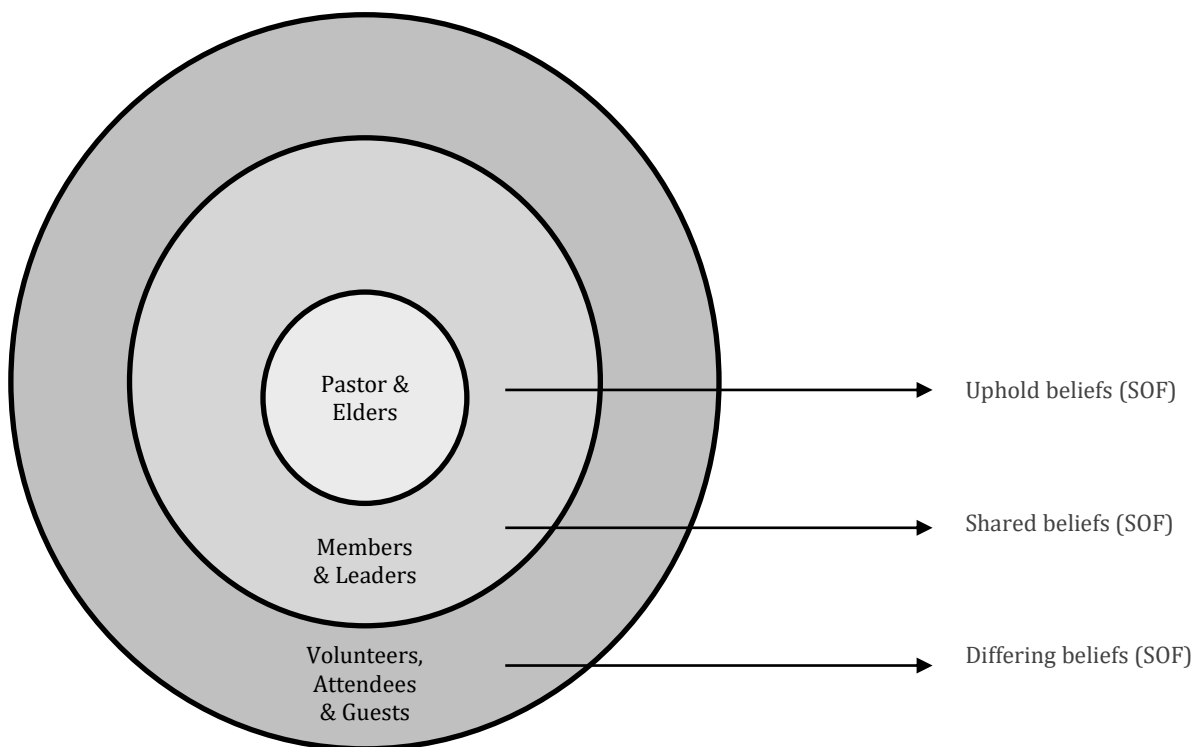


We have done our best to be transparent regarding our convictions, which have interwoven relationships with our absolutes.

We believe inclusion/exclusion at Grace Church is based on faith and belief of both absolutes, or our Statement of Faith and our convictions. We will not discriminate based on sexual identity. All who surrender to Jesus and walk in alignment with our shared Statement of Faith and convictions, even at different points of belief along the spectrum, experience no exclusion. Yet those who disagree with our Statement of Faith or convictions based on belief may experience felt exclusion at Grace Church at higher levels of commitment where alignment is critical.

Together, our Pastor and Elders at Grace Church are honoured to get to know you and, in that process, discuss any concerns/bring clarity to where there could be a felt exclusion at Grace Church.

## Desired Inclusion / Potential Exclusion



As we approach faith, sexuality, and gender, we look to Jesus as our highest aim. Faithfulness to His Word and commands comes before other considerations. Loving obedience to His command is our delight and joy. Our goal is not so much to be successful but to be faithful. As we follow Jesus, He embodies two characteristics that help frame our hearts for others. These virtues are gloriously held together in the person of Jesus:



## **Radical Embrace**

Jesus embodies a posture of radical embrace, self-giving pursuit, and sacrificial love towards those pushed to the outer periphery of society. Jesus opens up the hospitality of God to people marginalized by the religious, political, and cultural authorities of his day. Jesus doesn't just say, "You can come to my church," but enters the homes of the rejected to fire up the grill, share a feast, and talk into the night.

