

# Board-Clergy Task Force Report on the Open Letter on Requests to the General Church of the New Jerusalem Regarding LGBTQIA+ Issues

November 28, 2022

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## Introduction/Charge

A Task Force was formed by Bishop Buss in response to a General Church Board of Directors motion, seeking to “examine and recommend an organizational response to the Open Letter” (**addendum D**) and to report back on the same to a special Board meeting for that purpose (meeting held on August 27, 2022). Bishop Buss formed the Task Force with a balance of administration, clergy and Board members (see list of Task Force members in **addendum A**) and encouraged the group to look at the response in light of ongoing General Church efforts to develop and improve communication processes.

The Task Force’s work was conducted through frequent email communications and a series of meetings held from July until the present, summarized briefly in **addendum C**. Church member feedback and current research on pertinent topics informed the discussions and decisions of this body. The member feedback we received, while it represented a broad range of positions, generally indicated support for defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

In what follows, the Task Force aims to respond to the Open Letter through the framework of a question: “As it stands, what is the General Church position on the issues raised?” We strove to focus our work on inquiry and reporting, because the Task Force does not have the authority to make doctrinal statements or policy changes.

Our work as a committee was characterized by careful, respectful conversations. Our vision/hope is that through similar dialogue with clergy, board members, and church members more broadly, our church can live out the principles expressed in Bishop Buss’s letter accompanying this report.

The report which follows aims to share some of the detailed consideration and findings that came out of our process. It is written as a report to the General Church Board and Clergy, but also with

the understanding that it will be communicated to a broad readership around the church. This report is not and should not be regarded or interpreted as an official position paper of the General Church, its clergy, or its Board.

## **Review of the Open Letter**

The Task Force conducted an investigation into the current doctrinal and policy issues raised by the Open Letter. The following report is a response to these issues, prepared in collaboration with Bishop Buss. It was written in light of the General Church clergy's adherence to the model of marriage between one man and one woman, with the goal of also communicating welcome and love to people who experience LGBTQIA+ issues and refraining from spiritual judgment or assessing others by mere appearances.

[Request 1] Regarding the request to acknowledge differing doctrinal interpretations, the Task Force finds that the General Church affirms the value and right of individuals to seek their own interpretations of what the Word says. We are unaware of any doctrine that would hinder one's opportunity to come to conclusions other than those stated by Church officials. The Heavenly Doctrines entitle people to "be left in peace" to form and hold their own opinions, so long as they are not "disturbing the church" (NJHD 318). Lay people are encouraged to read sincerely while "looking to the good of life," "approaching the Word reverently," and "with the affection for truth" (SS 19; 41; 55; DP 259 AC 1776; 2568.2; 4027; AE 293; 1067).

Clergy have additional professional constraints that call them to teach the doctrine of their church and lead to the good of life (NJHD 315) and to strive for a "wholeness and purity of doctrine" (TCR 245). Further, we are taught that an understanding of doctrine is necessary to the understanding of the Word (TCR 225, SS 51-59). Additionally, clergy must meet standards of conduct outlined in the Employee Handbook for General Church employees. These standards should not be taken to imply expectations for the behavior of individual members.

[Request 2] Regarding hurt caused by the General Church, Task Force members discussed distress resulting from the perception that the Church discourages affiliation of some persons on the grounds of their sexual identity. We noted two ideas that have been perceived as coming from the General Church: first, that those with LGBTQIA+ experiences are not wanted in the church, and second, that these people are somehow uniquely bad or worse than other people. The Task Force found that neither of these ideas has a doctrinal basis, and neither is part of the General Church's intended message. Bishop Buss's message reflects this same finding.

[Request 3] Regarding employment policies, we spoke extensively with General Church Human Resources and legal counsel to gain a better understanding of how being a religious organization (a church), guided by religious principles, impacts employment issues. The Task Force received input from legal counsel as follows:

First, the General Church will not engage in discrimination, harassment, or retaliation that is unlawful. But the First Amendment's prohibition against laws that abridge the free exercise of religion results in the following: some conduct engaged in by a religious organization is lawful that otherwise would be unlawful were the organization not religious.

But even if conduct is permissible, the Church may conclude that it is unacceptable. Employees should not be harassed or subject to bullying, even if such conduct is permissible. We expect all employees to treat each other with respect and civility. This is always important, and it is particularly important when we disagree. At the same time, the Church retains the right to take such corrective action it deems appropriate if it concludes that unacceptable harassing or bullying conduct has occurred, regardless of whether or not it is unlawful.

