

March 2016

Dear Friends

You will be aware that since the Government introduced the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act in 2013 that we have been listening to each other in order to discern our response as Baptists Together. We identified from the outset that our aim was to reach a settled place on this issue; not pretending that everyone was going to agree because there are strongly held convictions involved, but to be able to express a common approach that would offer guidance and wisdom to local churches as they seek to live under the authority of Christ as revealed in Scripture and discerned in the gathered community.

Our Baptist Union Council has met recently to engage in this discernment through a time of intense prayer, listening and discussion. Many of you will have contributed to that process through our 'talkingtogether' email address. Council clearly discerned that we should offer to our Union, in humility, the statement that is set out below. I am aware that many will welcome this statement and I am also acutely aware that for some it will be the cause of great pain and concern. In all our reflection we must always remember that lesbian and gay Christians are valued members of our churches. We are dealing here with deeply and sincerely held biblical convictions and so whilst I believe that we have discerned a place where we can stand as Baptists Together, I also want to ensure that the voice from the margins is heard. Whilst many of us would not agree, I want to recognise that we do have brothers and sisters in Christ who believe that their response to the authority of Christ as revealed in Scripture and discerned in the gathered community, is a desire to be able to offer marriage to same sex couples. The concern was also expressed that this is an issue of justice and also that having a statement is not an authentic expression of our Baptist way of being church. At Council we recognised that our deeply held convictions over this issue are a source of pain for others and we believe that we need to bear with each other in Christ-like humility, love and grace as we journey on together.

In the light of this it is important that we devote ourselves to prayer. Prayer for each other and particularly prayer for those who feel marginalised. Scripture reminds us, "...but God has combined the members of the Body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it." (I Corinthians 12:25&26) Despite our profound disagreement over this matter, we are nevertheless called to prayer and deeper Christ-likeness.

Whilst the Ministerial Recognition rules continue to remain unchanged, I have asked John Rackley (Moderator of our Ministerial Recognition Committee) to ensure that clear guidance is provided to Accredited Minister colleagues following the next meeting of MRC.

For those of you who would appreciate the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of wider issues of human sexuality, Associations are able to provide a facilitator for a day exploring the issues involved.

The statement from Council ends with the conviction that the One who unites us is greater

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than the things which could potentially divide us. One thing that we can definitely agree on is that our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to participate in the Mission of God. It is imperative that, respecting our differing theological convictions on this particular issue, we all renew our commitment to sharing the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus with all people and for the whole of creation. This demands faith, prayer, sacrifice, daring, imagination and compassion. Let's not allow our genuine differences to divert us from our calling to make disciples. Council would therefore want to commend to our churches the call to engage in an evangelistic focus through the initiative '40 Days of Good News' from 6 April – 15 May.

I have often said that it is not just what we discern but the way that we discern it that is critical. Whatever your reaction to this statement I hope you feel able to join me in expressing appreciation to those who serve us through Council and the prayerful and gracious way we have been able to reach this point in our journey. May this spirit of grace and truth continue to be evident in our life together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynn Green". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Lynn Green
General Secretary
The Baptist Union of Great Britain