

Explore your journey in faith at First Baptist



September 8, 2016

Welcome to the Executive Committee of ABC-USA,

First Baptist Church of Rochester would like to take this unique opportunity to welcome you to our church. We hope to acquaint you with the history of our church as it nears its 200th anniversary of praising the power of God in our lives. Contained within this folder you will find a synopsis of our commitment to American Baptist principles and the long story of our efforts to uplift the lives of others through worship, education, ministry development, local and international missions.

In 2012, First Baptist of Rochester took another step towards being a positive and safe spiritual home for all of God's people. After a decade of prayer, education, discussion, surveys and a congregational vote, we felt called by the Holy Spirit to become a Welcoming and Affirming Baptist Church to the LGBTQ community. We recognize that not all American Baptist Churches have reached the same conclusion as First Baptist Church of Rochester and we unequivocally support the way that other churches have come to live their understanding of Christian views. It is very Baptist-like to have and to honor such differences.

We are seeking your advice about a related issue. The website of ABC-USA states that, "***we have tended to avoid embracing prepared creeds and other statements that might compromise our obligation to interpret Scripture as individuals within the community of faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit***". However, a simple internet search by anyone looking for a supportive congregation will lead to a document approved in 2005, "We are American Baptists", which states that all American Baptists believe that "***Marriage is between one man and one woman and that the practice of homosexuality is inconsistent with scriptural teaching***". It implies a single mind and a single Biblical interpretation among all American Baptists on this subject.

First Baptist wishes to address what seems to be a retreat from the core Baptist principle of Soul Freedom for individuals and congregations to interpret Scripture as God leads them to do so. We would like to participate with others in moving our denomination forward in constructive and healthy dialog. Our hope is that at some future point through further discernment work, we will be able to remove that statement that some find incompatible with core Baptist principles and personal theology. We are unsure of an appropriate way to open this conversation with other American Baptist churches. We would appreciate your counsel on how to reach out to other churches on this topic.

We thank you for the time and consideration that you will give to these shared thoughts. We hope that the next several days will be of benefit to you. Your committee and the good work that you do will be included in our prayers.

Thank you,

Committee on Welcome and Affirmation
First Baptist Church of Rochester, NY

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