One other thing we can report from a Human Resources standpoint is an intention to perform an employee engagement survey, which could further capture workplace perspectives. This is a standard method of helping organizations nurture a collegial workforce of passionate, loyal, and successful people. Such surveys have been used in the past and have helped in supporting the high goals of the General Church and the Academy of the New Church, and in promoting the professional and personal growth of its employees.

An added consideration of the Task Force extended into the many important volunteer positions that sustain the Church. In the case of volunteers who have positions of authority or representation within the church, staff work with these individuals in striving to represent the church faithfully.

[Request 4] Regarding the use of inclusive language and safe environments in schools and church communities, Task Force discussion acknowledged that all people – employees or not – experience the impact of this subject in personal and significant ways. We hear a call for a sensitized approach to how we handle these issues in our communities and our schools. Task Force proceedings included examination of educational materials on the subject at hand, which are cited in the appendix of this report concerning Resources Consulted (**addendum B**). Note that the Task Force lacks the professional qualifications to assess the strengths and weakness of such research with confidence. Also, it is not charged with making church or school policies. The Task Force notes that our schools, including our international schools, are located across a range of legal and cultural environments, adding significant complexity to this discussion. At this time, a significant part of our elementary schools' work on policy occurs at the level of the individual institution, guided by pertinent local standards. Church-wide curriculum guidelines are implemented under the leadership of General Church Education. The Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools and Bryn Athyn College determine their own educational policies. Efforts are made to have an appropriate consistency across our organizations. Work in this area is in its early stages and there is encouragement in the Task Force for further study of this issue.

[Request 5] Regarding the request for welcoming congregations, the General Church encourages and trusts all of our congregations to work toward being welcoming spaces and affirms the variety of pastoral approaches taken according to the needs, qualities, and cultural settings of individual societies. An expectation is that all congregations will work within the general framework of church principles and doctrinal perspective in their efforts to be welcoming. We have considered some examples of ways that congregations might be supportive within these doctrinal principles, such as establishing small groups that focus on LGBTQIA+ challenges, and helping members to better understand and support family, friends, and congregation members who have LGBTQIA+ experiences.

[Request 6] Regarding use of church facilities, each congregation has a distinct mission, points of focus, and variation in facilities, and it is not clear how the General Church Central Office might enforce a standard policy on building usage without abridging the role of local decision-making. The Central

Office is currently working on a Statement of Relationship document to help clarify how authority and responsibility for decision making is shared between central offices and local congregations.

[Request 7] Regarding the request to allow General Church ministers to support LGBTQIA+ people, the Task Force found significant support for doing better as a church to engage with people and families who deal with LGBTQIA+ experiences. It was recognized that these issues are culturally, politically, and personally relevant for many people and that there is a strong desire among church members and clergy to find ways to help these people and their families toward a life in heaven. The endeavor and the judgment needed for religious counseling are an entrusted responsibility of members of the clergy.

Ministers with varying doctrinal perspectives might wish to research best practices and seek out a clear doctrinal basis and other materials within a General Church framework for effectively supporting people with LGBTQIA+ experiences. They may wish to explore developing scientific understandings of sex and gender in the light of New Church doctrine and research, potentially in collaboration with faculty at Bryn Athyn College. They could prepare suitable educational materials which congregations and schools could use to assist employees leading and teaching individuals with LGBTQIA+ experiences.

[Request 8] Regarding a policy allowing General Church ministers to officiate weddings of LGBTQIA+ identifying people, the Task Force noted that same-sex weddings are not aligned with the General Church understanding of the ideals of conjugal love, and that church leadership has been clear that this would not be permitted in the General Church.

[Request 9] Finally, regarding the admission of all people regardless of sex, gender, or sexual orientation to the Theological School and the ministry, the Task Force elected not to closely consider the issue of women in the ministry, with the intention of devoting full attention to issues of differing experiences of gender and sexual orientation. Admissions decisions are based on aptitude as well as doctrinal convictions aligned with the General Church, and willingness to live accordingly.

## **Order and Organization**

The Task Force discussed the impression that Bishop Buss's article in *New Church Life* on "Standing for Marriage..." was final and binding in a way that is out of keeping with our long-standing organizational principles. Discussion included acknowledging other times within the General Church when bishops have spoken to matters affecting the overall church, as a part of their priestly duty to lead from the Word. Care could be taken in the future, however, to clarify that the bishop or the priesthood is speaking in such situations from their best current understanding of the Word, and with respect for people's rights to see things differently based on their own study.

