

Discussion #2

Question 1: What profound biblical/theological truths do we see on the one hand and on the other hand of the same-sex marriage stand off?

More in common than different, except for the LGBTQ issue; support a stand-off.

Love is paramount; most important. No one should feel unloved in the church.

Ex given about a recent Memorial Service for a mother who didn't understand her sons' homosexuality, but loved him dearly and asked him to sing "Amazing Grace" at her service. Beautiful example of love where differences existed. Can this be a model for our church?

Tension: if everyone is accepted and all viewpoints accepted, will we eventually stand for nothing?

Love doesn't mean rejecting Biblical truths

Can VA Conference provide a traditional perspective along with the more progressive view represented in MCUSA?

Question raised about the statement today that God created same-sex attraction.

Important to acknowledge the hurt experienced by the LGBTQ community, but question raised about needing to repent about theological beliefs.

truth of love on each side

Everyone is created in God's image.

Loving God wholly means a commitment to following God's will and way.

Looking for the Spirit of God present in everyone.

Being in relationship with the "other" is essential.

most in our group were not willing to consider that biblical truths are on one hand and on the other... :-)

We found we had different truths in our group.

On the one hand, God created humanity as male and female. On the other hand ~10% of our population states they are same-sex attracted. On the one hand, I know people in same-gender relationships that are more faithful to each other and to God than people I know in male-female relationships. On the one hand, wanting to proclaim the truth of scripture but on the other hand the standoff has created walls. We are reading an ancient near eastern text with post-modern eyes which gives us tension that we don't know what to do with.

It was mentioned that we need to use caution with where we seek guidance on same-sex and gender identity issues as evidenced by the ever-changing reversals of what "experts" report. For example, a physician recently admitted that there is significantly more "social contagion" at play than he previously

attributed to the rise of gender identity exploration, experimentation, and transitioning. One person expressed his thought that the both/and thought pattern also is not viable when looked at from a scientific perspective.

Biblical/Theological truths around the same-sex marriage stand-off.

1. Sarah's willingness to "show her cards" was appreciated. It showed a willingness to have the conversation more frankly.
 2. One person heard a position being taken.
 1. There was an affirmation for an opportunity to partner around some things.
 2. Around other things, some suggestions weren't affirmed as compassionate leadership.
 3. This was heard as an appeal to the VMC leadership about what compassionate leadership should look like.
 4. It was expressed that God creating every sexual orientation is something that we do not agree on.
 5. The story around Zacchaeus was appreciated. Jesus accepts the man, and without Jesus outright confronting Zacchaeus, he chooses to repent and make amends.
- On one hand, the belief that the Bible promotes heterosexual monogamy, on the other hand, a broken culture
 - On one hand, levitical law prohibits eunuchs from worship in the gathered OT; on the other hand, Phillip by the Spirit prompting baptizes the Ethiopian Eunuch into full Christian faith.
 - A communal spirit exists in VMC in that they still hold the credentials of ministers; some like this, others do not.
 - please protect local church autonomy
 - came from another denomination to the mennonite faith because of their welcoming attitude, having left years of theological wrangling.

Yes, we should love all people. But love doesn't mean affirming everything. Love includes calling us all to repentance

Can a single congregation and a conference hold together in a unified mission when persons are committed to different perspectives? Would like to add a positive affirmation of a person's dignity and worth, and the gift of sexuality, to the acknowledgement of harm to LGBTQ persons.

A metaphor we found helpful: One member shared a testimony of an Amish family with shunned member's family where they pushed 2 tables together covered by a single tablecloth to be together + technically not eat at the same table.

Can we agree to disagree? Not all topics are this but perhaps this is one.

Since the debate of sexuality has been happening for decades this has to be considered a paradox.

How do we in our churches converse when the wider body cannot?

Articulate both profound truths of sexuality and write the specific radical moral teachings that we agree on.

We strongly affirm that: Focus on debate about same sex marriage has distracted us from teaching fidelity - that sex belongs exclusively in the context of marriage

We affirm Sara's vulnerability in "breaking the sound barrier" and saying where she is at.

The importance of making ourselves publicly accountable for our intimate commitments - making them in the context of the church.

The paradoxical approach is important - but paradoxical approach is not the only valid way to interpret scripture (There is something beyond "relativism")

At whatever level we ask this to be sorted out (denomination, conference, congregation, family) . . . can it really be settled at that level?

If we "agree to disagree", are we then expecting congregations to "solve" what we can't solve as a conference?

Importance of acknowledging and caring for those who are hurting; but also recognizing that always removing pain now may only lead to greater pain later.

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Question #2: If as VMC leaders we agree to trust, honor and support each other in diverse missional approaches, what might we propose to do together to support families and children, sexual fidelity and accountability, vocations of marriage and singleness?

