

Statement on Sex, Gender and Sexuality

We, the Alliance of Baptists, have been on a journey of deepening acceptance, understanding and accommodation regarding sex, gender and sexuality.¹ Our congregations and members have long been involved in generating movement toward affirmation and justice for people of all sexual and gender identities. We assert that we are a sex-positive people and view sex, gender and sexuality as life-giving, life-fulfilling graces that are central to our humanity, offering an intimate glimpse into God's image and a means by which the Sacred is experienced in our midst. We are steadfast in our commitment to the highest values of our faith and all enduring faith traditions: love, justice, healing, liberation, reconciliation and peace. Thus, we challenge the membership and congregational partners of the Alliance of Baptists to engage in thoughtful study and to enter into substantive conversations about sex, gender, and sexuality that honors and is faithful to our shared commitment to be followers of the Jesus way.

We value all bodies as intrinsically good and made in God's image. We resist any theological or rhetorical framework that would identify human bodies as inherently depraved and sinful. We affirm without fear or shame the complexity and diversity by which humans made in God's image experience sex, gender and sexuality, and we affirm the multiple ways we express sexual lives marked by love, justice, mutual consent and pleasure. We acknowledge that sexual and gender diversity defy binary categories and are intrinsically a part of the divine beauty and wonder of creation. We affirm diverse and vibrant relationships of integrity and commitment as well as strong families in which all members are respected, secure, enjoy adequate material and emotional support, and are honored as persons created in God's image. We affirm our experience that people in multiple kinds of loving relationships can live faithful and responsible lives as sexual persons. We acknowledge that people of all gender identities and all sexual orientations have sacred worth and dignity.

We lament that religion, instead of being an agent of transformation, has too frequently been the source of so much pain and wounding, and that so many people of faith refuse to hear the cries and sufferings of sexual and gender minorities³. We grieve the misuses of power that take God's gift of sexual intimacy and distort it into experiences of abuse, brokenness, violence, and oppression. Heeding God's call to justice and advocacy for those harmed and hated, especially when the harm and hatred has come in the name of God, we confront and denounce the suffering, injustice, or violence caused by sexual prejudice and ignorance that:

- Diminishes the worth and equity of women in church, in families, and in society;
- Exploits children and other vulnerable people;
- Devalues the Sacred worth of all people regardless of their sexuality and gender;
- Neglects the full inclusion of transgender and gender-non-binary persons;
- Refuses to accept the full inclusion of intersex persons and all people regardless of biological or developmental differences;
- Denies full access to comprehensive sexual healthcare, prevention, and treatment for sexually transmitted illnesses;
- Stands in the way of access to voluntary contraception, abortion and prophylactics;
- Creates double standards or ethics for different people groups based on their sex, or their sexual or gender identity;
- Targets sex, sexuality or gender for violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of any kind;

We commit to respond to this suffering, injustice, and violence by being:

- Spiritual guides who say "no" to the way of fear and "yes" to the way of love;
- Healers who promote life and health where there is sexual woundedness and trauma;
- Educators who promote life-long, age-appropriate sexuality education in faith communities, schools, seminaries and the wider community;
- Prophets who challenge sexual injustice and oppression wherever it is found; and
- Leaders who seek to put an end to the harm and violence done to sexual and gender minorities in the name of God.

We appeal to faith communities everywhere to address matters of sex, gender and sexuality with compassion, truth-telling, openness and courage. We call for Christian sexual ethics that are guided by a theological astuteness that integrates:

- The witness of the Bible and the life and teachings of Jesus;
- The lived wisdom of those who have been excluded or silenced because of their sexual and gender identities;
- And insightful scholarship about sex, gender, and sexuality derived from the fields of medicine, social science, the arts and humanities.

We commit to work toward a world where all people are free to celebrate their sex, gender and sexuality in faith communities that are rooted in the liberating love and justice of God and in societies that value and practice freedom and justice for all.

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¹For almost three decades the Alliance of Baptists journey toward acceptance and inclusion of sexual and gender minorities has been shaped by:

- a. The work of the **Alliance Task Force on Human Sexuality** appointed in 1992 by the courageous leadership of President Ann Quattlebaum of Greenville, SC and chaired by Priscilla Asbury of Monroe, LA. The Task Force presented its *“Report of the Task Force on Human Sexuality: A Document for Dialogue and Study”* to the Alliance Board of Directors in 1994, who received it “with profound gratitude” and committed to “engage in an ongoing discussion of the issues raised in the report” and called its action “an occasion for recommitting ourselves to a fellowship and ministry of inclusion.” In 1995, “The Report” was “received with gratitude” by the Alliance membership, meeting in Annual Gathering in Vienna, Virginia.
- b. The co-development of ***Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*** with the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America as a resource to assist clergy and lay leaders in leading a healthy and respectful congregational dialogue around issues of sexual orientation. (Edited by LeDayne McLeese Polaski & Millard Eiland, 2000; Second Edition edited by Cody J. Sanders, 2013)
- c. The Statement on Same Sex Marriage which was affirmed by the Alliance of Baptists Annual Gathering meeting in Dayton, Ohio in 2004. (<https://allianceofbaptists.org/assets/uploads/congregations/SameSexMarriage2004.pdf>)
- d. Joining with the United Church of Christ in suing the state of North Carolina (2014) for violating the principle of religious freedom in regards to its law regarding marriage. The lawsuit was made moot in 2015 when the Supreme Court of the United States of America made marriage equality the law of the land.
- e. A significant Arcus Foundation grant that seeded the resources needed to conduct two retreats in 2015 for lay leaders and clergy from Baptist congregations in the south with the aim to help them discern how best to enter into dialogue with their congregations on matters of sexual orientation and gender identity.
- f. The publication of *Trouble the Waters: A Christian Resource for the Work of Racial Justice* in 2017, which was edited by Michael-Ray Mathews, Marie Clare P. Onwubuariri, Cody J. Sanders, and produced by the Racial Justice and Multiculturalism Community of the Alliance of Baptists. This book is a collection of essays offering an intersectionality framework for making the connection between work on LGBTQ justice, racial justice and justice for other embodiments of human difference, and was funded as part of the Arcus Foundation grant mentioned in footnote “f” above.
- g. At the request of President Mike Castle, the Board of Directors participated in an intensive training on sex, gender and sexuality in the fall of 2015 led by Rev. Dr. William Stayton, an ordained Baptist minister, a licensed counselor, and a certified sexologist. In response to this training, the board of directors set in motion the JUSTSEX conference, held in Nashville, Tenn. on October 18-20, 2018, in order to foster honest, open, faithful, conversations about sex, gender and sexuality. In addition, JUSTSEX was also designed to spark those conversations across the country and beyond in families, faith communities and any groups who are willing to engage this subject by making the videos of the conference and a discussion guide available to anyone or group free of charge by making them available at allianceofbaptists.org.

²The Nashville Statement is an evangelical Christian statement of faith relating to human sexuality and gender roles promoted by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) in Nashville, Tenn., which expresses support for marriage between one man and one woman as the only appropriate context for sexual behavior, for chastity outside marriage, and that opposes LGBT sexuality and equality.

³“Sexual and gender minorities” is used to refer to people who identify as other than heterosexual or cisgender, including but not necessarily limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual.

NOTE: We give thanks for the Religious Institute’s *Declaration on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing*, (2000; Updated 2015) as well as their *Statement on the Divine Gift of Sexual and Gender Diversity* (2017) which has served as inspiration and guide to this statement. We commend the work of the Religious Institute (religiousinstitute.org) to your attention and as a helpful ministry resource.