

October, 2021

Hello members and friends of Alger Park Church,

As many of you know, our denomination is in the middle of making important decisions about how to do life and ministry with those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ). After some delays, the Study Committee to Articulate a Foundation-Laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality will give their report this summer at Synod 2022. It is widely assumed that from this report, Synod will give guidelines for how Christian Reformed churches should guide, advise, and involve their LGBTQ members and friends.

Alger Park Church, perhaps more than most Christian Reformed churches, is primed to be deeply affected by the content of this report and Synod's subsequent actions. While many CRCs tend to be more homogenous in their political and social views, our congregation at Alger Park is not. Some of us are very committed to traditional parameters of human sexuality and marriage, based on interpretations of scripture. Others of us are very committed to open and affirming perspectives on sexuality and marriage, based on interpretations of scripture. Many of us find ourselves somewhere in between, with lots of questions.

Understanding that the actions of Synod 2022 may have an impact on Alger Park, and knowing that we all wish to love our LGBTQ brothers and sisters well, we believe it is important for us to prepare for Synod 2022 by committing ourselves in the months of October through May to prayer, conversation, study, and discernment. We believe that the way we respond to the matters at hand will have a big impact on Alger Park's ministry moving forward.

In addition to the importance of these matters on denominational and congregational levels, these matters are also of great personal importance to many of us. Synod's decisions and our congregational response will significantly affect us—especially our LGBTQ members and friends, as well as their families, who worship with us regularly.

During this season, it is not our goal to lead Alger Park into any particular perspective on LGBTQ matters. Our intention is to be as even-handed as possible, and to encourage the growth and discernment of all people, who hold a variety of perspectives. As we discuss these matters together, we're going to need a lot of grace and understanding. We're going to need humble, teachable hearts, and open ears. May God's Spirit lead us according to his word and in the light of his gospel.

Three Necessary Postures:

We think it's important to enter these conversations with three uncompromising postures.

The first one is this: We must not be afraid. We must not enter these conversations with a spirit of scarcity; we must enter them with a spirit of abundance. God is good. God is faithful. God is the God of all things, even conflict and disagreements. We must not be afraid of perspectives, ideas, suggestions, or outcomes, and we must not be afraid to discuss them. Prayerfully hearing and discussing theological ideas that we may disagree with in no way weakens or cheapens our faith - rather, it encourages us to dive into a deeper understanding of what we believe and why. We must all be willing to listen, learn, question, and grow.

Our second posture is that we must be people of compassionate empathy. The letters "LGBTQ" do not represent issues -they represent people. More acutely, they represent people who have historically been victimized, ostracized, and abused—both in society and in our churches. LGBTQ conversations don't just matter to LGBTQ people. They matter to all of us. Research shows that around 5% of people are same-

sex attracted, which means that statistically 5% of Christians are same-sex attracted, as well as 5% of Alger Park members and friends. All believers—gay and straight—are members of the singular body of Christ. Therefore, together, we strive to have solidarity.

Our third posture is that we must be respectful. Every person is entitled to his or her values and perspectives. If we want to grow together through this conversation, we will have to respect the different viewpoints and values of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our Stated Goal in this Season of Discernment:

In this season of discernment, Alger Park's goal is to promote dialog (healthy, open-hearted learning) about LGBTQ matters, especially with regard to the life of the church. We will promote, present, and engage differing opinions and perspectives on LGBTQ matters so we can better appreciate and understand other viewpoints —especially those with whom we disagree. We want to foster an environment of compassion and respect, believing that a congregation can do life and ministry together, even without consensus on all issues. We will place LGBTQ discussions in biblical, historical, and cultural perspective, and encourage unity, even without unanimity.

Faithfulness and Human Sexuality Series:

The main substance of our season of discernment will be our “Faithfulness and Human Sexuality” series, which will take place at Alger Park on seven Sunday evenings from October through May. The schedule is as follows.

- Sunday, October 17- Colossian Forum presentation on Growth Through Conflict
- Sunday, November 21- Discussion of the book *Single, Gay, Christian* by Gregory Coles
- Sunday, January 23- Discussion of the book *Torn* by Justin Lee
- Sunday, April 24- Sexuality and the Christian Reformed Church
- Sunday, May 1- Lecture from Wesley Hill with a traditional stance
- Sunday, May 8- Lecture from Matthew Vines with an affirming stance
- Sunday, May 15- A panel of perspectives on faithfulness and human sexuality

Finally, we ask that every member of our community would join the council in praying regularly for discernment and grace as we enter this season together. As Pastor Sam reminded us recently in a sermon on prayer, God is eager to listen to the hearts of his children. Ask God to guide our internal contemplations and our public explorations. We believe that God's faithfulness will define our season of discernment, as it has our entire congregational history.

Grace and peace,

Vision Council