

**James Street Mennonite Church
Shared Understanding of Singleness,
Marriage, and Inclusion
July 2022**

Mission

We are an Anabaptist congregation gathering in Lancaster City that is empowered by the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus' command to love God and neighbor as self.

Vision

We envision being a gracious Christian community in a world that is increasingly polarized, offering a safe context where people are welcome to embrace our uniqueness and express their differences in an atmosphere of belonging.

Values

We value worshiping God, building community and witnessing to the world.

(Adopted by the congregation November 13, 2013)

James Street Mennonite Church (JSMC) Pastors and Oversight Board present this “Shared Understanding” of singleness, marriage, and the inclusion of those who are LGBTQ+ to guide the actions of our congregation. As a “shared understanding”, rather than a policy, this document is fluid and flexible and can evolve as our understandings as a congregation evolve. This shared understanding clarifies how we will live out our Mission, Vision and Values moving forward. It arises from our reading of the church in Acts chapter 10 and 11, which asks, in light of Jesus’ life and salvation, as well as the work of the Holy Spirit, “Who are we to stand in God’s way?” We hold it in the context of *A Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, which we follow as a guide for our lives and faith rather than as a rule book.

This document is not an official position on the interpretation of scriptures related to LGBTQ+ expressions of sexuality. It is impossible to represent everyone’s exact understanding of Scripture, church life, etc. We acknowledge and embrace these differences in our congregation. We acknowledge that some or all of the particulars of this shared understanding may feel uncomfortable for some of us. We continue to value and welcome people with differing views and understandings as part of our congregation. And we invite all of us to live with, and live out this shared understanding whether or not it is consistent with our personal interpretations of Scripture and perspectives on these questions. We call one another to humility and openness as we journey together as a community. And we acknowledge the limitations of our language to describe, characterize and value those we seek to include by this shared understanding and apologize for any offense, inviting suggestions as well. It is our hope that we are able to journey together in unity as a community of faith called and sent to be witnesses of Christ’s healing and hope in a broken world.

1. **We are all created in God's image.** God created us sexual beings and intended this for good. Sexuality is a gift to us from God and an important part of our individual identities, whether we are single or married, gay or straight. God's word offers boundaries for our sexual expression to which we call one another.
 - a. sexual intercourse should be reserved for marriage
 - b. marriage is a life-long covenant of monogamy; exceptions for divorce and remarriage are accepted where reconciliation is not possible
 - c. there is no place for abuse of power through sexuality

2. **We understand marriage as a life-long, covenant partnership of two people growing together in love and fidelity, regardless of sexual orientation.**

Couples seeking marriage are welcome to receive pre-marital counsel from JSMC pastors to be equipped with the tools to foster healthy relationships as they process their commitment to build a strong marriage. Along with this, they are welcome to hold wedding ceremonies in our church building and involve pastors in their ceremonies as invited. JSMC pastors will use their customary discretion to discern readiness for marriage and will officiate weddings (i.e. lead vows and make the pronouncement) as invited by couples regardless of gender, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation.

3. **We commit to encourage and support those who enter into marriage relationships.** As a community of faith, we will seek to bless, nurture and support all persons as they strive to live out Christian ideals for marriage and sexual intimacy.

4. **We commit to supporting persons who are single through circumstance or choice.** As a community of faith, we will seek to bless, nurture and support single persons as they strive to live out Christian ideals for their relationships and sexual intimacy.

5. **We commit to foster healing and restoration** within individuals, families, and the community of faith when people experience pain and brokenness in relationships, married or single, and when individuals experience judgment and wounding related to their sexuality.

6. **We welcome and include all people according to our core documents¹.** Consistent with these statements, all are welcome to participate in the church life of JSMC, eligible for ministry according to our existing ministry guidelines, may be invited to serve as pastors, and may be supported by the congregation in seeking ordination, regardless of gender, gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

Everyone is invited to wholeness and faithfulness in Christ. We at JSMC call every person to a journey of discipleship in relationship with Jesus. We recognize that the congregation will not always agree on what that means. Even so, we look toward Jesus, the center of our faith, who shows us how to love, support, and challenge our fellow sojourners from a place of humility. This requires us to accept ongoing transformation by the Holy Spirit. May we be deeply rooted and established in this kind of love, "that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17-19).

FOOTNOTE

1. Core Documents: Mission, Vision and Values, JSMC Constitution, JSMC Covenant

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE READING

Genesis 17:1-10, 15-16; Psalm 95; Psalm 98; Isaiah 55; Jeremiah 29:7; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 13:24-30; Matthew 22:34-40; Matthew 25:31-46; John 15:1-17; Acts 10-11; Acts 18: 1-11; Acts 15:1-35; Romans 14 & 15; 1 Corinthians 8-10; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21; Galatians 2:11-21; Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 Peter 3:15b-16a

SUGGESTED READING

Messy Grace, Caleb Kaltenbach; *Torn*, Justin Lee; *A Letter to my Congregation*, Ken Wilson