

# **Commentary: Church Clarity pressures pastors and churches to disclose views on homosexuality**

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(RNS) — Jim has happily attended his church for more than six months. But he decided that this past Sunday would be his last. Why? Because he attended a membership class and discovered the church’s position on homosexuality. Jim feels this is an issue over which he cannot compromise, so he has no choice except to leave the church he once loved.

The story of this fictitious man has increasingly played out in real life, and believers on both sides of the issues have been harmed by it. Imagine a gay man and his husband are welcomed into a local church and even allowed to volunteer. Months later, however, the couple discover that the church does not recognize or support their union. The couple is prohibited from joining the church and their young children cannot be baptized. Or envision a conservative family walks into a contemporary church they think their children will like. But later they discover that the pastor has performed a same-sex wedding, which conflicts with their deeply held convictions and biblical interpretations.

I’ve heard countless stories like these from both conservative and progressive Christian friends. But thanks to a new website, these stories may become a relic of the past. Today, a new organization, [Church Clarity](#), launched an online database that will score churches’ positions on the issue and rate each congregation as either “affirming” or “non-affirming.”

The organization claims to be neutral on the issue, but visitors will be excused from assuming otherwise based on the organization's leadership. Two of CC's co-founders — Tim Schraeder, who identifies as gay, and Sarah Ngu, who identifies as queer — are clearly more progressive on the issue. The third, George Mekhail, identifies as straight but serves at the LGBT-affirming Riverside Church in Manhattan. Mekhail formerly served as a pastor at EastLake Church in Seattle, an evangelical megachurch that famously created controversy when [Time magazine reported](#) it had quietly become LGBT-affirming. Julie Rodgers, a lesbian writer living in Washington, D.C., is also listed as an adviser to the organization.

Even still, CC's mission is one that many conservative Christians should embrace. Many evangelicals have decried the theological ambiguity of some churches and have called for greater clarity on the matter.

Last year, Eugene Peterson told me in an interview that [he had evolved on LGBT issues and would perform a same-sex wedding](#), before [retracting the statement a day later](#). Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, responded that the ordeal underscored the need for every leader and congregation to "have your answer ready." He [wrote](#):

Every pastor, every Christian leader, every author — even every believer — will have to answer the question. The question cannot simply be about same-sex marriage. The question is about whether or not the believer is willing to declare and defend God's revealed plan for human sexuality and gender as clearly revealed in the Bible.... Evasive, wandering, and inconclusive answers will be seen for what they are. Those who have fled for security to the house of evasion must know that the structure has crumbled. It always does.

If one can set aside CC's leadership team for a moment, it's obvious that the organization shares a common goal with conservative Christians like Mohler: to pressure pastors and churches with unclear positions on

homosexuality to unambiguously state their views.

CC's Schraeder told me via email that they have "scored" 24 churches so far, and another 100 churches have been [submitted via the crowdsourcing form](#) on the website. These will take time to process and verify before they are listed on the website, Schraeder said.

The organization's initial efforts to promote their campaign have already created a firestorm on social media, but the organization's leaders tell me there is more to come. They will now begin posting quote memes from well-known Christian leaders and pastors who have spoken about the need for clarity but have yet to disclose their positions on this matter.

One quote, from LifeChurch.tv's Craig Groeschel, for example, says, "You are only as strong as you are honest." LifeChurch.tv has been [classified](#) as "Unclear: Non-Affirming." A selection of forthcoming memes has been inserted below this article.

When I asked Mekhail whether the organization was trying to use these conservative pastors' own words against them, he said: "We aren't. We actually agree with their quotes. We also don't think that there is any logical reason to be 'against' clarity. Clarity is reasonable."

But the organization curiously does not list any liberal congregations that are classified as unclear. In fact, the current website is stacked mostly with evangelical megachurches led by celebrity pastors. Mekhail says that this isn't intentional, but rather that megachurches are both the most visible and tend to get away with ambiguity.

In a time when the church is bitterly divided over sexual ethics and LGBT issues, it is, well, unclear, whether Church Clarity's effort will create more division or less. While we certainly don't want the "Jims" of the world to feel duped by their local congregation, we don't want to further polarize the Christian community on an issue that is riddled with nuance. If Church

Clarity has its way, the messy middle on this issue will shrink or be eliminated.

Regardless, you can expect that many pastors will find themselves on the hot seat in the coming days thanks to Church Clarity's efforts. And this is exactly what CC's leaders hope will happen.

"As any organizer knows, pressure becomes a necessary option when those in power refuse to engage in conversation with you," Ngu says. "We do want to have conversations with leaders and help them become more clear, but the truth is that for some leaders, unless they feel the pressure, they aren't going to care."

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