

Methodology

Before diving into the survey, a brief explanation is warranted about how the survey came about, how it was platformed and disseminated, and what kinds of data we can draw from the responses.

The idea for the survey came from a conversation with a friend who is a Covenant pastor. We were discussing the polarization found in the denomination and how various data sources—documents, essays, private conversations, ministerium votes, Annual Meeting votes, motions, social media posts and comments, discussions at conferences, etc.—provided confusing and sometimes conflicting narratives about how members of the Covenant were acknowledging or evolving in their understanding of sexuality. It was quickly decided that an anonymous survey had the potential to extract clear and honest feedback that could be used both as a temperature check of the denomination in the years following shortly after the second public disfellowshipping of a congregation and to help Covenanters make informed decisions about remaining in and interacting with the fellowship. The driving question was this: “What do pastors and church chairs really think?” To my knowledge, there have been no attempts to poll a large number of Covenanters to solicit specific opinions surrounding sexuality or inclusion.

We determined that petitioning denominational leadership to commission the survey was almost certainly a dead end. If it was to be done, it would have to be done independently. I took charge of the project and spent the next year interviewing dozens of pastors and other current and former Covenant members to learn their stories and insights. I read dozens of documents—books, essays, blogs, and social media posts—to better understand the history of the debate surrounding Covenant identity and sexuality. I drafted what I thought were the most important survey questions and solicited feedback from a number of Covenant pastors, as well as LGBTQ+ Covenanters and their family members. I learned the ins and outs of mass emailing, optimization, and inbox deliverability. I spent many hours compiling church contact information in various spreadsheets.

The Survey

The survey consists of thirty-four questions spread across four sections: personal demographics, personal experience with the LGBTQ+ community, perspectives regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion within the ECC, and a final question processing the experience of taking the survey. Two of the questions were completely open-ended, and the remaining questions provided multiple answer choices that were intended to reflect a diversity of respondents and of viewpoints. Every question had the option of a write-in response, which many people took advantage of using. No question was mandatory; respondents could skip any question they did not want to answer.

The survey was created using Google Forms and did not collect email addresses. It was completely anonymous, with the option of sharing contact information at the end for the purpose of networking and receiving information about any future projects that might come from THE ECC IN COLOR.

The survey began with the following introductory statements:

THE ECC IN COLOR: Perspectives on Sexuality & LGBTQ+ Inclusion in the Evangelical Covenant Church

This anonymous survey is intended to collect data from leaders and stakeholders in the Evangelical Covenant Church on current attitudes and beliefs surrounding human sexuality, gender, and the inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons within the denomination. Please answer the questions openly and honestly and please submit only one response per individual. This form will not automatically collect email addresses and responses will be anonymous and confidential. Should you wish to reach out to the ECC IN COLOR to learn more about future projects, there is an optional contact form at the end of the survey, as well as additional options for how to stay connected.

For the purposes of this survey, we offer the following usage of certain terminology...

"LGBTQ+" or "Member of the LGBTQ+ community"

A person that understands themselves to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, intersex, asexual, and/or queer. We are also including any persons who have experienced same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria or fluidity, or are questioning their sexual

orientation or gender identity, whether this experience has been outwardly shared and expressed or not. Other terms we may use to describe members of this community include "queer persons" or "gender and/or sexual minorities". While the term "queer" might have negative connotations for some people, for the purposes of this survey, please understand it to mean "someone who is LGBTQ+".

"Affirming"

A belief surrounding the inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons within the church that meets the following criteria:

- That sexually active same-sex relationships are morally equivalent to sexually active opposite-sex relationships.
- That identities and expressions of being transgender or gender fluid are morally equivalent to identities and expressions of being cisgender.
- That the humanity and dignity of queer persons should be acknowledged and honored without condition.
- That queer persons should be welcomed to full participation within the life of the church, including, but not limited to ministry service, communion, baptism, ordination, and marriage.

Now, let's begin the survey!

Distributing the Survey

The initial goal was to send the survey by email to every lead pastor and every church chair from all 850+ churches in the denomination. The primary source of that contact information was the Local Church Data from a recent Covenant Yearbook. Some information was missing or out of date, so several hundred entries were cross referenced with information that had been posted to church websites. The audience of the email campaign was extended to include some associate pastors, conference staff and the national Covenant offices staff, Covenant camp directors, and North Park faculty and administrations, as well as my own personal contacts within the Covenant. The audience then grew to include a number of people who were invited over Facebook. About one hundred were contacted personally by me, and another hundred requested a link to the survey after an announcement was put out on the MF4i Facebook page. In total there were

well over 2000 invitations submitted, with instructions that the survey could be shared with any current or former members of the ECC.