The Open Letter makes reference to one statement in the Order and Organization of the General Church. Since many of the issues that are mentioned in the Open Letter call for a change in policies or practices, the Task Force feels that it is useful to briefly review this governing document.

By long tradition, the General Church is not governed by a constitution or bylaws. Rather, the leadership and the members seek enlightenment and direction from the Three-Fold Word. The Order and Organization is best seen as an evolving charter that guides the uses of the General Church and

describes how it operates. In general, it states that those uses are governed by the priests of the church, who are led by the bishop.

The Order and Organization impacts the life of the church in two main areas:

1. Leadership of the members.
2. Leadership of the employees.

#### Members

To quote the Order and Organization: “The Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Writings together are the supreme authority in matters of faith. Neither the Bishop of the General Church...nor the clergy, nor any council or assembly of the Church should, by pronouncement or by majority vote, decide doctrinal issues and thereby bind the conscience of the Church.”

We understand this to mean that the beliefs of members can arise from their own study of the Word aided by the teaching of priests, but there is no “official doctrine” that members must follow. Any articulation of doctrinal understanding – by a priest or bishop – should be seen as his best current understanding, subject to further approach of the Word itself. Clergy members offer their doctrinal understanding to help individuals in their faith journey.

The Order and Organization defines “the membership of the General Church [as] those who have been baptized into the faith of the New Church, and who subscribe to the principles and purposes of the General Church.” More can be found about these purposes and principles online <https://newchurch.org/get-involved/join-us/purpose-and-principles/>. Applications for membership are submitted to the bishop, who responds to membership requests.

#### Employees

According to the Order and Organization, “The Executive Bishop of the General Church is its chief governor and general pastor.” This is in line with the following teaching: *“To keep the affairs of the Church in order there must be wise and God-fearing governors who are skilled in the Divine Law. There must also be subordination among the governors lest from caprice or ignorance evils contrary to order be sanctioned (New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine 311, 313).”*

Our understanding of this is that the bishop – with a great deal of counsel – can, among other things, set expectations as a condition of employment such that pastors and other employees carry out their work in ways that are consistent with the doctrine of the church as it is currently understood. That same control does not apply to members of the church who are not employees.

#### **Communications**

The General Church has solicited feedback at several points in the series of Open Letter communications, with the intention of better understanding how the conversation surrounding gender and sexuality impacts the General Church community in as balanced a way as possible. The Church remains open to your thoughts and dialogue regarding how we can continue to serve you. One way to voice questions and concerns is through the Bishop's Council, the newest General Church mechanism for soliciting the input and perspectives of lay people. You are able to contact this body with concerns for

discussion by sending a message to [memberservices@newchurch.org](mailto:memberservices@newchurch.org) with the subject line, “Attn: Bishop’s Council.”

The General Church welcomes any messages for the Central Office at [memberservices@newchurch.org](mailto:memberservices@newchurch.org). If a response is desired, please request one in your message.

We encourage engagement with pastors and ministers at a local level as well, who can address ongoing exploration of living your faith. The General Church Central Office is happy to facilitate contact with a member of the clergy as needed.

## **Conclusion**

The Task Force sees areas in which the General Church can continue to make progress in becoming the best possible expression of the Lord’s church on earth. Some of those key areas reflected in our conversations included the following:

- 1) focusing on employee safeguards and responsibilities;
- 2) ongoing work on school and congregational policies and practices;
- 3) encouraging language that is as clear, respectful, and as helpful as possible; and
- 4) ongoing and careful study of the Word as well as other sources of information, seeking tools to understand and support people who deal with challenges around sex and gender.

The analyses in this report essentially, but not exhaustively, represent the sentiments of the Task Force. Where points of disagreement arose, we were able to reach a general consensus, but we acknowledge that some Task Force members are hoping to see clearer lines drawn and boundaries placed around matters of sex and gender, while others would see it as useful to have more variety in approaches within the General Church and its affiliated organizations.

We include this note on variety in perspective, first, in the interest of transparency about the reality of our process and the voice in this document, and second, to reflect that a range of perspectives is found among engaged students of the Word.

