



## SSM Update to Assembly 2016

Since Assembly 2013 we have continued to use the 'talking together' email address to collect all responses from individuals and churches as our 'conversations' around various aspects of same sex relationships progressed. We've made space to hear differing voices in many different ways.

In March our Council engaged further in discernment through a time of intense prayer, careful listening and respectful discussion. By the end of that meeting, Council clearly discerned that it should offer to our Union the statement concerning potential registration of our buildings for same sex marriage. The statement re-affirmed Christian marriage and recognised our ecclesiology, it encouraged creative mission and it encouraged a commitment to unity in diversity. This was communicated to ministers and churches immediately following Council and the statement and pastoral letter can be found on our website.

The distribution list amounted to 4500 addresses and we've received 108 responses to that statement, the content of which will be shared with members of Council when they meet next in October.

It's blatantly obvious from all those responses and the many conversations that we do not agree and there is a breadth of opinion in our Union... We know that there are different understandings and interpretations when we go to the resources of faith to consider issues of sexuality and faithful relationships.

The Baptist Steering Group (BSG) will continue to reflect on the concerns raised which include: the centrality of our Declaration of Principle and ecclesial authority; mutual respect for differing interpretations; pastoral concerns and our missional imperative.

It's important to remember that what Council did in March was to provide a wider context for discernment as part of our 'walking together' and 'watching over each other'. This wider discernment should be used by congregations to aid their own response as they seek the mind of Christ in their local context. This has always been a part of Baptist shared life at its best and does not run contrary to our Declaration of Principle.

So, what's happening next:

All the concerns raised by the responses to the statement will be shared with Council in October.

Today, there's an opportunity for personal conversation with those who serve on the Baptist Steering Group during the lunch sessions – you'll find them at the Baptist Together stand in the Cotswold Hall. And you can use the post cards to register a concern or a question – (post cards in the delegate packs, deposit in box by BUGB stand.)

With regard to Ministers in particular, our Ministerial Recognition Committee is also considering further the guidelines that sit alongside the Ministerial Rules and again their reflection will be taken to Council in October.

In our reflection together, we must continue to reaffirm our pastoral and missional commitment to all people irrespective of their sexuality and that will require each one of us to commit to an even deeper understanding of the differing convictions that lie at the heart of this matter.

Stephen Keyworth  
Team Leader: Faith and Society  
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