



TRAVIS COLLINS

**WHAT DOES
IT MEAN
TO BE
WELCOMING**

?

**NAVIGATING
LGBT QUESTIONS
IN YOUR CHURCH**



HOW TO HAVE A CONVERSATION IN YOUR CHURCH ABOUT LGBT ISSUES

THIS SAMPLE PROCESS DEVELOPED BY FIRST
BAPTIST CHURCH, HUNTSVILLE, AL.

OUR CHURCH IS A RELATIVELY big tent church. We affirm women in ministry. We proclaim Jesus as the only means of salvation. We consider ourselves centrist Baptists.

Yet the church spoke overwhelmingly in favor of a Traditional position statement on LGBT topics. Losing people as a result was difficult, though not nearly as many people left as I thought might. There were also those who *came* to our church because they were looking for a church that was willing to address the topic, and they identified with the position we reached. While the losses were painful, the church actually emerged stronger at the end of the conversation.

Here is the process that our church followed in formulating and adopting a position statement. See appendix B for the position statement.

DISCOVERY

Week One

A Study Team was affirmed by the church.

Week Three

A suggested reading list of equal numbers of writers representing each viewpoint (see “For Further Reading” at the end of this book) was made available to the congregation.

Week Nine

My booklet (now the book *What Does it Mean to be Welcoming?*) on the topic was made available at the conclusion of worship services.

Week Twelve

A season of prayer and fasting began.

Weeks Fourteen, Fifteen, and Sixteen

I did a sermon series on Sunday mornings with question-and-answer sessions on Wednesday and Sunday evenings.

DISCUSSION

Weeks Fourteen, Fifteen, and Sixteen

We held church-wide conversations, including six listening sessions led by me, four listening sessions led by the Study Team, a direct email address to allow people to email the Study Team, and a secure, facilitated online opportunity for the posting of opinions.

DOCUMENT/DIRECTION

Weeks Sixteen through Nineteen

The Study Team met and worked on drafting a statement.

Weeks Twenty and Twenty-One

The Study Team presented a preliminary report to the Ministerial Staff for feedback and, one week later, to the Legal Committee.

Week Twenty-Two

The Study Team presented its report to the Leadership Council. At this point, the Leadership Council assumed responsibility for the document and prepared it for presentation to the deacons and ultimately to the congregation.

Week Twenty-Three

The Leadership Council presented the document to the deacons for affirmation.

DISCERNMENT

Week Twenty-Four

The proposed statement was distributed to the church.

DECISION

Week Twenty-Six

A vote to affirm the statement was held in a Sunday evening gathering.

The process is as important as the decision, and the process is particularly important for churches who reflect a broad diversity of opinions on this topic in particular. The process should . . .

be prayerfully deliberate,
offer plentiful opportunities for input and reflection,
ensure that those in the minority are not excluded, and
be led by skilled facilitators.

A process such as this should be entered with the full knowledge that it will be difficult, emotional, and potentially divisive. The best that most churches can hope for is substantial agreement.

By the way, it is important to remember that a statement by one congregation does not implicate, accuse, or question the orthodoxy of congregations who have a different position. A good statement also does not label or marginalize those holding a minority viewpoint. A statement is simply declaring, “This is what a majority of our church members believe to be true.”