

A letter to First Church | from the Student Advisory Council

When we heard the rulings that came from the General Conference we felt betrayed, frustrated, ignored, disturbed, surprised, and heartbroken; some in our community felt dehumanized and even denied of their natural God-given identity. Through our shock and disbelief, it was clear from the very beginning that our youth community did not agree with the exclusion of LGBTQ+ people from the life of the church. We felt a strong urge to do something to change it.

After further educating ourselves on how we had come to this place in our denomination, not only do we disagree with the ruling, we also feel like this decision was made without taking us into consideration – and now we are being called on to help clean up the mess from the aftershock. We are not voiceless – the youth and children matter in this decision too – our opinions and our viewpoints are just as valid and important as any adult's. We don't want to be dismissed or overlooked because of our age. We are the future of the church.

So, we wanted to respond with action and to help lead the movement toward full inclusion and acceptance of all people. We believe that our LGBTQ+ family should be able to be married in the church and have the same rights as everyone else. We also believe that our LGBTQ+ family should be able to be ordained ministers in the church. As young people, it feels like we are living in two different societies – one where we can live our everyday lives of love and acceptance for our peers and their various identities, and then life at our church, which preaches love and acceptance, but isn't making bold action to bring those words to life. We want new conversations about sexuality, identity and culture. We want radical acceptance – we want to be 100% open and accepting of all people no matter their sexual orientation, race, and socio-economic status – NO MATTER WHAT.

On the level of personal identity, this issue is crucial to our youth. Many of us are personally living out our LGBTQ+ identity. This decision has challenged and devastated our faith and mental health. We are scared that this crucial and beautiful time in our lives will be looked upon with the church as an enemy. If there isn't a change in the church, why would the youth want to stay committed to first church as an institution? Are we playing it safe and staying in our comfort zone, or are we preparing for future generations of the church? Frankly, we do not see a future where our children will attend a church that preaches love and acceptance for all, but has contradictions written in the fine print.

If we are not bold with our words and actions today, future generations will look back and see our polite efforts and ask why we didn't do more. We wish the church wasn't so concerned with what we might lose by making bold statements- and instead would think of the people we might lose if we continue to just stand idly by. If we are hindered by a refusal of acceptance, we are doomed to be rejected in the end. We must learn to love completely, openly and without fear of consequence.

We know that true growth in faith comes from stepping out of the boat and walking on the stormy waters. God calls us to step out of our comfort zone and become advocates for change. We will continue to raise our voices. We will continue to speak up and speak out against injustice. We will be present and participate in more conversations with our congregation. We would even be willing to attend the next General Conference and participate in larger conversations within our denomination. We want to stand up and be leaders creating change – we want to help lead our church and our society towards bolder love and grace.

We love this church – it has been a safe place for us to learn, grow and explore our faith for many years, but we have reached a turning point- where hard decisions must be made and action must be taken. One of the earliest themes we learned from the church was to love God and love our neighbor. We fail to see how we are living into this calling by excluding people and by abiding by rules that are borne of ignorance and hate. We want FirstChurch to make a stand in both word and action. Our youth community is ready to stand with you and lead the way forward, together. Our youth are calling out to you all – help us fight for full inclusion for all people.