



On October 4th, six of our Siblings joined Pastor J in attending SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity, and [gender] expression) education with [ReconcilingWorks](#). It was a marvelous gathering opportunity with the [Executive Director](#) of ReconcilingWorks,

Aubrey Thonvold, and some Siblings from around the country to explore the ministry of hospitality as it relates to intention and sharing love for Siblings that are living in a different space on the spectrum of humanity than I, or you, or we, might be! Pastor J sent three reflection questions at the beginning of our gathering: What did you hear that is sticking with you? What stands out to you as a ministry strength at First English? What invitation did you hear for ministry growth at First English? Our responses follow:

What did you hear that is sticking with you?

- I truly appreciated the clear definitions [of sexual orientation, gender identity, and (gender) expression]. I think that since we are entering into the business of attaching labels to other humans it behooves us to be consistent in those labels.
- Practicing introductions and identifying with pronouns is important to help us become comfortable when we welcome newcomers and to our church, and identifying pronouns often makes one feel more accepted or comfortable.
- Hearing the answers in the [Clunky Questions video: LGBTQQIAA: Why Do You Need a Label for Everything?](#) Specifically: "It's a group and however that group chooses to identify, the most important thing is that choice is respected by people outside of the group" AND because the label helps one "'to feel seen" and "to have a place" and "to be welcome." These answers are a reminder to me that when I'm feeling "behind" in knowing current terminology (for example) I can give myself (and others) grace

because it's ok that things change and evolve AND it's also ok that I don't know/can learn. AND, also, it's not about me.

- Reflecting on the SOGIE Spectrum within the Binary (Female/Woman/Feminine/Seeks Men on one side and Male/Man/Masculine/Seeks Women on the other side) and how truly "fixed" that is. And that while this Binary works for some people, it does not work for everyone. And how much sense that makes to me. And the idea that God, through infinite love and expression, washes out this imaginary binary line. :-)

What stands out to you as a ministry strength at First English?

- I see our welcoming statement as a ministry strength. All are invited.
- FELC wishes to be a welcoming congregation. We have a vibrant music ministry which I consider a strength. I think it is important to stretch our muscles from time to time and learn new ways of welcoming. Hospitality hour is a first step but from what I've been told can often be a bit overwhelming for a newcomer.
- I believe it's a genuine desire for the individual members of the FELC community to want to make all people feel welcome and at home in our church.
- Welcome + [internal] community + music

What invitation did you hear for ministry growth at First English?

- I heard the invitation encouraging us to make a practice of learning the preferred pronouns of others.
- What I took away from the SOGIE training is this: we could (and should) all be more intentional in the manner in which we communicate with our LGBTQIA+ [Siblings], both visitors and membership. My dream is for a world where it doesn't matter to anyone, not a single person, what one's orientation is; a world where each individual is accepted for what they are and the gifts they bring. I would love to see a world where when one has sensitive questions there is information readily available, reading materials, seminars, whatever, that

they can avail themselves of in order to better understand and answer their own questions, without inadvertently and unintentionally inflicting pain on an individual that may already be feeling marginalized. There will always be questions I am sure, but I'd like to think we can reach a point where we value each other for who we are, not who we chose to partner with.

- Embracing and practicing "hospitable curiosity [by] asking questions that mutually build relationship."
- We have the genuine welcoming intent going for us, however, as most of us fit into a 'majority culture' [white], we may not always fully appreciate how we and/or our intended welcome *impacts* those outside of that 'majority culture.' A wise person once said "there's a difference between 'all are welcome' and 'we built this with you in mind'" and I think a growth area for FELC is figuring out the 'we built this with you in mind' piece and what that might look like for us.