

AREAS WHERE THE ISSUE OF MARRIAGE MIGHT ARISE:

- Who can become a member?
- Who can be employed by the church?
- Who can become a leader (Sunday school teacher, deacon, or elder)?
- Who can work with children?
- Who can receive marital counseling?
- Who can receive any marital benefits the church offers?
- Who can participate in the marriage ministry (go to marriage conferences or couples retreat)?
- Who can use the church's facilities for marriage ceremonies or anniversary celebrations?



"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Matthew 19:4-6

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is not, nor is it intended to be, legal advice. You should consult an attorney for advice regarding your specific situation.



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Marriage and the Church
Guidelines for Emerging Threats

STATEMENT ON MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY

In the wake of the ever-evolving cultural, political, and legal definition of marriage in our nation, all churches should act proactively to define their religious beliefs regarding marriage and sexuality. This will first guarantee that all members are clear on the church's teaching regarding these extremely important issues and, secondly, it will help protect the church from any potential challenge to its practices.

The church should have a clear definition of marriage, along with its Scriptural basis, in their governing documents (usually the church's bylaws). It should also have language that addresses the proper role of sexual relations, constraining it within the confines of marriage.

The church should also make clear the church reserves the right to take any disciplinary actions it deems necessary, including termination of membership or employment, in order to uphold their Biblical beliefs.

Such action will help the church, along with other governing laws (which we are assuming the church should have), to stand on firm ground if it were to be challenged internally or externally.



[The Church Name] believes and affirms marriage as established by God in Genesis 2:24: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Therefore, we affirm marriage as the union between one man and one woman. We believe this union is an exclusive one, where both man and woman are joined by God, becoming one flesh, and are to save themselves for one another, abstaining from any romantic relationship, whether physical or emotional, outside of their marriage.

We believe God created sex to be practiced within the confines of the marital relationship between one man and one woman. That definition excludes any intimate sexual activity outside of marriage. Those who are not married must, therefore, wait until marriage to engage in intimate sexual activity, and those who are married must be faithful to their spouse.

All other sexual activity, regardless of their cultural, political, or legal acceptance outside the church, are considered sin and fall short of the standard God has set for us in Scripture. These include adultery (Proverbs 6:32), fornication (1 Corinthians 6:18), homosexual, bisexual, or transgender relations (1 Corinthians 6:9), polygamy (1 Corinthians 7:2), bestiality (Leviticus 18:23), etc.

[The Church's Name] welcomes all sinners and hopes to offer a path to repentance, redemption, and restoration through Christ to all who come. We love all people, while holding on unequivocally to our Biblical beliefs.

As you can see, this language will require further action on the church's part to give guidance (for example, on church membership, employment, or facilities use policy). But it is a good place to anchor some fundamental teachings about marriage. Language for membership could read:

All members shall abide by and agree with [the church's name's] statement on marriage and sexuality, found in [insert appropriate designation]. The church reserves the right to take any disciplinary actions it deems necessary (including membership termination) when a member is found in violation of the statement on marriage and sexuality, according to the church's disciplinary procedures found in [insert appropriate designation].

For facilities policies, some churches limit facilities to church members, which would already include adherence to the statement on marriage and sexuality. Others can use language that establishes the use of the facilities of the church "for activities that are in line with the church's mission and vision, and which do not run contrary to the church's doctrine as established in the church's governing documents" (which will include the statement on marriage and sexuality).

For employment purposes, it would be helpful to have the employee sign the statement on marriage and sexuality, along with other documents, like the statement of faith, that are usually presented.

Furthermore, the Biblical references in the language suggest a church should adopt an official version of the Bible for purposes of its governing documents and also an official interpretative body of the Bible in case any dispute arises (usually a board of elders, church council, or deacons). All of these are important, though they fall outside the scope of this publication.

Notice this document is meant to give general guidance regarding one very specific issue within church governance, namely defining marriage. This document is not meant to be exhaustive, nor to be considered as definitive legal advice on the specific situation of your church. For a more comprehensive examination of your particular church's situation, you should consult your attorney.

