

**To: SPU Board of Trustees**  
**From: Faculty LGBTQIA+ Task Force**  
**Date: Monday, November 15, 2021**

We offer deep gratitude to the Board members who participated in the conversations on Monday, November 8, 2021. It is gratifying to know that such conversations are possible, and to confirm that we all ultimately want SPU to thrive long into the future as an authentically Christian university.

We support, and will continue to participate in, the consultant-guided conversations about SPU's overall identity, communication, and governance. However, the following realities demand our attention:

- SPU faculty, staff, students, and alumni are stressed and fragile, at a teetering point, whatever their views on the policy towards LGBTQIA+ persons.
- The interconnected issues of LGBTQIA+ exclusion, financial stress, and the urgent recruitment and retention of students, staff, and faculty mean that we must move quickly to clarify SPU's identity for internal and external constituencies.
- All of SPU's constituencies need to see us as leaders respond with a sense of urgency, acting to find a way forward through these crises in the short term.

We recognize that SPU is at a critical juncture in its history. The Faculty Task Force has been prayerful in our discussions and offers this potential course of action:

- SPU remains affiliated with the Free Methodist denomination.
- The Free Methodist Church leadership makes a statement that the church has a different interpretation of LGBTQIA+ issues but recognizes that the University is a separate entity with which they are willing to remain in partnership through Christian fellowship and ministry.
- The policy which asks employees to "refrain from...sexually immoral behavior that is inconsistent with Biblical standards" will be revised, along with relevant sections of the Statement on Human Sexuality, to allow for the hiring of LGBTQIA+ Christians as staff and faculty.

### **Timeline**

- We would like to meet again with representatives of the Board in early December 2021.
- We intend to present this proposal as a faculty resolution to Faculty Council in December 2021, asking that it be brought to Faculty Senate for a vote of affirmation.
- We invite representatives of the Board, administration, staff, and students to join us in a working group to discuss how we will operationalize these ideas during winter quarter 2022, working toward a formal announcement about a change in the hiring and employee conduct policy no later than March 15, 2022, ahead of the May 1 Admissions decision deadline.
- As we work together, we hope to model for the world a Christian community characterized by the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

The above approach finds common ground in our shared commitment to faith in Jesus Christ and to living out that faith with one another.

- Building on this common ground, we can move forward to the hard and necessary work of putting such a plan into practice.
- As we live into and through these disagreements, we must continue to engage in caring, attentive, and graceful dialogue.

SPU is positioned to occupy a unique space within Christian higher education as an authentically Christian institution which is already drawing students, staff, and faculty from across traditional dividing lines of Christian theology and practice.

- The image of an invitational table open to all is central to this vision.
- As a Christian university community, we come from a range of traditions which authentically disagree on any number of issues and practices.
  - We want to continue providing an appropriately ecumenical range of Christian perspectives on all of the issues facing our students and our world.
  - Christian communities have interacted with and responded to gender identity and sexual orientation in a myriad of ways.
  - Views have been informed by scriptural interpretation along with strong evidence from biological and social sciences that have prompted deeper understanding of the complexities of these issues.
- We recognize that the Free Methodist denomination differs from the university on LGBTQIA+ issues, but we believe it is possible to maintain a faithful and productive distinction between the policies of the denomination and the policies of the university.
  - The teachings of the Free Methodist Church will be honored, respected, and taught in SPU classrooms alongside others.
  - Students will continue to be encouraged to think critically, considering the complex range of perspectives attending any given issue.
  - As an invitational, hospitable, and welcoming university, SPU can continue to draw students, faculty, and staff into conversation with the theology and traditions of the Free Methodist Church.

An updated policy on hiring and employee conduct would welcome all of these voices to be fully present at Christ's table, characterized by the core of our faith: love one another. This is a model the world desperately needs.