

POSSIBLE CHANGE IN OUR AMERICAN BAPTIST REGIONAL AFFILIATION

Many of you heard the sermons the past two Sundays about how we are “A People Who Share Baptist Affiliation & Identity,” as well as Pastor Alice’s sermon July 25, “Free to Be: A Local Church Who Organizes & Ordains as Christ Leads Us.” (See box with links to these.) You therefore know that one of the key tenets of our Baptist identity is the autonomy of each church congregation to determine its own direction, including its doctrine, mission, and style of worship, within the American Baptist framework. As you learned, every American Baptist congregation is affiliated with a region; Calvary’s regional affiliation is with the American Baptist Churches of the Rocky Mountains (ABCRM). In the past several years, we’ve seen the Baptist freedom of local church autonomy come in conflict with ABCRM’s Statement on Homosexuality which prevents Calvary and other member churches from having regionally recognized ordinations of qualified persons from the LGBTQ+ community. This has led to many discussions and communications over the past 5 years to try to reach a workable compromise, with Calvary suggesting a number of alternatives on the regional and national level, but none have led to a solution.

Review the sermons about the role of regions and the local church on our website ([page is titled “Sermon Gallery” under the “Worship” tab](#))

We are now at the point where ABCRM has advised Calvary’s leadership that they don’t intend to take up this issue for consideration in the near future. Calvary’s Church Council has therefore considered what other options might be available to us that would honor Calvary’s

Calvary’s Statement of Inclusion:
Calvary welcomes and affirms all people as children of God from every cultural and religious background, sexual orientation, family composition, physical and mental ability, economic means, race, age, and gender.

Statement of Inclusion and meet the needs of *all* candidates, including LGBTQ+ persons, who wish to be ordained at Calvary, and also have their ordination recognized by ABCUSA. Council has determined that it is time to bring this issue to the congregation for discussion and a congregational vote on the option that seems most feasible: the possibility of changing our ABCUSA region affiliation to one that would allow us to fully exercise our church autonomy with regards to ordaining candidates from the LGBTQ+ community.

How is that possible, you may ask? The alternate region that Council has identified is the Evergreen Association of American Baptist Churches USA. This “region” is not geographically based as most regions within the ABCUSA are. It is, however, primarily in the West, with churches in Washington (where it is based), California, Utah, Idaho, Alaska, and Colorado (First Baptist Church of Denver). There is much to learn about this possibility, and Council has appointed a Discernment Team* to coordinate the communication and discussion process over the coming weeks. The opportunities listed in the table below have been scheduled so far, and additional options may be offered depending on where these initial discussions lead us. A congregational vote on this matter will be scheduled for late September.

Whatever our decision, Rev. Dr. Steve Van Ostran, Executive Minister of ABCRM, has stated:

“Whether the church affiliates with Evergreen or chooses to remain with ABCRM, I and region staff will pledge our commitment to stay in contact, to find opportunities for mutual ministry where possible, and continue to assist in forging cross-congregational relationships in mission and ministry. Indeed we continue to seek to do that with congregations who have chosen to leave ABC by offering to support them in whatever ways they might choose to allow.”

Reverend Van Ostran has indicated that Calvary members may, for example, continue to participate on mission trips with ABCRM and continue to serve on committees (though not as Chair). This would do much to ease our transition should we elect to change our affiliation and would honor the long-standing relationships and partnerships that many share between Calvary and ABCRM.

This is an important congregational decision, and we encourage everyone to spend the time necessary to evaluate this option and help the congregation as a whole make a good decision that is in the best interests of Calvary’s membership and values. We thank you in advance for making this important investment in our future.

*Beth Dickinson, Erin Gangloff, Brenda Goodman, and Walter Rowell – Chairman

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING MORE ABOUT A POSSIBLE CHANGE IN ABCUSA REGION AFFILIATION	
Congregational in-person meetings and discussions after church services	August 22 and September 19 – Discernment Team members will present information on the history of the issue, outline Evergreen’s structure, policies, and operations, and answer questions. The August 22 meeting will be recorded and posted on the CBC website Discernment Team page.
E-News	Periodic updates will be provided in the E-News
Tuesday Zoom meetings	Guest speakers will talk about Evergreen and ABCRM, as follows: September 14, 7:00 p.m. Zoom – Rev. Doug Avilesbernal – Evergreen Association. September 21, 7:00 p.m. Zoom – Rev. Dr. Steve Van Ostran – ABCRM
Information page on Calvary Website. Page titled “Discernment: Regional Affiliation” under “About” tab	This page will be a source of information about the history of the issue, what has been done to try to reach a compromise with ABCRM, and everything you might want to know about Evergreen. Recordings will also be available of Zoom sessions. View website page here.
FAQ’s on the information page	This will start with some basic questions/answers that we expect everyone will want to know about, and be expanded as other questions arise during the course of our discussion.

Question "Box"	An email account has been set up (DiscernmentTeam@calvarydenver.org) where congregational members can ask questions confidentially. This account will only be accessible by Discernment Team members. Your questions and the answers may be posted generically in the FAQs, but they will not be attributed to you.
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