

From: President <President@spu.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2022 2:20 PM
Subject: Regarding LGBTQIA+ Work Group Report to the Board



LGBTQIA+ Work Group

May 10, 2022

Dear Faculty and Staff,

In the context of the Christian Church's deep divisions in its understanding of sex and gender issues, Seattle Pacific is at a defining moment in how we live out our purpose and mission as a Christian university. These divisions in the Church have provoked controversy at SPU—specifically regarding our employment policies and behavioral conduct expectations. To help the University address these issues, the LGBTQIA+ Work Group was given the following charge:

In the face of diverse perspectives, what options might create a shared direction regarding sexual conduct expectations and employment policy (specifically with respect to LGBTQIA+ individuals) within a Free Methodist Christian context, and how do these potential options align with SPU's mission and Statement of Faith?

[How do we create a shared direction that] strengthens community, values and respects all people, and remains true to the SPU mission and faith values?

As the Work Group started this task, it quickly became clear to us that how SPU addresses sex and gender issues must be grounded in its identity as a Christian university. How do our policies and practices contribute to, or detract from, being *“fully committed to engaging the culture and changing the world by graduating people of competence and character, becoming people of wisdom, and modeling grace-filled community.”* (SPU Mission Statement)

Thus, our deliberations about SPU's hiring policy and behavioral conduct expectations were framed by centering on SPU's mission as a Christian university. We spent many hours listening to a range of voices on these issues in our community; we carefully studied relevant documents (articles, policies, statements, case studies); and we carefully analyzed data collected on our campus. The Work Group itself is composed of Staff, Faculty, Senior Administrators, and Trustees with diverse perspectives, knowledge, and experiences. We wrestled with potential options and their possible consequences for our community. After all this work, we completed our analysis and submitted our report to the Board. The report details the five main options we considered and the possible implications (positive and negative) for each option. The Board now will consider the report. It will be the Board's responsibility to determine what they, as fiduciaries, believe is best for the mission of SPU as a Christian university.

The Work Group considered a wide range of potential options. One option described in the report is to "maintain" SPU's current employment policy and Statement on Human Sexuality. A second option is to revise SPU's policies and institutional statements to reflect an "affirming" view. The Work Group analyzed multiple possibilities between these two options to create a "third way." Each "third-way" variation suggests that SPU change its Employee Lifestyle Expectations to eliminate the prohibition of "same-sex sexual activity" but maintain that sexuality activity should be expressed within the loving and committed bounds of a marriage covenant. In addition, each variation expressed a desire to maintain an affiliation with our founding denomination, the Free Methodist Church. The "third-way" variations differ concerning the Statement on Human Sexuality (SoHS): one variation retains the statement as an expression of our denominational heritage, the second variation eliminates the SoHS, and the third variation revises the SoHS to acknowledge different Christian perspectives on human sexuality.

After lengthy and prayerful consideration of the role of SPU as a Christian university in the context of a divided church, there was significant support among the Work Group for the "third-way" options. There was not complete agreement within the Work Group regarding the options, and Work Group members varied in their personal beliefs about human sexuality. Also, the Work Group did not specifically recommend any of the three "third-way" options to the Board. However, many in the Work Group saw the "third-way" as the most viable amid the diversity of theological beliefs within SPU and the ongoing schisms within the larger Christian church and also saw these options as the best ways to help SPU be a space in which students, faculty, and staff

can engage deeply with the issues by hearing, considering, and thoughtfully and graciously critiquing the full range of Christian perspectives.

Although the full report to the Board is not being made publicly available, the LGBTQIA+ Work Group will share with the SPU community the options that were discussed. In addition to this Summary Explanation, members of the Work Group will hold open meetings in which faculty, staff, and students can discuss the options in the report and their potential implications. Please note that in these meetings we will not discuss specific situations or comments made by Work Group members in our process. It was and remains important that all Work Group members maintain the integrity of our commitment to keeping specific in-group commentary confidential.

These are difficult issues to work out as a community, and the Work Group has known from the beginning that nothing we could do would please everyone. We have, however, as prayerfully, as thoughtfully, and as thoroughly as we could, wrestled with as many options as we could imagine and sincerely sought to hear God's voice speaking to us through everyone we listened to. Let us all be in prayer that SPU's unique Christian mission is made strong through these complicated times and that our witness as a grace-filled community might be amplified.

As noted in the Provost's email to campus on April 24, these meetings have been scheduled to take place on the following dates and times:

- Faculty: Wednesday, May 11, 3:30-4:30 p.m. in Upper Gwinn
- Students: Wednesday, May 11, 6:30-7:30 p.m. in Upper Gwinn
- Staff: Thursday, May 12, 10:00-11:00 a.m. in Demaray 150. This session will also be livestreamed via this link: <redacted>

Humbly,

Joshua Canada (*Co-Chair*)

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