## **Radical Obedience**

Jesus embodies a posture of radical obedience towards his Father and calls all who follow him to cross-bearing discipleship that raises the Old Testament bar rather than lowers it. Jesus's invitation is to die to ourselves that we might live unto God, to lose our life to save it, to give everything for the Kingdom's sake. We cannot compartmentalize things like sexual activity, money, or power as "off-limits" to his reign - as King. He lays claim to all our life.

## **Our Convictions Regarding Faith, Sexuality, and Gender**

We believe covenantal marriage is the union between two sexually different persons (biological males and biological females) from different families and that God intends for his people to engage in sexual relations within the context of marriage. All sexual behaviour outside this context of marriage is considered sinful. We believe cohabitation is not equal to a covenant marriage.

We believe sexual behaviour is not essential for human flourishing and following Jesus. That is, marriage and sex are not rights given to all humanity but are gifts given to those who are called to marriage. We honour single heterosexual and LGBTQI+ followers of Jesus engaging in discipleship from a place of abstinence.

We believe God created humans as male and female and that our bodies are an essential aspect of our God-given identity. While this might take a lifetime, God intends for biological males to identify as males and biological females to identify as females. If not possible due to surgical transition, we trust God to work in each and every heart.

We are committed to seeking to understand and address the deep heart issues of identity and experience which draw some people into the LGBTQI+ practice; to reach out with love, compassion, and justice of Christ, and to reject and condemn all forms of hatred, verbal or physical abuse, and victimization of LGBTQI+ people.

We at Grace Church gladly welcome the joyful opportunity to love, care for, and live in community with people who experience gender dysphoria, same-sex attraction, or identify as queer. We believe we are in sin if we neglect to do so.

Grace Church welcomes anyone, Christian or not yet a Christian, regardless of marital status, sexual orientation, or gender identity, to worship and grow in following Jesus together. Our Sunday service is genuinely open to all, and we have no moral expectations of people who attend our worship services. Felt exclusions based on belief may be experienced at the membership, staffing, elder, and leadership levels of Grace Church.

We believe same-sex attraction (i.e., "being gay, lesbian, queer, bisexual") or gender dysphoria is not a morally culpable sin. We believe sexual behaviour outside of marriage is sinful, whether it be same-sex or heterosexual in nature.



We believe adultery, unbiblical divorce, sex outside of marriage, lust, and viewing pornography are morally culpable sins. We believe there's a difference between struggling with sin and calling sin righteousness. We, at Grace Church, make a firm distinction between struggling with sin, which is part of being a Christian and calling sin righteousness, which is contrary to the Christian way of life. Our desire is to hold the same standard for same-sex and heterosexual sinful behaviour.

## **Our Desire in Realized Differences**

We recognize our conviction of traditionalism in marriage, and the hope, in time, one could healthily identify with their biological sex can place us at odds with those who hold to a progressive belief of marriage, as it asserts God blesses monogamous covenantal same-sex marriage.

We believe the book of Acts gives us an essential example of understanding the differences that separate us in the church. Rather than spend all our time focusing upon our differences for the sake of the lost and the advancement of the Gospel, we celebrate the broader body of Christ in the city and trust Jesus as Saviour, Healer, Baptizer, and soon coming King. As King of His Kingdom, it is His responsibility, not ours, to separate "sheep and goats" and "wheat from the chaff." Where our beliefs differ while messy, we are grateful Jesus is praying for our unity amid our differences.

If your beliefs differ and you are joining Grace Church from another church, speak well of His Bride. If your beliefs differ and you leave Grace Church for another church, speak well of His Bride. It isn't whether we join or leave but how we do so that is an opportunity for us to become more like Jesus.

