

HOW TO BE CLEAR

A Resource for Church Leaders

By: The Church Clarity Team

FOR OUR FULL COLLECTION OF RESOURCES VISIT [CHURCHCLARITY.COM/RESOURCES](https://churchclarity.com/resources)

If you're like other church leaders who have decided that #ClarityIsReasonable, you might be asking one of the most common questions we receive: "Our church has room for improvement when it comes to being more clear about our policies. How can we make our website more clear?" We've designed this resource as a simple guide that your church can use when updating your site.

STEP #1: Add Clear POLICY Language to your Website:

LGBTQ Clarity: Generally speaking, aim for less "beliefs" and more "policy." Explicitly state your church's actively enforced policies on the primary pages of your website. When we say "Actively Enforced Policies" we mean: policies for marriage, hiring, ordination, membership, baptism, preaching, leadership, or *insert relevant policy* for LGBTQ+ people and people who identify as women.

Not all churches have all these positions, sacraments, abilities or rituals, so just list those that are relevant to your church. Keep in mind we evaluate policies on the level of the church, not the pastor. So, for instance, if one pastor will not perform a same-sex wedding but another will, that still means your church will be able to perform a same-sex wedding.

Primary pages of your website = pages that are clearly and conveniently accessible within 1-2 clicks from the main homepage (e.g. Beliefs, Values, About, FAQ pages). Your policy should be easily discoverable for the average person casually browsing your website. If your policy is located in a sermon, blogpost, denomination's website, or some other peripheral page, it will be scored as Unclear. To learn more about the difference between Clear and Unclear, see our Scoring Definitions.

Here are some actual examples of clear LGBTQ policy statements which churches have used:

Statement of Inclusion

The First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, DC, welcomes people of every race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, age, physical and mental ability, national origin, economic station, and political ideology to full participation in the life of our community;

"Full participation in the life of our community includes all members, without exception, being fully eligible to participate in the ordinances, blessings, benefits and responsibilities of church membership "including communion, baptism, marriage, ordination, parent/child dedications, and all offices and positions of leadership."

This policy statement was located in First Baptist Church of D.C.'s About Page and thus easily accessible; moreover, the policy spells out "sexual orientation" and "gender identity," as well as many other demographic markers, and specifies exactly what "full participation" means in all its details. We scored this church as Clear.

Here is another policy statement, this time from a United Methodist church:

It is our deeply held conviction that the provisions of the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church that exclude lesbian and gay people from the full life of the church, including the prohibitions on United Methodist clergy conducting same-sex marriages and on same-sex marriages being conducted in United Methodist churches, are prejudicial, discriminatory and fundamentally inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus Christ. We recognize that it is the right and responsibility of our pastor, and not the congregation, to decide whether any particular marriage ceremony is to be performed in our church, but we believe it is incumbent upon us as a congregation to voice our dismay at the discriminatory provisions in the Book of Discipline and our strong support of marriage equality.

Accordingly, we resolve as a congregation (i) to support and honor the marriage of couples licensed to be married in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts equally, regardless of gender, (ii) to approve the use of our church building equally for all marriage ceremonies, including same-sex marriages, and (iii) to affirm our full support to our pastor if he or she chooses to celebrate a same-sex marriage in our building.

This statement was located under the About page, so it was very easy to find. This church was scored as Clear because it acknowledges its denominational constraints, and spells out how, as a church, they commit to resisting its denomination. For denominations that are non-affirming as a whole, such as the UMC, we will score churches within it as "non-affirming" unless we see policy language indicating "resistance" against its denomination's policy.

Here is example of a clear policy statement from a church that is not affirming.

While we are committed to love one another under the unifying grace of God, in terms of the church policy, we cannot fully satisfy both Side A and Side B. Upon much consideration and prayer, the Leadership Team has come to a difficult decision on policy related to the inclusion and leadership of LGBTQ people in the church and the officiation of LGBTQ marriages.

Our previous policy was a work in progress, not in writing, and not clear. The Leadership Team felt that it is important to state this new policy in writing. Our new policy is as follows: (1) We accept into membership everyone who puts their faith in Jesus, is baptized, and signs the membership covenant, regardless of their sexual orientation; (2) LGBTQ Christians may fully participate in the life of the church and may be called to serve in any leadership position; and (3) New City pastors may not officiate same-sex weddings but may provide marriage counseling services. We note that the sexual conduct standard for leadership remains the same for both heterosexuals and LGBTQ people: We believe that the Scriptures call us to sexual relationship only within the context of marriage.

This statement was not only convenient to find on its website, but it clearly spells out what level of participation LGBTQ people can and cannot have in the life of its congregation. Bravo.

Here is another example of a clear policy statement from a church that is not affirming.

**"Happy
Claritizing!"**

-FACEBOOK USER

"We believe that all people are born with the essential dignity and intrinsic value that comes from being made in God's image and are equally capable of experiencing God, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We welcome and invite LGBTQ persons to participate at all levels of church life: partaking of the sacraments, serving in ministry, joining in membership, and holding leadership roles.

We humbly recognize that we hold a minority view on human sexuality within our denomination. Artisan values and joyfully welcomes all LGBTQ persons, whether they are single, in relationship, or called to celibacy. In order to persist in fellowship and remain in good standing within the ECC, we are currently unable to officiate or host same-sex weddings; however, we have partnerships with local pastors and churches who can, and we will provide references as requested. In this way, the Artisan community can celebrate with all couples as they begin their lives together.

This statement was easy to find, located in the "About Us" dropdown. It spells out all the specific ways that LGBTQ people can participate, as well as the one area in which they cannot: weddings. This church was Scored initially as "Clear: Non-Affirming," but the score was changed to "Verified Clear" after they filled out our policy survey (see Step 2 below).

Women in Leadership Clarity

We score churches for how clearly they communicate their Women in Leadership policies on their websites based on two factors: How easy it is to find a policy and/or gender representation on the leadership team. To earn a "Clear: Egalitarian" score, a church must have women and/or non-binary people make up 50% of its leadership team (e.g. elders, vestry, church council) and clearly display that information on its website. Alternatively, if a woman has the most senior title in a church (e.g. senior pastor), that would suffice as well.

So while it is good to have a clear policy stating that women can lead at any level of the congregation on the primary pages of your website, it is equally important to state who your church's leadership team is on your website, as well as the pronouns and/or gender-identity of each person on that team.

The best example of this we've come across is Portsmouth Union Church, which lists each person who is on the pastoral leadership team and the congregational leadership team, along with each person's pronouns.

STEP 2: Become Verified Clear



Assuming your church is already on our database (if not, submit it here), after your church is scored, we will send an email to your church (e.g. church email address, pastor email address) to fill out our Verified Clear policy survey. It's a 5-minute, policy survey that asks a variety of questions about how LGBTQ+ people and women can participate in your church.

Regardless of how you answer the policy questions, as long as the survey is fully completed you are eligible to receive a Verified Clear Score. You can view examples of Verified Clear churches here. If you decide against completing the Verified Clear survey, your church will continue through our scoring process and published according to our non-verified scoring methodology.

Please note that only surveys that are submitted by someone with a church email address or someone listed on the leadership team on the church's website will be counted.

Any questions? Please email [vcsurvey \[at\] churchclarity.com](mailto:vcsurvey@churchclarity.com).