



The Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

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August 17, 2004

Larry Coffman
Committee Chairman
Judson Association
P.O. Box 401
Hepzibah, WV 26369

To our brother in Christ Larry Coffman along with the churches gathered as the Judson Association of the West Virginia Baptist Convention: Grace and peace to you.

We write in response to your letter of July 20, 2004, which was distributed to the 50 churches of the Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists. Some of these churches have sent responses directly to you. As the council of the Association, we echo the words of our brothers and sisters who thank you for your prayers.

We desire to trust the sincerity of your words that “We love each of you as one loves his family.” Such love presupposes relationship. Matthew 18, the text you cite as the basis for approaching our churches, also assumes relationship between the members of the church – or between you and us. Therefore, it troubles us that you ask the churches of AWAB to sever their ties with the Association without even being in relationship with us, individually or corporately. In short, you do not know us.

One might identify your request as akin to the self-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees which so troubled Jesus. However, at this time, we are compelled to take you at your word, that you consider us not as your enemy but approach us as family in “the Service of Christ.”

If we are right in trusting your sincerity, we ask you to reciprocate by demonstrating your interest in relationship: meet us, get to know us, learn how we have wrestled with scripture, prayed without ceasing, yearned for truth and peace, and discerned together the Spirit’s leading in our individual and congregational lives. Listen to our stories of pain and joy, the losses we have experienced as well as the grace we have encountered in coming to accept God’s blessing for all God’s children, gay and straight. Receive the invitation to visit our churches. You will witness American Baptists in mission and hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed.

Come and see up close those whom you condemn from a distance as “sinful.” Give us reason to trust that you are not those whom Jesus said woe to – the leaders who “lock people out of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 23:13).

Until we meet, do remember us in your prayers as we remember you.

The Rev. Daniel Pryfogle
Interim Director, on behalf of the Council of the
Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists

cc: Rev. Dr. Roy Medley, Dr. James E. Lutz