One person expressed a great discomfort between loving a family member and believing that they are living in conflict with their theological understandings.

We liked that open and honest conversation is encouraged. We need that.

Allow people/congregations/pastors to faithfully follow God into spaces & ministries & work & streams of theology, Our job is to love, we need to learn to love, Can we have open/faithful/vulnerable conversations about sex & sexual ethics & sexual realities, Expect good from people,

- Get to know one another.
- Divisions have come in the context of business meetings regarding mission.
- We're called to love God and neighbors as ourselves. That calls us into relationship and to really know one another.
- Get to know one another; practice love.
- Practice loving those we disagree with. Purposefully meet and get to know them.
- Seek ways for districts and conference can bring us together.
- Practice building compassionate listening skills
- We need to reset our thinking to the foundation of God's word. Find places of commonality in scripture. Build from the bottom-up using 1&2 Corinthians.
- Use the Apostles Creed as a basis. (Difficult to use because we're not a credal denomination.)
- Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself. That is the basis set out by Christ.

Recognize and accept the fact that we are all formed in the image of God.

It is difficult to talk about mission work when dealing with internal struggles

The "IF" in the question is a big "if" but if we commit or agree to work together at home to get that right first then our outward focus will become more natural.

backing away from the stand-off is essential to making progress on addressing these other shared values
good teaching, but embodied in deep, trusting relationships

our group could not come to any consensus on this... :-(

Get to know each other; practice loving each other, learn to understand each others' points of view; work together on shared projects; learn how to practice compassionate listening and grow into it; focus on what we have in common, going back to our roots and the foundation of our faith; affirm the mission of the gospel; have grace for each other who have different beliefs

We discussed acceptance of all and what that means.

Call off the stand off! Love that. It is important to acknowledge that your truth is valid for you. Can we agree to trust and honor each other? Acknowledge the pain that is felt on all sides of the issue. We would like for VMC leaders to provide more opportunities for people with different perspectives to come together for table discussion. We need much more time for this. -- Side note -- one person in our group would like to see the conservatives stay and fight for what is right. They are disappointed that so many conservative churches have left.

At 2 of the churches in our group, persons have openly identified as non-binary and been accepted and loved well. A significant reason for this seems to be that it was not made into an issue where everyone had to take a stance. Another church formed small groups where people with diverse views were made to feel safe as they openly shared. While no resolutions were made, the process was the most important outcome. I heard frustration from a pastor who has felt stifled by leadership in his desire to lead openly and strongly from the current Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. It was noted we need to emphasize each of the components in this second half of this question. It's been observed that fidelity is not taught or expected all of the time. Finally, it feels very risky to break the sound barrier as it was done today. There was lament over people at both ends of the spectrum leaving churches when they don't hear the conviction that they align with.

A leader needs a place to lead from e.g. Confession of faith

Not our job to get rid of what wisdom has been learned over generations (traditions) What is a new way to express it.

Cities of refugees . . . law is still law, but also safe space

Really like image of stand off and how to have disarmed conversations

Native Americans think of 7th generation.

Sad if compassionate leaders only leans to one side

Show how this will draw people to Jesus

Commitment; celibacy; not just do away with but replace with something else

This feel like we are trying to follow the world's example.

The children are not the problem. No one is keeping children from coming to Jesus.

Leaving each one to decide whether to bless same-sex relationships is dangerous. Prophecy has to be measured by the scriptures. If one departs from the Word, we will be lost.

Judges - In that time, there was no king in Israel, and each one did as he/she saw fit. Is that where we are?

The Word of God stands forever. We cannot be like politicians, trying to please everyone.

We are called to humility before God and his Word.

Yes, Jesus did not come to condemn, but he did come to save, and this involves showing us how to live. Humbling, we want to stand with the teachings of Jesus.

Yes, we are all created in God's image. But sin also affects all of us. We are not to give in to sinful desires.

The sexual revolution is a matter much larger than same-sex marriage. If marriage is meant for two, why? Because scripture calls for male-female marriage; they complement each other. We must stick with Scripture's definition.

Yes, we must accept all as made in God's image. But we must not bless sinful behavior. We must call all of us equally to repentance and obedience to God's ways.

It is important for persons to acknowledge, "What am I afraid of?"

Reframe the conversation ground "What experiences have shaped your understanding of human sexuality?" and "What is a faithful response that does not harm LGBTQ persons?" rather than deciding on a position.

Revisit the Healthy Sexuality God's Gift curriculum

See, affirm and encourage the variety of ways that families exist, including singleness.

Acknowledge the care that is needed for all in a family system, including children and their parents who cannot affirm their nontraditional identities.

If celibacy is for same sex single people can be done, then straight people should be encouraged and supported to.