

Jacksonville Church Affirms Members' Requirement to Sign Biblical Sexuality Contract

Only days after issuing a statement that required its members to sign a statement to agree to its "Statement of Biblical Sexuality" or be booted, First Baptist Church of Jacksonville's senior pastor said the church is "not closing our doors to anybody," but that "not everybody can be a member here," reported.

First Baptist Church of Jacksonville Senior Pastor Heath Lambert told its congregants and members last Sunday during an open-mic, 90-minute forum that they will not lose their membership for not signing the statement. Hundreds of people—almost all of the congregants—filled the church's downtown auditorium.

About 10 people chose to speak on the issue and concerns about the church's requirement to affirm their support for the church's position on gender and marriage or be removed from its membership, reported.

It was reported that one woman—one who calls herself "queer" and who was raised in the Baptist Church—spoke noting "she came with her partners of seven years" ... and "she encouraged congregants to stop attending First Baptist, saying the decision to have its members sign any kind of contracts to attend 'turns your church into an organization, a club.'"

"This church is no longer a religious place of worship welcome to all. ... Forcing your members to sign a contract erasing our existence just adds to the mountains of resentment that LGBTQ people already have for the church at large," the woman said. "Is that what you want? To draw a larger wedge between God and queer people? To sanitize the world from us or eliminate our

existence? This oath is disgusting and not what God would want.”

The “contract” that members were originally required to sign read:

“As a member of First Baptist Church, I believe that God creates people in his image as either male or female, and that this creation is a fixed matter of human biology, not individual choice. I believe marriage is instituted by God, not government, is between one man and one woman, and is the only context for sexual desire and expression.”

The statement was adopted by the First Baptist Church congregation last fall. However, it has become a point of community discussion after the church laid down a deadline of March 19 to affirm the statement to “ensure your membership at First Baptist Church continues without any interruption”

Lambert has served in his role as senior pastor at the church since May 2018. He emphasized that all individuals are welcome at any of the church’s three multi-campus locations in Jacksonville.

“If you disagree with us, you are welcome here,” Lambert said. “Not everybody can be a member here, but you are welcome here. First Baptist is not closing our doors to anybody.”

Lambert said the statement was approved by church leaders and lay officials and voted on by the congregation and that “the church’s statement is typical because it simply is a statement of their belief. It is abundantly Biblical, abundantly Christian and it is not strange or new to have a statement of faith.”

Other speakers and many in the audience voiced support for the document as a demonstration of their religious beliefs.

 The form asks congregants to check a box next to the statement, “I agree with and will uphold the biblical truth contained in the First Baptist Statement on Biblical Sexuality.”

reported that, “Days into his role as sole senior pastor at First Baptist, Lambert told the Times-Union that the church’s overriding priority would be Love God and love people. Our intention moving forward is to do that.’” {eo}

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