This phenomenon was echoed throughout nearly 180 pages received as direct feedback, added to numerous emails shared by caring members of the Church. We wish to express thanks for the many hours respondents spent providing our group with thought-provoking reflections on the subject. We also recognize the care, concern and thought that went into the authoring and signing the Open Letter. The email address available to members and friends for offering feedback – [memberservices@newchurch.org](mailto:memberservices@newchurch.org) – remains open. Individuals are also always encouraged to contact their local pastor(s) with questions for further conversation.

## Appendix

### **A: Task Force Members**

**Task Force Chair:** Rt. Rev. Peter Buss Jr.

**Task Force Co-Chair:** Charlotte Gyllenhaal, PhD

#### Marijke Bau-Madsen

I joined the team at the General Church central office in 2021 as Director of Communications and have spent most of my life in the Bryn Athyn Church Society. I received an undergraduate degree from Bryn Athyn College in history and political science followed by a Master of Liberal Arts from the University of Pennsylvania.

#### John Berridge, PhD

I was born into a Conference Church family, moving to the General Church as a teenager. I'm now a retired pharmaceutical consultant, having been Vice President of pharmaceutical sciences at Pfizer. Living in Kent (south-east England), I've been married to Eileen for 50 years and we have 3 children and 7 grandchildren living in very close proximity. I recently chaired the UK group that helped build a strategic plan for the New Church in the UK. I became a General Church Board member in late 2020 and was asked to chair the Global Healthy Congregations committee in 2022.

#### Rev. Jared Buss

At present I serve as the pastor of the Pittsburgh New Church, where I've been for just over a year. Before moving to Pittsburgh, I served for six years as assistant pastor at the Olivet New Church in Toronto. My wife, Justine, and I have four young children. Our two oldest children attend the Pittsburgh New Church School.

#### Rt. Rev. Peter Buss Jr

As is known I currently serve as Executive Bishop of the General Church and as Chancellor of the Academy of the New Church. Relevant to the work of this Task Force, I coordinate closely with my two colleagues in the Bishop's Office, David Lindrooth and Brad Heinrichs; I also chair the General Church Board and convene the Council of the Clergy. I have served in administrative leadership roles for nine years and served as a pastor for twenty years before that, mostly in the Glenview New Church. I live in Bryn Athyn together with my wife and daughter. We have three other grown children living elsewhere.

#### Rev. Eric Carswell

I recently retired from full-time work, having served in pastoral roles in Pittsburgh, Glenview and Bryn Athyn. I also served as Dean of the Theological School and Vice Chancellor at the Academy of the New Church. Throughout my career I was involved in New Church education, teaching at all levels – elementary school, high school, college, Theological School, and the Master of Arts in Religious Studies (MARS), both religion and secular subjects. I have been married for 47 years and have five 5 adult children and six grandchildren.

Charles Ebert, PhD

I am a retired long term mathematics teacher at Bryn Athyn College. I have been on the General Church Board for a long time and chair the Outreach Committee. My wife and I reside near the Boulder New Church and are very active in outreach and other church support activities.

Charlotte Gyllenhaal, PhD

I am the research manager at the Block Center for Integrative Cancer Treatment in Skokie, Illinois and an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Pharmacy. With my husband, Michael Huft, I spent 30 years living in Glenview. Our children attended New Church schools there and in Bryn Athyn. We were active in a variety of church uses. We now live in northern Indiana, but I remain part of Glenview's church music team. I am a long-time General Church Board member and chair the Education Committee.

Rev. Barry Halterman

Chaplain and Religion Department Head at the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools (BA, Bryn Athyn College; MA, Temple University; MDiv., Academy of the New Church Theological School). I am in charge of all facets of the religion program at ANC including our religion classes, chapel program, pastoral work, and admissions presentations on our New Church faith. I also teach New Church Religion classes to three different grades, teach a Comparative Religions elective, chair our ANC Diversity Equity and Inclusion Team, serve on the Admissions Committee, and help with the boys' basketball team when I can. My wife and I have been married for 33 years and we have 4 adult children.

Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs

For the last three years I have worked as an Assistant Bishop of the General Church. Currently, I also oversee General Church Education, and I am the President of the South African Corporation of the General Church. Prior to my posting in Bryn Athyn, I was at the Carmel New Church in Canada for 20 years, serving as the head pastor and as the principal, I also was the Executive Vice President of the General Church in Canada. I started my career as a Landscape Architect in South Florida and was a part owner of a landscaping design/build business in West Palm Beach.

