

Proposal of Intent for Seeds Church to become a Formally Affirming/Inclusive Church

February 4, 2022

The Context

From its inception as a congregation, Seeds church has sought to “make Jesus real” in a way that engages the context of our time and remains faithful to the call of Jesus “to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves.” As a “center set church” (See Appendix A), we have desired to place our focus on the centrality of Jesus in our faith, with less of an emphasis on particular faith issues that may serve to divide us or separate us from each other. This approach has often been a healthy way for us to make space for different views and beliefs while maintaining a unified focus on Jesus.

In 2012, our leadership team determined that it was important that we do some more intensive conversation and learning around the question of the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ folx. The following timeline is a summary of the conversations that took place beginning in 2013

Timeline of Congregational Conversation on LGBTQ+ inclusion.

January 2013 - Lead/Vision Team - Worked through ‘Love is an Orientation’ Study.

May 2013 - Congregation worked through ‘Love is an Orientation’ Study which had the focus of elevating our conversation around LGBTQ+ participation in the church. The emphasis was on how we could center love in engaging people from the queer community.

January 2016 - Lead/Vision Team - Worked through Next Steps via the ‘In This Together’ Series from Eastlake Community Church - Washington State. This study emphasized the process of a congregation who had formally become “affirming and inclusive” of LGBTQ+.

Fall of 2015 - Began a practice of weekly communion with a strong emphasis on the having an Open Table (that assumed that all people of any sexual identity were welcome to participate in communion and by extension any aspect of our church life including teaching, worship leading, cell leadership, etc.)

March 2016 - Congregation worked again through ‘Love is an Orientation’ Study to bring more people in the conversation around centering love in the dialogue around this issue.

April 2016 - Congregation worked through a Next Steps Conversation using videos from the ‘In This Together’ Series (Eastlake Community Church). This study invited those who had walked through the Love is an Orientation conversation to consider next steps toward becoming more inclusive of queer people in the life of our congregation.

Fall 2016 - Today - Although we didn’t make any formal statements around being affirming or inclusive, the leadership at Seeds practiced a conscious (if not formally spelled out) inclusion of all people no matter their sexual orientation or other identity.

Spring 2019 - As part of our 20th year anniversary and Next20 conversation the congregational conversation affirmed our commitment to living out our values of being Open, Connected and Responsive, and people raised the need to increase our welcome to diverse groups and people, with specific emphasis on welcoming and developing our relationships with the LGBTQ+ communities.

Throughout this process, we have held firm to our commitment to “make Jesus real” and to live out our core values to be open, connected and responsive. Although this process has been a very healthy conversation in our community, the leadership at Seeds believe it is time to move with purpose by becoming more explicit about our commitment to full inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in our church life and that it is time to formalize our affirming posture as a congregation. The driving force in this step is for the safety of our friends and family members in the LGBTQ+ community. As we listened to LGBTQ+ voices within and outside of Seeds, and asked what THEY would need to enter a church, the number one response was of clear articulation that they were included and would be safe there. In this case, it is not enough to let our actions speak for us, we must also speak honestly and clearly about our willingness to make space for those who identify within the LGBTQ+ community.

The Proposal

It is our intention to make a formal statement as a congregation that...

1. Seeds Church in its mission to make Jesus real, welcomes all people into full participation regardless of racial or ethnic identity, sexual orientation or gender identity, physical or mental ability, and marital or economic status.
2. acknowledges the Treaty 1 land we sit on and our commitment to move towards reconciled relationships with our Indigenous neighbours.
3. Provides a visual representation of both commitments ie. Rainbow Flag and a Indigenous Reconciliation image. (See Church Examples in Appendix B)

Appendix A - Being a Centred Set Congregation (From the 2016 Church Report)

What do we believe as a church?

This question is often a very important question asked of any church. Even more important is the reason for asking the question. Many times this question is asked to determine who can be a part of the church and who should be kept out. Because of the tendency for groups of people to articulate who is in and who is out, we have been very careful about how we express our core beliefs as a church.

Throughout its life, Seeds has viewed itself as a “*Centre Set*” community versus a “*Bounded Set*” church.

A bounded set is where we create a boundary, a theological border, a doctrinal fence, and separate those who are inside the fence from those who are outside. It is an “us” versus “them” mentality where everyone on the inside is accepted, loved, and welcomed, while those on the outside are kept away until they can change their beliefs and behaviours to fit the entry requirements.

Most churches are “bounded set” and require that in order for a person to become a part of the life of the church they must adhere to an “in” set of beliefs and practices.

