

Equipping FMCiC Churches To Engage Effectively in Ministry for LGBTQ2S+ People

Why?

We are driven by love for the persons who are in our churches but may suspect they are not welcome, and for those in the larger LGBTQ2S+ communities who think and feel that we are against them. We want to openly acknowledge the unique challenges and pain that our teaching regarding same-sex sexuality can cause members of our own communities. We know that Jesus died and was raised for us all. We know that Jesus died and was raised for us all (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). He longs to enfold every person into the family of God and enable each one to grow in ever increasing measure into His likeness. As followers of Jesus, we are compelled by the love of Christ.

How did this get going?

In recent years, the conversation around the church's relationship with people who identify as LGBTQ2S+ has been raised with leaders in regional gatherings as one of the most significant questions facing our Free Methodist churches.

As a result, in 2018, at the recommendation of the Study Commission on Doctrine, the Board of Administration of the FMCiC established an LGBTQ2S+ Ministry Equipping Team composed of pastors and lay leaders. The mandate of this team was to develop a strategic plan to equip FMCiC churches to minister effectively to people who identify as LGBTQ2S+, from within our current theological understanding of same-sex sexuality and gender identity. The team leader, Dale Harris, was doing Doctoral work on this at Northeastern Seminary during this time.

At the end of its work, the team brought to the BOA recommendations as strategic steps the FMCiC can take to equip its churches to minister to LGBTQ2S+ people more effectively. The B.O.A. took significant time to carefully and prayerfully process the report and take action.

Initial Timeline

Our planned discussion will follow **4 Phases** leading to General Conference 2024 and beyond:

Phase 1 we will attempt to **Establish a Baseline** by taking time to examine scripture and the position of the FMCiC around human sexuality and gender identity. Through discussion forums and the minister's conference, we will take time to understand our stance on human sexuality and surface assumptions that we make about our own position, which may or may not be accurate.

Phase 2 we will focus on **Listening and Gathering**. We want this journey to be a place of mutual listening and a chance to gather people from across Canada to hear the stories and wrestle together with our fellow Free Methodists on this topic.

Phase 3 is to **Sketch a Way Forward**. From the listening, the team along with SCOD and BOA will take the contributions of everyone who participates into account as possibilities for the future are set out before us.

Phase 4 will be the chance to join together to **Choose the Journey**. From the engagement and the sketch for the way forward, any necessary motions to the General Conference will be drafted.

Below is a more in-depth sketch of the conversation. Details for these future events will be developed and circulated as we proceed.

Phase 1 - Establish a Baseline

1. Winter/Spring 2021

- April 17th - Regional Gathering
 - Introduce our plan for a conversation to equip FMCiC churches to minister effectively to LGBTQ2S+ people consisting of this proposed timeline.

Our goal is to begin a conference-wide conversation about this issue in a way that sets an appropriate tone and allows for ongoing engagement and discussion.

1. Announce the formation of our pastoral care group for FMCiC Pastors who have close/immediate family members who identify as LGBTQ2S+.
2. Announce creation of a special committee to help us navigate this conversation.
3. Announce participation in a working group of LGBTQ2S+ equipping committees from other evangelical denominations.

2. Spring/Summer 2021

- Begin creating a series of videos drawing on Dale Harris's dissertation, *With the Welcome of Jesus*.
- Form 3 sub-committees that will address the following:
 - Celibacy as a valid path for following Jesus.
 - Related membership questions arising in local FM churches.
 - The diversity of conviction among our Pastors regarding our statements on human sexuality.

3. Fall 2021

- Fall Minister's Conference
 - This will be on the theme of engagement with people who identify as LGBTQ2S+. We will take time to examine the current statements of the FMCiC regarding human sexuality. During our time together we will pay special attention to assumptions that we make about our own position.
- *First Discussion Forum*
 - This will be an open invitation to all Canadian Free Methodists to engage in an online discussion. Format and details will be announced soon. The discussion will focus on outlining and understanding our current theological statements on human sexuality.

Phase 2 - Listening and Gathering

- 1. Winter 2022**
 - *Discussion Forum #2*
 - Questions arising from our discussion on our current theological understanding of human sexuality
- 2. Spring 2022**
 - *Discussion Forum #3*
 - On reports of sub-committees exploring both Membership and Celibacy questions
- 3. Fall 2022**
 - Fall Minister's Conference - Discuss Diversity Among Clergy and Celibacy Questions

Phase 3 - Sketch a Way Forward

- 1. Spring 2023**
 - *Discussion Forum #4*
 - Presentation and conversation on subcommittee proposals regarding Celibacy, Membership and Clergy Diversity questions.
- 2. Summer 2023**
 - Compile feedback from *Discussion Forum #4* and revise Celibacy, Membership and Clergy Diversity proposals.
- 3. Fall 2023**
 - Fall Minister's conference - Feedback on Revised Celibacy, Membership and Clergy Diversity subcommittee proposals.
 - BOA and SCOD - to compile information from the Fall Minister's Conference.
- 4. Winter 2024**
 - Create final report and General Conference Motions on Celibacy, Membership, and Clergy Diversity.

Phase 4 - Choose the Journey

- 1. Spring 2024**
 - General Conference
 - Motions on Celibacy, Membership, and Clergy Diversity.
- 2. Summer/Fall 2024**
 - SCOD to initiate a theological conversation regarding whether or not our current statements need to be changed in light of what we learn in the process, and if so how.

What do we need from each other in this process?

1. Commitment to one another as family in the unity of Christ: This is a family conversation and we have chosen to be here.
2. Pray and keep praying for divine guidance and empowerment for this process.
3. Encourage humble and loving communication throughout this process.
4. To not "de-Christianize" each other as we earnestly engage this conversation.