

Frequently Asked Questions About This Year's
Proposed Amendment to the SDB Statement of Belief

1. Why is this proposed amendment to the Statement of Belief coming now?

A: In 2015, the General Conference passed the following recommendation, after a recommendation was made from the floor, and the matter was referred to the Conference's Interest Committee on Christian Social Action:

We recommend that the Standing Committee on Faith and Order examine the possibility of amending the Seventh Day Baptist Statement of Belief to include a statement concerning the topics of Human Sexuality, Family, and/or Marriage.

The recommendation on the floor came partially in response to the 2015 Supreme Court case *Obergefell v Hodges*, which legalized "same sex marriage." Several SDB churches contacted the General Conference office with questions related to the protection of their religious liberty to dissent from the new laws of the land regarding marriage law, and resources were distributed to local churches from third party organizations. The resources distributed to local churches surrounding these questions recommended that local churches make statements about their convictions on marriage, including them in their local statements of belief. At least 12 member churches of the General Conference have taken these measures to date.

As the local churches began to respond to the changing legal landscape, the General Conference also needed to respond, and at Conference, the statement which the Conference has repeatedly passed (4 times in 11 years) regarding the definition of marriage, was once again affirmed. The recommendation to consider additional language is therefore also part of a legal response meant to protect the Conference in the event of litigation, as making a change provides an additional clarification of our long-standing position on the definition of marriage.

2. If the issue was "same sex marriage," why does the proposed amendment include a statement on family?

Our biblical beliefs about marriage (that it was established by God for an explicit purpose: to propagate human life in the context of family, either by birth or adoption, as a ground for human culture and society) link the two things together, and since our Statement of Belief is a theological document (not just a resolution where we can say a thing in isolation) it was both appropriate and necessary to link them. Seventh Day Baptists describe ourselves as a family people, but there was nothing in our statement of belief to provide any theological basis for such a statement. The proposed amendment rectifies that situation, and allows us to say unambiguously what we support rather than what we oppose.

3. Why should a church vote to approve this amendment?

There are a couple of reasons that a member church would cast their votes to approve this amendment. The first and best reason for a church to vote to approve this amendment is because it adequately describes the congregation's beliefs about marriage and family, and because they believe it does belong

in our statement of belief. A secondary reason to approve the statement would be because you believe being clear about our belief in this matter to a watching world is important for our witness. Another reason is to provide a clear statement doctrinally that this is not only a preference some of us have, but rather the clear witness of Scripture. This last point would be especially important if you believe litigation on this matter in our country is imminent.

4. Why should a church vote not to approve this amendment?

There are a couple of reasons that a member church would cast their votes not to approve this amendment. The first and best reason for a church to refuse this amendment is because it does not adequately describe the congregation's beliefs about marriage and family. On a related note, if your congregation does not believe that this issue rises to the level of inclusion in the statement of belief or that our resolutions are adequate, that would be a reason to vote against it. Another possible reason to vote against this amendment is if you think publicly disclosing this belief would be damaging to our Gospel witness in our current cultural climate, or that litigation on these matters is unlikely.

5. What should my church do in response to this discussion?

Assuredly, we live in dynamic cultural conditions, including politically and socially. It is important for the member churches of the General Conference to be both discerning and wise in such times. Local churches should regularly be evaluating themselves to consider how they can best reach a lost and broken world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This evaluation should include both practical and theological components. Theologically, local churches need to be teaching the faith and preaching the Gospel—both to themselves and to a watching world. Clearly articulating shared beliefs winsomely and graciously is a responsibility we all share. As Seventh Day Baptists, we believe in liberty of conscience, but this liberty is not unlimited in the context of our churches, and so local congregations should have a sense of what are necessary shared beliefs and what issues allow for a broader array of conscience. Practically, churches should be looking for concrete strategies to make their witness known as they live their faith, so that our Statement of Belief finds expression in the way that we live. In addition, churches should be diligent with respect to their relationship to the law and to the civil authorities, taking appropriate steps to protect themselves and their congregations while obeying those appointed by God to govern. This includes securing adequate insurance and writing appropriate policies which describe how the church wishes to function in light of its beliefs. More specifically with respect to the issue of “same sex marriage,” local churches should have a clear sense of what they believe and how they will function, taking adequate steps to document both their beliefs and the outworking of those beliefs in the policies of the church.

If you have additional questions about any of these matters, please contact:

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