



The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

The National Voice For LGBT Baptists

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Statement for SBC Press Conference and Action

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Over the last twenty years I have watched as Baptist churches of all stripes have been shunned, chastised, and dis-fellowshipped because they dare to believe that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are equal in the eyes of God. These churches and communities have gone so far as to say that LGBT people should have the same rights and responsibilities, the same freedoms, and the same opportunities as the heterosexual community. This belief, discerned and made public by a few courageous congregations almost twenty years ago, is what gave birth to the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists - a fellowship of churches who have gone on record and who practice their belief that ALL are welcome into the full life and ministry of their churches, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. AWAB speaks as the National Voice for LGBT Baptists because there are still too many who have no voice because it is too dangerous, too harmful for them to come out, even as a supporter.

For many, the act of "Coming Out" as a Welcoming and Affirming Baptist Church is as much a statement on the belief that, as Baptists, we respect the God-given freedoms that we have as fellow believers in Christ. We respect each congregations right to believe and interpret scripture as each feels lead by the Spirit. It also means that we associate in faith, without dogma or creed, to discern the Spirit among us, and that we respect the dissenting opinions because this may be the still-small voice of God speaking through the one for the benefit of the many.

I come today to this gathered body, this part of God's Baptist family, asking that the discerned wisdom of the still-small voice of 76 member congregations across this country, hundreds of churches that live in fear of "Coming Out" around the world, and the thousands of welcoming and affirming individuals across the globe be heard in the sincere hope that we would open a dialogue on the harm that is being done to people because of the Southern Baptist Convention's teaching on sexual orientation and gender identity.

As Baptists, we stand in a unique place within the wider Christian community because we honor and respect the local congregation above all other bodies. However, since the split over slavery in 1845, the SBC has moved farther and farther away from this founding principle within the Baptist tradition, as it imposes more and more doctrine and dogma on the local congregation. It is the doctrine on sexuality and gender that, for too long, has brought so much harm to so many. This doctrine has gone so far as to threaten expulsion to any church that even appears to include LGBT believers or our allies, let alone welcome and affirm us as a part of the life and ministry of the church.

I stand here today as the representative for AWAB to say to the SBC that it is time to turn and repent of this anti-Baptist imposition of doctrine and dogma on the local congregation! That it is time to repent of the arrogance that dismisses the still-small voice from being heard! That it is time to repent of the unwillingness to engage in honest and respectful dialogue across this difference.

In humility, AWAB implores the SBC, locally, regionally, and nationally, to join us in a dialogue so that the day may swiftly come when not one more person, family, church or community is harmed by the SBC's teaching on sexuality and gender identity.

May God's grace be with us and may the Power of the Holy Spirit prevail to bring reconciliation and peace for the good of all.