In a centred set church, there are no boundaries. There are no walls. There is no fence. There is no dividing line between “us” and “them,” no rules or guidelines to determine who is “in” and who is “out.” Everyone is loved, welcomed, and accepted, no matter what. Everyone automatically belongs. A centred set has no boundaries to keep people out, but it does have something compelling at the centre which pulls people in. There are no gatekeepers turning people away, for everyone is on equal footing, being pulled toward the centre.

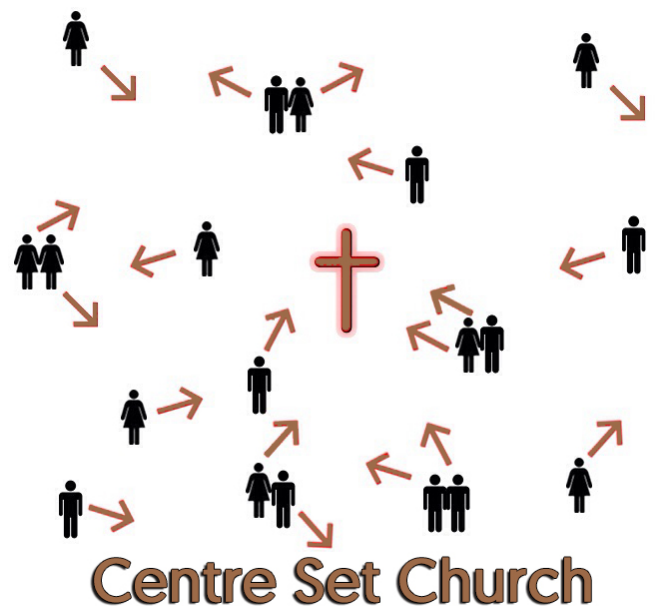
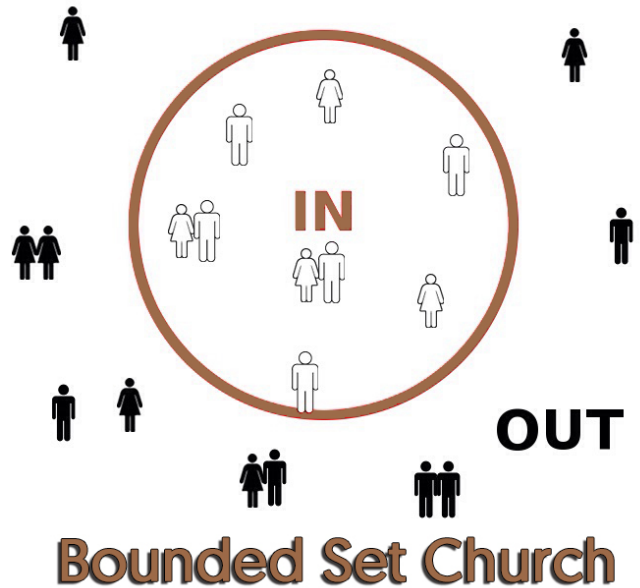
At the centre of the life of Seeds Church is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We teach about Jesus and seek to live our lives in relationship to Jesus. Our purpose statement of “make Jesus real” embodies this commitment and centring around Jesus. The early church of Jesus Christ was known to have the simplest of belief statements: “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Later in history, more and more was added to this simple statement of belief and allegiance to Jesus. Of course this clarified and explained more about the one we are centred on, but at the same time it caused division and conflict among the people of the church.

Seeds Church is a Christian Church committed to the faith passed down from the first disciples to our day. We affirm wholeheartedly one of the first written creeds of the church known as the **Apostle's Creed**:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,

Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,



*who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended into hell.
On the third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen*

As members of the Mennonite Church of Manitoba and Canada, we also affirm the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (adopted in 1995 in Wichita, Kansas). These statements and affirmations of faith provide needed guidance and a context for conversations about what it means to make Jesus real in our lives. But as guides, they do not create a litmus test for inclusion or a reason to exclude others from participation in the life of Seeds Church. What matters most is a person's commitment to be moving toward the centre of our faith in Jesus Christ; to foster a relationship with Jesus, to take time to listen for the voice of Jesus and to move with purpose as we walk with Jesus.

Appendix B - Various Congregational Statements from Other Churches.

(Comments in Italicized Print) (For Vision Team only)

Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church <https://www.samc.ca/>

Congregational Statement on Website (*Statement is generally inclusive, not just specifically related to LGBTQ+ identity, but also socioeconomic, racial, etc.*)

SAMC seeks to grow as a community of grace, joy and peace so that we can be witnesses to God's love in the world. We invite and welcome all people to join in this vision. As followers of Jesus Christ in the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition we believe that all people have been created in the image of God. We trust the Holy Spirit is among us and leading us, as we strive to faithfully follow Jesus. We acknowledge our different understandings of Scripture and how these shape our lives, yet we choose to live as a community of love, welcoming into full participation people, of different race, income, sexual identity, family status, ability and other factors that may give rise to division and marginalization. In our diversity, we gather around the Table together to celebrate our unity in Christ.