Stephanie Klippenstein

I live in Weatherby, Missouri, and have served on the General Church Board for the past 7 years. I have been on the General Church Education, Nominating, Communications, and Advancement Committees. I am involved with the Central Midwest New Church Group or Kansas City, Missouri area, which serves several members and nonmembers in our area.

Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth

I currently serve the General Church of the New Jerusalem as one of the two Assistant Bishops. Previous positions for the Church include Director of Outreach, Pastor of the Ivyland New Church, Assistant Pastor of Sunrise Chapel in Tucson Arizona, and Pastor of the New Church in Stockholm Sweden.



### Cathy McQueen

I live in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, and was recently elected to the General Church Board, serving on the Education Committee. My husband and I raised 5 children who attended the Bryn Athyn Church School and the Academy of New Church Secondary Schools. I have been an active volunteer in a variety of church organizations, most recently the Board for New Church Challenge.

### Mark Pendleton, MDiv, LPT

I was born and raised in Bryn Athyn, PA, USA. I'm a licensed Physical Therapist who practiced for three years in that field before returning to theological school. I'm now in my 31<sup>st</sup> year as a priest of the General Church, having served in Kitchener Ontario, Rochester Michigan, Phoenix Arizona, and Glenview Illinois. I'm currently senior pastor in Glenview, where I also serve as Chair of the Glenview Clergy Association. My wife of 10 years, Ellen Detwiler, has two lovely, bright, grown children from a previous marriage. One of my hobby interests and crowning achievements has been the development of a non-profit organization, website, and program which makes the New Church's "doctrine of repentance" into a universal, step-by-step discipline of life change and spiritual transformation, available to people of all faiths and cultures and advertised around the globe via a generous lifetime promotional grant from Google ([www.BeginaNewLife.info](http://www.BeginaNewLife.info)). Other hobby interests include reading the theological writings of Swedenborg from start to finish, regular physical exercise, outdoor labor and landscaping, and driving bulldozers and other heavy equipment. I've loved my New Church faith since late high school. I wish all people well in their spiritual walk with the Lord.

### David Radcliffe

David is a member of the Mitchellville, Maryland society where he lives with his lovely wife Heather. He is a member of the Mitchellville society and General Church boards. David leads the Department of Defense's efforts to build institutional cyber capabilities among allies and partners and consequently spends way too much time in airplanes these days. When he's not working, David loves to hike in High Peaks of the Adirondacks, swim in the Chesapeake Bay, and ride his mountain bike on the local trails.

### Rev. Justin Schorran

I grew up in Kempton PA and attended the church school there. I finished high school at the local public school and then attended Bryn Athyn College and received a degree in religion. After college, I went straight into theological school and was ordained into the first degree of the priesthood on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021. I am currently serving as assistant to the pastor at Carmel New Church in Kitchener Ontario. I teach grades 1-5 at the Carmel New Church School and lead a youth group. Among other things I run three different kinds of doctrinal class, preach once a month at Carmel, do traveling ministry in Dawson Creek/Grande Prairie and preach occasionally at Olivet New Church in Toronto. I got married July 31, 2021, and my wife Denali and I welcomed our first child into the world in May of this year.

### Rev. Brian Smith

Following my ordination in 2010, I worked as an assistant pastor and principal in Toronto for 5 years and in Washington for 7 years. I'm married to Janine, and together we have four school-aged children. I grew up in the Westville, New Church in South Africa, and have visited or worked for our congregations in Australia, England, Ghana, Brazil, Canada and the United States.

## **B: Resources Consulted**

1. *Order and Organization of the General Church of the New Jerusalem*. July 2008.

The General Church has no formal written constitution. Its constitution is the Three-Fold Word. Instead, the statement of Order and Organization outlines the current understanding of the roles of the membership, priesthood and the Bishop. The full text was available to the Task Force and can be obtained at <https://newchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/GC-Order-Organization-July-2008.pdf>.

2. *Standing for Marriage in Today's World. A Church Perspective*. *New Church Life—January/February 2022*—Rt. Rev. Peter Buss, Jr.

Article by Bishop Buss explaining a General Church approach to marriage and LGBTQIA+ matters.

3. *The Role of the General Church Board*. A Report to the General Church Corporation. Prepared by Bishop Peter Buss, June 8, 2020.

