



June 4, 2022

From: Seattle Pacific University Faculty Council

To: Seattle Pacific University Board of Trustees, Faculty, Administrators, Staff, Students, Emeriti, and Alumni

On June 3, 2022, the Seattle Pacific University Faculty Senate passed the following resolution in response to the SPU Board of Trustees' [decision](#) on May 20th to maintain a sexual conduct policy that prohibits the employment of individuals in same-sex marriages.

The Board's decision came after more than a year of controversy over this policy. The conflict was sparked in January 2021 by a lawsuit brought against SPU by an employee alleging discrimination. Surveys in late January 2021 demonstrated that 75% of faculty and 68% of staff desired SPU to eliminate the policy. In April 2021, the Board announced that they had voted to maintain the policy, and SPU Faculty responded that month with a "Statement of No Confidence in the SPU Board of Trustees." In the fall of 2021, the Board hired consultants to assess the institutional conflict and work on communication between the Board and the SPU community; as a result, several shared governance work groups were formed, including a work group focused on the conflict over LGBTQIA+ questions. This work group analyzed several options the university could take and presented their analysis and recommendation to the Board on April 22, 2022. Before the Board met to discuss these options, two members of the Board brought a resolution to the Free Methodist Church USA Board of Administration, which then declared that any Free Methodist educational institution "that alters their hiring policy to permit the hiring of individuals living a lifestyle inconsistent with the FMC *Book of Discipline's* teachings on sexual purity" cannot stay affiliated in any way with the FMC. The Board then met in May and decided once again to maintain the policy.

Of the 225 members of Faculty Senate, 197 members voted electronically on the resolution below. Of those who voted, 80% voted *Yes*, 15% voted *No*, and 4% abstained. Faculty voted on the resolution with the understanding that members of the SPU community have permission to share this document outside of SPU.

SPU Faculty Senate Resolution
to Endorse the “Third Way” Recommendation of the SPU LGBTQIA+ Work Group

June 3, 2022

WHEREAS the Seattle Pacific University LGBTQIA+ Work Group—comprised of faculty, staff, administration, and board members holding a diverse spectrum of views, knowledge, and experiences regarding human sexuality—*modeled shared governance ideals* by working together in good faith for months to come to a mutually acceptable recommended direction for the Board of Trustees to address the current LGBTQIA+ controversies on campus, and

WHEREAS this recommended direction, called the “Third Way,” establishes that as an institution of Christian higher learning, SPU has a mission and purpose distinct from that of a Christian church; i.e., while churches may commit to a side or “stand” in theological debates for the sake of providing moral clarity to their congregants, a Christian university must train its students in a process of critical inquiry, continually questioning and probing our way towards truth, remaining committed to Christian faith while avoiding the sectarianism that has divided the Christian community, and

WHEREAS the Third Way concludes that to maintain a posture of educational invitation that supports the University’s mission “to engage the culture,” “to graduate people of competence and character,” and to “model grace-filled community,” SPU must eliminate the conduct policy in its Employee Lifestyle Expectations that prohibits employment of individuals in same-sex marriages and thus prevents students from benefiting from the widest range of wisdom, experience, and mentorship that could be offered by Christian faculty, and

WHEREAS in revising this conduct policy, the Third Way remains consistent with the SPU community’s understanding of the four pillars of its Statement of Faith, which call us to be

- orthodox, requiring not excessive legalism but an adherence to Scripture and doctrinal essentials that keeps Jesus and his command to love at the gravitational center of all we do, always balancing commitment *to* Christ with a spiritual freedom of conscience *in* Christ;
- evangelical, requiring not a subscription to a specific ideological perspective but a joyful proclamation to the world of the good news of Christ’s saving grace and love for all humanity;
- Wesleyan, requiring not a narrow piety but an expansive social holiness that blends acts of piety with acts of charity, embracing rather than excluding, demonstrating God’s free grace that is *in* all and *for* all;

- ecumenical, requiring not a mere tolerance of theological diversity but an active engagement of different beliefs and practices that enriches each person's faith and brings us visibly and tangibly closer together in Christ and his Church, and

WHEREAS the Third Way maintains the principle of monogamous marriage as supportive of human flourishing, in line with universal Christian teaching, and

WHEREAS in advocating revision of the conduct policy, the Third Way nevertheless articulated both the desire and a means of remaining in affiliation with its founding denomination the Free Methodist Church USA, although the FMC Board of Administration rejected these good faith overtures before the Board of Trustees could consider and debate the work group's recommended direction, and

WHEREAS surveys of SPU's faculty, staff, and students from 2021 and 2022 have demonstrated supermajority support for eliminating the conduct policy, not only for missional and financial reasons, but because the policy's existence, regardless of all loving intent, could be said to insult the humanity of individuals in the community who identify as LGBTQIA+, and

WHEREAS the recommendation to revise the conduct policy not only remains in alignment with SPU's mission and ethos but also recognizes that our geographical and legal context makes it difficult to maintain the conduct policy without damaging relations with Seattle partners and constricting many key programs in the university, and

WHEREAS the SPU Board of Trustees, against the recommended direction of the LGBTQIA+ Work Group, decided to retain SPU's current Employee Lifestyle Expectation regarding sexual conduct, arguing that it was in line with the SPU's mission and Statement of Faith and would allow SPU to remain in communion with the Free Methodist Church, and

WHEREAS serious questions about the Board's duty of care have arisen in light of Board member statements in a town hall on May 26, 2022, which

- provided vague answers as to how maintaining the conduct policy was in line with SPU's mission,
- admitted the Board voted to maintain the conduct policy despite having no articulated strategic vision for the university, and
- could not articulate what financial and generative support the Free Methodist Church would provide to SPU as a result of requiring us to maintain the policy under threat of disaffiliation,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE SPU FACULTY SENATE

1. Affirms that Christian churches and Christian educational institutions have different constituencies, responsibilities, and missions, and that SPU must therefore have autonomy to establish policies that help the institution flourish by supporting its people, protecting its educational assets, and advancing its institutional goals;
2. Affirms the assertion in the LGBTQIA+ Work Group report that a key feature of SPU's missional identity has always been "to form a community around core convictions while making space for difference and divergence," as expressed within the University's capacious and invitational Statement of Faith;
3. Endorses the SPU LGBTQIA+ Work Group's "Third Way" recommendations to
 - Position SPU as a *grace-filled learning community* that recognizes, respects and invites inquiry into the diversity of Christian opinion on same-sex relations and gender identity, and
 - Revise the employee conduct policy to allow for same-sex sexual activity within the context of marriage, thus making individuals in same-sex marriages eligible for employment;
4. Repudiates the Board's decision to maintain the conduct policy against the consensus of the LGBTQIA+ Work Group and the majority opinion of the SPU community;
5. Urges the Free Methodist Church USA to engage in direct conversation with SPU faculty and administration in order to find a mutually sustainable path forward for both institutions; and
6. Authorizes Faculty Council to establish an Alternative Affiliation Task Force to explore the feasibility of affiliation with Christian denominations other than the Free Methodist Church.