(Sargent has also chosen to visually signify their LGBTQ+ inclusion by the display of the Progress Pride Flag. From Wikipedia)

“In June 2018 designer [Daniel Quasar](#) released a redesign incorporating elements from both the Philadelphia flag and [trans pride flag](#) to bring focus on inclusion and progress within the community. The flag design immediately went viral as the *Progress Pride Flag* on social media, prompting worldwide coverage in news outlets.^{[49][50][51]} While retaining the common six-stripe rainbow design as a base, the "Progress" variation adds a [chevron](#) along the [hoist](#) that features black, brown, light blue, pink, and white stripes to bring those communities (marginalized [people of color](#), trans individuals, and those living with HIV/AIDS and those who have been lost) to the forefront; "the arrow points to the right to show forward movement, while being along the left edge shows that progress still needs to be made."^[52]”

Bethel Mennonite Church Winnipeg <https://www.bethelmennonite.ca/>

Congregational Statement on Website (*Bethel's statement is simpler and also inclusive other identifiers and includes images of pride and Indigenous Reconciliation*)

With gratitude we acknowledge our gathering on Treaty No.1 land and that we are all treaty people. Imitating the inclusive welcome of Jesus, we seek to be a community marked by the love of God. Regardless of age, race, or sexual orientation, we invite you to make Bethel your spiritual home. Sharing the peace of Christ, together we strive to reveal the realm of God in the world.



Indigenous Reconciliation



Affirming Church

The Bridge Church Abbotsford <https://www.thebridgeonline.ca/>

Congregational Statement on Website (*The Bridge's statement is a call to learn and move in a particular direction and culminated in a Service of celebration and affirmation in October 2021. Also they chose to include a version of the Progress Pride Flag as well.*)



Our statement of intent

The Bridge Church desires to "Love God by Loving What God Loves." In order to reflect this, the Steering Team has been in process to become an LGBTQ+ inclusive and affirming church. This summer we will be providing educational opportunities and resources for our community and are planning a special service of welcome in September 2021. We want to ensure we are creating a community where all will feel welcome and loved. These steps bring alignment to the words, actions and values that our community has lived out for years. Our commitment to elevating the Good News of Jesus remains the same.

Being inclusive means we will overtly welcome the LGBTQ+ community. We believe in the belovedness of those who identify as queer. This belonging includes blessing their marriages, supporting their families and having the same freedoms to participate in church life that we all share. Being affirming means we believe their experience, perspectives and influence as queer people are needed and welcomed here. Jesus welcomes all of us to God's table.

We recognize that LGBTQ+ people have been harmed and excluded from the church at large. We regret and apologize for how we have, knowingly or unknowingly, advanced these damaging ideas. We have much to learn and acknowledge that as we grow our community building trust is part of the way forward. Because of this, we are approaching this process with humility: listening to and learning from LGBTQ+ voices. Our official statements and policy may grow and adjust as we discover what being a public, intentional and explicitly affirming community looks like. We want to do our part to change the narrative and make room for healing. We are better together and look forward to what this change will bring.

We encourage our community to look at these resources and consider this further, let's be kind to one another, learn together, and let's keep talking.

Raleigh Mennonite Church - North Carolina <https://www.raleighmennonite.org/>

Congregational Statement on Website *(Raleigh's statement is quite short and direct on the landing page with no flags or LGBTQ+ images. There is also a fuller, yet still quite concise statement on their visitor page.)*

Who is welcome?

All are welcome. Raleigh Mennonite is an affirming congregation.

As a Christian community, called to peacemaking and reconciliation, we affirm that people of any racial or ethnic identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, age, or economic status are welcome to full participation in our congregation.

Albany Mennonite Church - Oregon <https://www.albanymennonite.org/>

Congregational Statement on Website

Who are we?

We are an Anabaptist community of people on a faith journey together, united by our commitment to follow Jesus' call to be people of love, justice and peace. We believe that all people are created in God's image and are blessed and loved equally by God. We welcome people of any racial or ethnic identity, sexual orientation or gender identity, physical or mental ability, and marital or economic status, who want to join us on this faith journey, to full participation and membership in our congregational life and ministry. We Affirm and celebrate the diversity of God's people and commit to loving, respecting, and learning from each other.