The General Church Board is concerned with overseeing the proper distribution and management of the resources of the General Church of the New Jerusalem, which is a non-profit corporation. The Board looks to the priesthood for guidance on ecclesiastical matters. Board responsibilities are those typical of a non-profit organization board of directors: promoting the mission and purpose of the Church, financial oversight, maintaining ethical integrity and accountability, ensuring adequate planning, supporting the Bishop and administrative team, and counseling them on all aspects of Church life. Beyond the fiduciary responsibilities regarding oversight of management, such as approval of budgets and projects that need financing, the Board is a body for input to the Bishop and administration, rather than a decision-making body.

4. *Open Letter - Requests to the General Church of the New Jerusalem Regarding LGBTQIA+*

Letter addressed to the Bishops, General Church Board and General Church clergy members, outlining requests for changing the treatment of LGBTQIA+ persons in the Church. The Open Letter can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/NC-LGBTQIA>

5. *Initial Response to "Open Letter - Requests to the General Church of the New Jerusalem Regarding LGBTQIA+"*, July 3, 2022

Response to the Open Letter from Bishop Buss, Rene Johnson (secretary of General Church Board and Corporation) and Jean Atta (secretary of the Council of the Clergy). Sent by email to Church members. Explains that a joint clergy-Board task force is being set up to address the requests in the Open Letter, and that additional routes of communication on the subject of LGBTQIA+ persons in the church will be set up.

6. *Chosen pronouns and name changes*. PowerPoint file prepared by Charlotte Gyllenhaal, Task Force Co-Chair, for Task Force meeting of August 4, 2022.

Basic background on chosen pronouns and name changes in transgender persons and why they are felt to be important. This presentation also included a discussion of legal cases arising in some public school and business situations in which employees refused to use chosen pronouns and name changes of transgender people that were required in their workplaces, asserting their religious freedom to not

participate in practices they find are in opposition to the Bible. Links to articles describing these cases and a Bloomberg Law review article summarizing the legal situation were provided.

7. *Notes for discussion with Open Letter Task Force.* Summary of a presentation by Karen Stoeller, Department Head of Human Resources for the General Church, for the Task Force meeting of August 4, 2022.

These notes are based on a presentation by Karen Stoeller to a Task Force meeting. It summarizes the employment policies of the General Church, including adherence to all relevant U.S. laws (with specific exceptions such as decisions on hiring of ministers and teachers). It describes the employee handbook and current efforts on a project to foster a Respectful Workplace based on the Ten Commandments. There is also a summary of the Church's Equal Employment Opportunity policy and of protected classes of employees under U.S. law.

8. *Teachings about Marriage and Homosexuality*, by the Rt. Rev. Brad Heinrichs. This collection of passages aims to focus on what the Word says that applies to the subject at hand. Sections include: "The ideal vision of marriage," "Does the Word say anything about same-sex unions?" "Is practicing homosexuality breaking the commandments?" "What if homosexuality is biological," and more.

9. *General Church of the New Jerusalem Employee Handbook.*

The full Employee Handbook of the Church was provided to all Task Force members so they could read specific employment policies regarding ethical conduct, protected classes and related topics.

10. *Implications of biology for the New Church approach to LGBTQIA+ populations.* Paper for private circulation prepared in April 2022 by Charlotte Gyllenhaal and Michael Huft.

Summarizes briefly some current scientific studies on potential biological influences on same-sex attraction, gender dysphoria, intersex conditions and alternate gender identities in the LGBTQIA+ population, with separate discussions for different subgroups in this population. Speculates on how these studies might be seen in the context of New Church doctrines.

11. *Written first-person testimony about experiences of a former Academy of the New Church high school student who is transgender.*

Expresses some of the difficulties faced growing up as transgender in Bryn Athyn and attending New Church schools.

12. *Standards of Care for the Health of Transgender and Gender Diverse People*, Version 8. E. Coleman et al, International Journal of Transgender Health (2022), volume 23, supplement1, S1-S259.

This document, based on scientific research with over 60 pages of reference citations, sets out standards for managing health care for people who are transgender, non-binary, intersex or have other diverse gender identities. This document was made available to Task Force members, although it was not read or studied in detail, which would have been beyond the scope and expertise of members and outside the goal of responding to the Open Letter.

13. *Sex redefined*. Claire Ainsworth. *Nature* (2015), volume 518, number 7539:288-91

Discussion of the large number of chromosomal and hormonal differences among the intersex population, and the difficulties that intersex people face in determinations of gender.

14. *Invited commentary from General Church members on the Open Letter*.

