



December 1st, 2019

An Open Letter Regarding Vox Veniae, Austin, Texas

Dear Friends,

The members of Vox Veniae have voted to disaffiliate ourselves from the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) in light of our discerned commitment to supporting LGBTQ individuals, couples and families who wish to be married and receive the support and blessing of Vox pastors and community members.

### Story of Vox

In 2006, a group of friends were asked by Austin Chinese Church to start a church that would reflect the beauty and diversity of the city in which we lived. Over the next twelve years, we embarked on a journey to live out Christ's love and grew, turning a dilapidated nightclub into a community center to host local artists and nonprofits, and eventually putting down roots in a historic East Austin neighborhood. We became more diverse, less young, and increasingly committed to loving God, our city and our neighbors.

The decision to partner with the ECC is a key part of our story. Connecting with an older, larger tradition of Christian wisdom is something we value and need. We initially understood ECC to be an inclusive church – including all who confess faith in Christ, being rooted in a model of Christian life together that supported diversity of culture and scriptural interpretation and aligned with our values.

Since 2015, Vox Covenant Members have been guided by these values through a process of learning about gender and relational diversity through engaging the scriptures and listening to God, our LGBTQ members, ourselves, and each other. We value mystery over certainty, and we practice deferring to the guidance of God's Spirit in all areas of our lives. It is not part of Vox culture to craft statements top down and then vote on them; therefore, for ten years, we lived life together and then put our journey into words. Our LGBTQ Journey Description captures the story of these conversations over five years and is not a fixed vision or aspiration, but rather a description of ourselves and our journey together, born out of listening circles and prayerful discernment together.

### LGBTQ Journey Description

Vox is committed to the following practices regarding diversity:

- We welcome and invite LGBTQ persons and families to participate at all levels of community, partaking in sacraments, serving in ministry, joining as members, and holding leadership roles as we are called.
- We recognize same-sex marriages and perform same-sex weddings.
- We practice spiritual discernment and empathetic conversations together.
- We welcome diversity of theological views and scripture interpretations, and do not strive for agreement or certainty.
- We use tools of listening, empathy, and nonviolent communication to refrain from trying to change anyone's mind on matters of discussion; rather, we practice listening, learning, and discerning God's spirit together.

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3106 E 1/4<sup>th</sup> 1/2 ST  
AUSTIN, TX 78702



We affirm broad historical Christian orthodoxy--notably the centrality of Scripture, freedom in Christ, and a conscious dependence on God's Spirit. We celebrate the ECC's history of refusing to allow theological differences to divide a community, while at the same time advocating for the marginalized. We realize that not all Christians will arrive at the same conclusions about the Bible's teachings on every subject. We believe that the beauty of the body of Christ comes from our shared faith in Christ, not from total agreement about every matter. Above all, we are committed to the practices above, rooted in our core values and the love of Christ, and we believe our differences and diversity serve to deepen and enrich our spiritual life together.

### **Disaffiliating from the Evangelical Covenant Church**

In April 2018, we shared our LGBTQ Journey Description online to inform Vox community participants and local Austinites of our values and practices.

In the year and a half following, we have witnessed a historic shift from ECC's welcoming of diverse theological views and scripture interpretations. We saw ECC ministers who married LGBTQ couples be disciplined, stripped of their credentials, and terminated from employment. We have witnessed long-established ECC congregations who supported LGBTQ marriages and families be involuntarily removed from the denomination at Annual Meetings.

**In August 2019, the members of Vox Veniae voted to disaffiliate ourselves from the Evangelical Covenant Church in light of ECC policies and practices which conflict with our discerned commitment to support LGBTQ individuals, couples and families who wish to be married and receive the support and blessing of Vox pastors and community members. As of December 1st, Vox Veniae is no longer affiliated with the Evangelical Covenant Church.**

By disaffiliating from the ECC, we are preserving our autonomy as a local Christian faith community rooted in East Austin, governed by an internally elected board of leaders, served by a team of appointed pastors and staff, and supported by liturgy, contemplative prayer and discernment practices of our community members and partners. Though we continue to desire connection with an older, larger body of Christian wisdom, that body must also be aligned with our discerned values and practices in support of LGBTQ individuals, couples and families.

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Grace upon grace,  
Leadership Board

Vox Veniae  
Austin, Texas

3106 E 1/4<sup>th</sup> 1/2 ST  
AUSTIN, TX 78702