



FINDING COMMON GROUND

on LGBTQ+ Ministry



[COVCHURCH.ORG/EMBRACE](https://covchurch.org/embrace)

INTRODUCTION

As attitudes toward LGBTQ+/same-sex attracted (SSA)/sexual minority* people have shifted in recent years, Christians have responded to this cultural shift in a variety of ways. Some have concluded that the traditional interpretation of Scripture regarding human sexuality must be re-examined, whereas others have sought to discern a compassionate response to LGBTQ+ people within the traditional teaching. Although significant areas of disagreement persist between “affirming” and “traditional” Christians, this does not diminish the call of every Christian to follow Christ’s example—to love all human beings and to extend compassion to every person who is in need of God.

The Evangelical Covenant Church has discerned and adopted the position that “faithfulness in heterosexual marriage, celibacy in singleness” constitutes the Christian standard for human sexuality. Knowing that we are all sinners who rely on the grace of God, we are compelled by the Spirit to find careful and pastorally sensitive ways to live out our position.

Rooted in the values expressed in our six Covenant affirmations, the Evangelical Covenant Church has historically sought to find common ground on areas where many Christians have divided. In light of this heritage, a diverse group of Covenanters developed this list of suggested ways in which we might find common ground in our ministry with and to LGBTQ+ people.

Please note that this document should not be considered an “official” statement or resolution of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Rather, we offer it as one component of the Embrace toolbox which can be used as a starting point for conversations on how we can all flourish in love for the LGBTQ+ community. We welcome your stories and feedback at embrace@covchurch.org.

***A word about language.** We recognize that in conversations about human sexuality, various constituencies use words and definitions in different ways. Meaning matters, and careless use of language can hinder true communication. In Embrace, we make an effort to use a full range of vocabulary interchangeably in order to make space for everyone in this conversation.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

- We believe that all human beings—regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity—are created in the image of God, are loved by God, and are by God's grace capable of participating fully in the kingdom of God and in the life of the church.
- We acknowledge that many individuals with non-heterosexual orientations and non-binary experiences of gender did not choose these for themselves but on a daily basis must navigate the constant challenges of living out their sexuality authentically and faithfully.
- We acknowledge the pain and fear experienced by sexual minority individuals who feel they must hide their orientations to remain safe, and we recognize how debilitating and unbiblical this secrecy is when it inhibits their ability to live truly free in Christ.
- We confess that the body of Christ has frequently failed to recognize both the created worth and unique challenges of sexual minority individuals, and has instead abused its majority power to marginalize and even mistreat individuals simply because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- We confess that the body of Christ has—contrary to the teachings of Scripture—exalted marriage above chastity in singleness, thereby causing many single people to feel as if they are second-class Christians.
- We confess that the body of Christ has neglected its call to radical hospitality and covenantal community, and in doing so has failed to provide sexual minority individuals with the safe, loving spaces for non-sexual intimacy they need to live fulfilled lives.
- We confess that the body of Christ's undue focus on orientation-change therapies has caused harm to sexual minority individuals by treating them as problems to be solved rather than as people to be loved, dehumanizing them and leaving them to deal—often alone—with the fallout of shame, confusion, and despair.
- We confess that we as a denomination have participated in the above sins against sexual minority individuals—even if unintentionally—by failing to acknowledge the presence of these persons in our midst and by failing to extend the grace and love that Christ would extend to them.

FINDING COMMON GROUND (CONTINUED)

- We resolve—as a matter of our commitment to compassion, mercy, and justice—to actively work and speak out against prejudice, hatred, and violence against the LGBTQ+ community and all sexual minority individuals in society, in the body of Christ, and in our own denomination.
- We resolve that we will actively engage in listening well and in conversation and relationship with sexual minority individuals, so that we will no longer marginalize them by making assumptions about their struggles, needs, and spiritual aspirations.
- We resolve to grow together as a learning community and actively equip our pastors and churches with the tools, training, and support they need to provide safe, hospitable, and spiritually nurturing spaces for sexual minority individuals—wherever they are on their journey of faith.
- We resolve to work to prevent suicide and self-harm in sexual minority youth by helping parents and family members commit to the safety, security, and emotional support of their loved ones—regardless of the choices they make about how they live out their sexuality.
- We resolve to do all we can to eliminate bullying in our local schools, churches, and communities, recognizing that such bullying often targets youth who are perceived to be sexual minorities.
- We commit ourselves to the spiritual nurture of the children of sexual minority persons, recognizing that these children and their journeys of faith in Christ must be valued and protected, rather than jeopardized by un-Christlike attitudes and actions toward their parents.
- We resolve to make our churches welcoming spaces for sexual minority persons and their families by exhibiting Christlike love and compassion, by humbly repenting of our own sins even as we withhold condemnation of others, and by speaking to all who walk through our doors with equal respect.

Content originally created by Randall Wilkens, associate pastor of worship and the arts at Bethany Covenant Church in Mount Vernon, Washington, with contributions from Make and Deepen Disciples and a feedback team.



COVCHURCH.ORG/EMBRACE