## **A Word on Conversion Therapy**

The following is used with permission from our friends from the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Canadian Council of Christian Charities, and Christian Legal Fellowship.

Grace Church does not believe in or practice Conversion Therapy. It has proven damaging and abusive towards our LGBTQ+ family and friends. Our focus isn't on our LGBTQ+ friends becoming heterosexual; rather, it is focused on all of us becoming holy in our following Jesus, our being more like Him. God does the work of transformation in all our lives. In any area, including sexuality, when by force we attempt to change one another, we only do harm.

To that end, for both heteronormative and our LGBTQ+ friends, we pray our identity is rooted in Christ. We trust the moving of the Holy Spirit to start, continue, and bring to completion the sanctification work in each life. On behalf of the wishes of parents/guardians, we do not pray for minors in the area of sexual orientation.

Conversion therapy bans have been passed or proposed at all levels of government: municipal, provincial, and federal. Many people who have experienced conversion therapy describe despair and suicidal ideation consequently. Initiatives to ban conversion therapy arise from a desire to protect Canadians from such damaging effects. We share these concerns. Coercive/involuntary efforts to "change" sexual orientation have no place within our communities.

Still, many in the Christian community are deeply concerned about efforts to put conversion therapy bans in place. Why? The definition of conversion therapy in many of these bans is very broad. It expands beyond



discredited practices – which are rightly condemned – to include “any practice ... that seeks to change sexual orientation or gender identity, or eliminate or reduce sexual attraction or behaviour between persons of the same sex.”

Broadly worded conversion therapy bans could impact freedom of expression and the ability of Canadians to live according to their religious conscience or personal convictions in the following ways:

- Effectively prevent people from freely accessing the help and support they voluntarily seek to live out their identity, including the teaching and practice of traditional Christian beliefs regarding gender and sexuality. Canadians must be free to order their sexual lives following their religious conscience, faith identity and personal convictions and voluntarily access support from their faith community, pastoral care, and other supports in doing so.
- Limit or prohibit those within churches and faith-based communities, and even within families, from praying, encouraging discipleship and engaging in religious instruction concerning human sexuality, and offering pastoral care to those who voluntarily seek support on this matter.
- Restrict the diagnosis and treatment offered by a medical professional to a patient with gender dysphoria so that the only acceptable treatment option is affirmation and support to transition. This would prevent medical professionals from using their professional judgment to best treat the patient before them.

When the government undertakes initiatives to prohibit any harmful activity, it should always be narrowly focused on the specific activity. It should not overreach. In this case, the focus is and should remain on abusive and coercive practices.

### **How Can We Engage Wisely?**

Canada’s current conversations around conversion therapy create unique opportunities for Christians to thoughtfully reflect on how we can improve our witness and meaningfully engage with political leaders. Our goal is to seek the well-being of our land (Jeremiah 29:7) and to live out the gospel call to love our neighbour (Matthew 22:39).

As we engage on this difficult issue, it is important that we do so with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). This is an opportunity for constructive dialogue. It is an opportunity to demonstrate love and grace to LGBTQ+ people in our communities and for the love of Christ to be known. We must, then, be prayerful and wise in our communications with elected officials.

Once again, we affirm: All people are created in God’s image and are loved by God, having equal dignity and worth. Coercive or abusive practices to “change” sexual orientation have no place within our communities. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to first love God and then to love all our neighbours as ourselves. God’s design for sexuality, as taught in the Bible, recognizes to our sorrow that the church has not always responded with grace when dealing with matters of sexuality.



## **Resources**

Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender Position and Statement Papers

Link: <https://www.centerforfaith.com/>

Link: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/Series/316445>

Christian Sexuality - Teens, Parents, Youth Leaders

Link: <https://christian-sexuality.com>

## **Recommended Reading**

The Deeply Formed Life by Rich Villodas

A War of Loves by David Bennett

Live No Lies by John Mark Comer

The Sexual Reformation by Aimee Byrd

Gay Girl, Good God by Jackie Hill Perry

Love Thy Body by Nancy R. Pearcey

The Genesis of Gender by Abigail Favale