

## **EBF Commission for Theology and Education Consultation, Smidstrup Strand, Denmark, 16-18 November 2016**

Fifteen people from nine different Unions met at Smidstrup Strand, Denmark, 16-18 November 2016, to have a conversation on homosexuality and our churches. In a very good atmosphere they prayed, talked and shared practices and resources. For those who seek to have conversations like this within their own Unions or churches, the group made some common affirmations and also agreed make available some [resources](#) that might be of help.

### **Affirmations from the Consultation on Homosexuality**

The purpose of this Consultation was not to make any formal recommendations to the EBF. In 2010 there was an informal meeting at the EBF Council concerning same-sex marriage. This was followed by a Resolution, available on the EBF website, agreed by the Council reaffirming the traditional understanding that Christian marriage takes place between a man and a woman. This [Resolution](#) continues to stand as a guide to our further thinking.

This most recent Consultation was held to respond to the concern of some EBF Unions that in the mission and pastoral practice of the church we are so often unsure and uncertain as to how to respond to homosexual men and women who may in some way become involved with the fellowship of our local congregations.

In our Consultation we tried to follow what we understand to be the Baptist practice of 'communal discernment'. By this we understand that we gather together in the face of difficult or controversial issues to be open to listen to one another, and together to seek the mind of Christ as to how we should think and act. So in our time together we listened to Scripture, worshipped and prayed together, and listened to one another as we shared our biblical, theological and practical insights.

We also shared our experience in dealing with this issue in several Unions. These highlighted the great difficulties that all our Unions and churches in each part of the EBF region are experiencing when this issue is raised, because it provokes such strong emotional reactions and often great hostility. Yet we sense that many churches desire to get beyond hostile confrontation and discuss further how they can be faithful to God and his Word in this, as in all aspects of the life and mission of the church.

Therefore we offer the following affirmations that we think should inform the debate, whatever position individual Unions and churches may take on it.

1. We believe that the challenges for our churches arising from the presence of homosexual men and women in our societies and in our churches in some way affect us all as the people of God. Therefore we would want to encourage EBF member Unions and local churches to find good, appropriate and non-confrontational ways to discuss it, seeking together the mind of Christ and the guidance of Scripture.
2. We are concerned about the violent and intemperate language that Christians sometimes use to speak with one another about all aspects of homosexuality. Whatever our differing views, we want to seek ways to have a grace-filled

respectful dialogue with one another, recognising in humility that the fullness of God's truth is beyond the understanding of any of us.

3. We believe that Baptists who hold different views are seeking to be faithful to Christ and whilst we may disagree on our conclusions reading the Scriptures, we should respect one another's integrity in this regard. We can do this when we come together from our differing perspectives to discuss how we should interpret Scripture in order to apply its meaning and message to our contemporary situation.
4. As churches we can agree that we should be welcoming to all in need of God's grace and the salvation won by Jesus Christ through his cross and Resurrection and to love them, as Christ loves them. We believe that we need to explore further how the evangelism and mission of our churches can embrace the 'all people' of the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 16-20), including homosexual men and women. We asked the question, 'What does the good news of the Gospel look like to a homosexual man or woman as he or she encounters it in the Christians and/or churches they meet?'
5. In the pastoral practice of the church we are inspired by the example of Jesus who welcomed men and women just as they came to him, each in some way in need of healing, reconciliation and hope for their lives. We share an awareness that we are all broken people and in need of healing and transformation in all our relationships. Such healing and transformation comes from Christ and is often mediated through the community of the church.

In making these five affirmations we want to emphasise that for us this is just the beginning of a wider discussion that we hope can now be taken up further by others. It is certainly not an attempt to find a comprehensive 'settled position' for the EBF. Such decisions clearly belong to Unions and/or local churches and not to the EBF as a whole. We anticipate that we will continue to have a diversity of responses among us to what is a controversial and complex issue.

Rather we want to encourage all of us in this matter to look first to Christ as he reveals himself in Scripture, in prayer and in our meeting together.

Grace and Peace,

Teun van der Leer  
Chair, EBF Commission for Theology and Education

\* \* \*

Members of the Consultation:

Linda Aadne  
Olle Alkholm  
Marion Carson  
Jenni Entrican  
Stefan Gisiger  
Stephen Keyworth

Helle Liht  
Ole Lundegaard  
Lone Møller-Hansen  
Tony Peck  
Toivo Pilli  
Meego Remmel  
Michael Rohde  
Uwe Swarat

We have gathered some of the materials that were produced within different Unions that we used these days and that are helpful resources for this conversation. You can find them [here](#). Some of the papers will put here later as well, as soon as they have been finalized.