The initial email campaign was sent between September 15, 2025 and October 17, 2025, with a follow-up reminder email sent between October 21 and 24, 2025. It was announced that the survey would be closed on November 1, but I left it open until Thanksgiving as there were a few people still asking to complete the survey.

The Survey Data

In total, 307 people responded to the survey, representing a fairly broad cross section of the denomination. There was a pretty even 50-50 split of men and women, and very good representation in terms of generation and regional conference. Racially, respondents were disproportionately white (almost 90%). People identifying as LGBTQ+ represented 8.5% of respondents with 2.3% selecting “maybe” as their personal identification. In terms of their relationship to the Covenant Church, 31.2% were current pastors, 18.6% were former ECC members, and 16% were current members or attenders, with a wide variety of roles covering the remaining responses. The number of respondents attending or most recently attending churches voluntarily or involuntarily removed from the Covenant rosters was 10.2%.

As you look through the responses to the survey questions you will see specific color coding for many of the pie charts and for the write-in responses. The colors refer to questions or respondents that can generally be categorized regarding the posture towards the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the church as *affirming* (shades of purple), *non-affirming* (shades of yellow), and *unclear* (shades of cyan). Wedges of pie charts that feature these three color groups are referring to survey responses that were more-or-less coded by their language into one of these three categories. Respondents were also categorically split based on their responses to six questions in section three of the survey (#1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9). The results were 53.4% *affirming*, 26.4% *non-affirming*, and 20.2% *unclear*. It's important to know that respondents did not self-select into these categories. Respondents who were grouped in the *unclear* category provided conflicting or ambivalent responses to those six questions, but it's possible many would have self-selected into either of the other two choices. When you see this color coding for the write-in responses, the colors

refer to the category that the respondent was grouped into and not to the content of their particular response.

It needs to be said here that the nature of the survey's distribution limits the kind of scientific analysis that can be done to draw general figures and trends that can be applied more broadly to the entire Evangelical Covenant Church. For example, 53.4% of respondents were categorized as *affirming*, but this in no way suggests that 53.4% of *Covenanters* would be categorized in the same way. That is not a conclusion that can be drawn from this survey, and I am not trying to claim anything of the sort. All statistical data is limited to the particular respondents of this particular survey. This will no doubt be frustrating to readers for whom that kind of statistical data would encompass the primary if not exclusive value of a survey of this nature. There are two things to be said about this.

Firstly, is that this kind of polling is not something I personally am capable of doing. To obtain statistical data that can be analyzed for confidence intervals and standard deviations and then applied to the denomination writ large with any amount of accuracy would require a professional polling organization (think PPRI), the work of professional sociologists, preparation and a promotional campaign from Covenant leadership, buy-in from dozens if not hundreds of churches, and tens of thousands of dollars. The present survey represents the efforts of a single individual working from home in his spare time on a cheap laptop. I've spent hundreds of hours and hundreds of dollars to conceive and plan the project, write the survey, write the promotional messaging, compile contact information, solicit feedback, plan the email campaign, execute the email campaign, find and reach out to people on Facebook, respond to emails (both positive and negative feedback), sort through the survey data and prepare it for publication, research information for other sections of this report, and write the report. I'm happy to have done it, but it's important that we all view the survey for what it is and not for what we hope it might have been. Should the content of this report inspire others in the denomination to want to know that kind of statistically significant information, I whole-heartedly endorse the ECC in organizing that effort.

Secondly, that kind of polling wasn't really the point. My goal for the survey was to create a platform in which all kinds of people in and adjacent to the Covenant could give voice to an issue that can't be captured from a vote at the Annual Meeting. The survey was meant to be an invitation for deeper engagement and dialogue. The goal was to tease out perspectives and opinions that otherwise cannot be determined due to policies which undermine the possibility of voicing dissenting positions and an overemphasis on viewing the voting patterns from Annual Meetings as expressing clear understandings of nuanced positions. The survey is not about showing that the majority position has changed. It's about affirming the reality that the minority position is present and valid. I wanted to show that affirming Covenanters exist and that they have stories to be shared and convictions to be heard, as well as to illuminate the perceptions and motivations of the non-affirming contingent which has thus far dominated the conversation. The impetus for the survey was neither dispassionate nor unbiased, but the response choices and open-ended questions were intended to capture a wide variety of honest and unfiltered perspectives, and to that end, I believe the survey was a tremendous success. I invite the reader to read through the responses with an eye to the remarkable diversity that can be found in our fellowship.