An email was sent out to the General Church mailing list in August with an invitation to send responses for the Task Force to consider in their work. A dedicated email address was included, as was a copy of the Open Letter. Responses were collected by mid-September. 179 pages of single-spaced emails from Church members around the globe were received. In addition, some Task Force members received direct communication from concerned acquaintances, and some of these were shared with the rest of the Task Force. Several of the emails contained detailed doctrinal analyses of requests in the Open Letter. Most responses demonstrated passion and deep engagement in the issues raised, with many favoring and many opposing these requests, but with the greater number expressing support for the General Church policy of viewing marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

15. *Other email correspondence*

Email correspondence was continually circulating among Task Force members during this process, bringing up issues being discussed as well as sharing information about our activities. Email input was also received in a series of emails that began after the meeting with the General Church Board, and that were circulated to all members of the Board and Task Force. This correspondence also displayed passionate and engaged discussion of the relevant doctrines and the Open Letter requests.

## **C: Summary of Task Force Meetings**

### **1. 7/27/2022**

- a. Introductions, setting committee chairs, note taker, decision to invite communication director.
- b. Clarifying and understanding our charge and a path forward. Speed and thoroughness of response. Scope of authority of the committee.
- c. Initial go-around of committee members, thoughts in response to the open letter.

### **2. 8/4/2022**

- a. Report, presentation and discussion on employee related issues, special guest Karen Stoeller, head of General Church Human Resources.
- b. Discussion included update on current legal landscape, key General Church approaches to employee protections and responsibilities, balancing religious mission with realities of civil environment in the range of jurisdiction where the General Church has churches and schools.
- c. Brief review of state of General Church school handbooks, most written prior to gender pronouns becoming a national issue.
- d. Discussion of goals and approach to seeking broader input from church members in response to the petition.

3. **8/27/2022** (special meeting of General Church Board)
  - a. Polarity exercise, seeking individual input into an exploration of fears/threats and positive hopes on two sides of an issue, seeking to synthesize around commonly held goals, and avoidance of pitfalls held in common.
4. **8/31/2022**
  - a. Committee digest of input received from special meeting of the General Church board.
  - b. Efforts to distill the fundamental underlying issues that are on people's minds, for example, a call for acceptance.
  - c. Peter reported on a clergy polling process, showing strong consensus in viewing marriage as being between a man and a woman and sexual activity outside of marriage as disorderly.
  - d. Discussion of form of committee response, length, author, scope.
5. **9/12/2022**
  - a. Digestion of voluminous feedback from church members, sent in for the Task Force.
  - b. Appreciation of the quality and range of feedback. Note made of the concern, ranging to anguish expressed in many of the communications. Noted that part of the feedback questioned the function/legitimacy of the Task Force.
  - c. Settled on the primary form of response from the committee being a letter drafted by Pete, with feedback and input from Task Force.
6. **9/29/2022**
  - a. Discussion of articles and documents shared with the Task Force, including written first-person testimony from a former Academy student. Point by point discussion of open letter. Outline of Pete's letter. Discussion of necessary difference between employees and leaders representing the organization and general members.
7. **10/11/2022**
  - a. Discussion of Pete's drafted letter, and feedback he received from Consistory, Advisory.
  - b. Discussion of how to characterize the consideration of relevant science by the Task Force. That it is important to show, but also that we have neither space nor expertise to provide a thorough literature review of relevant science.
  - c. At the end of the day, we want to bring forward and commit to how we operate.
    - i. We are a group of people that is committed to going back to the Word and studying it.
    - ii. We can always be informed on the natural sciences about what happens in the world
  - d. Considered outline of a possible committee report to accompany Pete's letter and set members of subcommittee to draft
8. **10/19; 10/26; 10/31; 11/8:**
  - a. (Subcommittee charged with drafting Task Force Report)

- b. Detailed review of individual points of Open Letter. Settling outline of report and assigning sections for members to draft, drafting and reviewing each section)
9. **11/10/2022**
- a. Review of drafted task force report and second draft Bishop Buss' letter.
10. **11/21/2022**
- a. Meeting to review final suggested changes to task force report.
  - b. Addressed the concern over distributing report before the Christmas season in tension with the problem of further delay
  - c. Discussed timing of distribution, feedback collection, debriefing meetings with board and clergy in the new year.

**D: Links**

**Order and Organization**

<https://newchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/GC-Order-Organization-July-2008.pdf>

**Open Letter**

<https://tinyurl.com/NC-LGBTQIA>