

Waco church to allow same-sex weddings

May 23, 2019

WACO—University Baptist Church in Waco announced it will allow its building to be used for same-sex weddings and grant its ministerial staff freedom to choose whether to perform LGBTQ marriages. The decision could affect the church's relationship to the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

On May 21, University Baptist Church posted on its church [blog](#) a letter drafted by a nine-member leadership team—elders chosen by the church—and read to the congregation on May 19.

Decision followed 'season of devoted listening'

"Four months ago, the leadership team stood before you and asked for your prayers and your voices regarding building use and pastor autonomy for same-sex marriages," the letter states. "We believed then, as we do now that UBC is a place that celebrates intellectual and theological diversity, but felt that our ambiguity on these policies had the potential to create harm for those in the LGBTQ community."

The letter notes the "many and varied perspectives of the people who call UBC home" voiced during the "season of devoted listening."

"On the matter of building use for same-sex marriages, we have voted yes. On the matter of pastoral autonomy with regard to performing LGBTQ marriages, we have voted yes," the letter from the leadership team states.

“Though it is not our polity at UBC to take congregational votes, in January we said that it was our aim to come to our best collective/theological conclusions on these decisions, and so it is important to share that our votes were consistent with both congregational and pastoral feedback.”

The letter acknowledges not everyone in the church would receive the decision the same way.

“We know that for some this announcement comes with great joy, and we sit with and among you today. We know that for some this announcement comes with loss, and we sit with and among you today. We know that for many this is a day of uncertainty or ambiguity—too much, not enough, or some other singular or mixed emotional highs and lows—and we sit with and among you, too,” the letter states.

Study and conversation



Josh Carney

In an interview, Pastor Josh Carney said a request from a same-sex couple to use the church building for their wedding prompted the action.

However, prior to receiving the request, he noted a growing awareness of LGBTQ individuals attending the church and wondered if the church’s unwillingness to publicly acknowledge their presence created “an unsafe

space for them.”

Once the leadership team determined to study the issue, the church devoted three weeks of sermons and four Wednesday evenings of study and discussion to the matter, he said.

The Wednesday studies included how to handle difficult conversations in loving ways, as well as exploring issues of biblical interpretation and theological discernment.

Carney acknowledged not everyone in the congregation would be entirely satisfied with the position the leadership team took, but he commended members of the worshipping community for the way they have handled different viewpoints.

“I am proud of our people. They have done an exceptional job of treating each other really well,” he said.

Relationship to the BGCT

At the November 2016 BGCT annual meeting in Waco, Texas Baptists approved a motion establishing affirmation of same-sex marriage as grounds for declaring a church outside the bounds of cooperation with the state convention.

Carrying out that policy, the BGCT Executive Board in February 2017 declared three churches—Lake Shore Baptist in Waco, First Baptist in Austin and Wilshire Baptist in Dallas—“outside of harmonious cooperation” with the BGCT.

Concerning University Baptist Church, “the convention’s executive leadership and elected officers will work together over the coming days to gather information and, if needed, refer the situation to the Executive Board for further consideration,” said Joshua Minatrea, BGCT

communications director.

Carney recognized the policy University Baptist Church has adopted regarding same-sex marriage is contrary to the stated position of the BGCT, as well as Baylor University and Truett Theological Seminary.

Carney earned his Master of Divinity degree from Truett, and the seminary's Kyle Lake Center for Effective Preaching is named for a 1997 Truett Seminary graduate who died while serving as pastor of University Baptist Church.

"We are interested in maintaining our relationship with the BGCT and with Truett. We will continue to honor them and speak well of them. We will celebrate the good work they are doing, despite what is decided," he said.