

Addendum to the Confession of Identity

Fall 2025

Four years ago in November 2021, the beloved community of First Baptist on Fifth wrote our Confession of Identity. As we wrote, we knew this confession wasn't a statement of belief, nor was it a policy or bylaw. We hoped this Confession of Identity would illuminate a clearer, more vibrant and honest picture of who we are and how we feel called by Jesus to be in the world in this precise season. Though the audience of this longer-form essay would be primarily external, we saw it as a snapshot of the church's imagination and identity in a pivotal season. The Spirit was clearly at work in our midst in that season, and it was a joy to capture a glimpse of it together.

This fall of 2025, the church's leaders (Deacons and pastors) have returned to our Confession of Identity and given it a thorough examination. We came to the review wondering: *do these words still resonate and serve their purpose?* Even as our congregation and context have changed, significantly in some ways, does the unique and particular spirit of First Baptist on Fifth in 2021 hold up in the unique and particular context of 2025?

Hearteningly, we discovered that the Confession of Identity is still summoning us to true and beautiful expressions of discipleship in our beloved community. Since 2021, our congregation has grown in number and faithfulness. Among the increase in number, we find a widening view of God's dream for this world as reflected in the diversity of our membership. Within our body, we're more varied in age, race, ethnicity, education, economic status, marital status, mental and physical ability, gender, sexual orientation, and church background than ever before. And among the larger number of friends and online viewers who find connection to the church (even if not members), we experience a broadening imagination for how the church can bring its unique witness to bear to the world. Changes in staff and governance have extended our capacity and sharpened our readiness to serve. With every passing year, we are more deeply tied to our neighbors and neighborhood, and see tangible reflections of how we're shaped by the people who visit, work, live, and play in downtown Winston-Salem. Here, our civic commitments and call to cultivate common good are lived out in full and vibrant view. In this changing landscape, we are called to live ever more faithfully into the way of Jesus.

As it was originally conceived, the Confession of Identity represented a distinct response to a particular moment – created at the church's 150th anniversary, following the Covid-19 pandemic, and as we reimagined ourselves without two buildings and children's center that had long served the congregation. We do not aim to alter this historical document, but hope that this addendum can serve as both a postscript that offers reflection, and a reminder to consistently return to the words that shape us to consider them anew. In an age where robust expressions of beloved community are even more countercultural, even more important, even more necessary against the tides of anger, fear, and tribalism, we celebrate what God is doing among us and commit ourselves again to God's work of Love in and through this place.

The Deacons and pastors of First Baptist Church on Fifth, November 2025