

Samples and Templates
For the
Development of
Position Statements on Marriage, Wedding Policies and Facility Use Policies

Provided to
Associational Missionaries, Pastors, and Church Leaders

The Baptist State Convention
Of North Carolina

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During the summer of 2013, Dr. Lynn Buzzard, Retired – Professor of Law at Campbell University’s Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law at Campbell University drafted a white paper for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (Convention) regarding churches and cultural pressures to embrace homosexuality. At that time, portions of the Defense of Marriage Act had been struck down and issues emanating from changes in policy by the Executive Board of the Boy Scouts of America were cause for concern. At the conclusion of the white paper, Dr. Buzzard included an appendix containing several templates and samples. The appendix is comprised of marriage position statements, wedding policies and use of facilities policies. The samples and templates were gathered from a variety of churches and denominational groups. These samples and templates have been determined to be a great value to churches in light of more recent developments. As a result, these samples and templates have been edited and are now provided to associational missionaries across North Carolina to assist churches in their development of appropriate position statements and policies.

The action of the Supreme Court of the United States on June 26 2015, validating same-sex marriage in the United States, has caused church leaders to examine various church policies, including but not limited to, wedding policies, use of facilities policies and personnel policies. To assist churches as they navigate this issue, the following document is provided for distribution to pastors and church leaders.

In addition, there are much larger matters that deserve significant attention, conversation and discussion regarding marriage, sexual identity and the role of the church in engaging culture with the Gospel. These matters should not be overlooked as churches contemplate the development of position statements and policies. The mission of the church, as outlined in Matthew 28:19-20 is the making of disciples. The matter of marriage and sexual identity must be viewed through the lens of disciple-making if the church is to address these issues in alignment with its mission.

Please note the following:

1. The Convention has long encouraged churches to have policies and procedures regarding weddings and the use of facilities. Some churches will find that their current policies are sufficient while others may wish to update and revise their current documents. The attached is a resource for use in this process.
2. The attached are samples and templates; churches are not encouraged to simply adopt any of these documents as is. However, churches are encouraged to use these documents to assist them in the development of their own position statements and policies.
3. The focus is on position statements and policies, not additions or revisions to other governing documents (articles of incorporation, constitution, or bylaws). There are numerous reasons why we do not encourage amendments to these documents, should associational missionaries, pastors

or church leaders wish to discuss this further please do not hesitate to contact Convention staff.

4. Most importantly, the samples and templates provided speak to the matter of marriage from the following perspectives:
 - a. Scripture speaks clearly to marriage and as such a high view of scripture, and the admonitions for marriage described therein, is presented.
 - b. The focus is on marriage and the expectations God has for those wishing to enter marriage. Other groups appear to be focusing on the numerous derivations from these expectations. Simply put, the emphasis is upon the model for marriage outlined in scripture as opposed to attempting to list those expressions that contradict scripture.
 - c. Weddings, marriage, and the use of church facilities are not to be viewed as disconnected from the overarching disciple-making ministry of the local church.

When these samples and templates were assembled by Dr. Buzzard, he noted the following:

The various items in this document are intended to further a church's review of its own policies and practices in regard to the subject areas of marriage and responses to recent national developments in regard to same-sex marriage.

They are not offered as the only appropriate or best church statements or policies, but to assist churches in drafting policies and approaches that reflect their church's convictions and commitments. Even though we find these statements helpful, we do not necessarily agree with or endorse every position or approach.

Some provisions provided are short, succinct statements of belief or policy, and others much more detailed.

In most cases the draft clauses and documents have been based on provisions adopted by other churches. In many instances they may have been edited where appropriate.

It is the prayer of your Convention staff that these templates and samples will be helpful to you and your congregation as you seek to minister in your community.

The templates and samples are divided as follows:

Documents Related to Marriage Policies: Samples A-G

Document Related to Church Facility Use: Sample H

NOTE: The samples and templates enclosed are to only be viewed as resources that may be utilized by associational missionaries, pastors and other church leaders as

they seek to assist churches in the development of position statements and policies. The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (Convention) has no authority over the government of local churches, nor does the Convention have the ability to impose or require churches to adopt specific policies or procedures. It is the hope that these resources will assist churches as they prayerfully consider their response to the ever changing culture in which we now seek to make disciples.

I. Church Policy Statements on Marriage/Sexuality

(Included here first are two extensive statements on marriage and sexuality including doctrinal beliefs and practical policy applications, and the several shorter, narrowly focused church statements of belief/policy.)

Sample A

Church Policy Statement

Introduction

This is a policy statement on the beliefs of _____ Church regarding religious beliefs concerning marriage and human sexuality and our policies based upon the necessary application of our faith to life and practice.

What We Believe About Marriage and Human Sexuality

We believe, based on the teaching of the Scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments, that marriage is an institution ordained by God from the foundation of the world, and intended as a lifelong union of one man and one woman. This idea is supported by the account of creation in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. Genesis 1:26-28 provides that God created man in His own image, both male and female. The passage implies that a unity of one man and one woman is in some way necessary to fully represent the image of God in mankind.

Genesis chapter 2 provides a more detailed account in which God created the first man, Adam, and decided that it was not good for him to be alone. (Genesis 2:18). God indicated that He would make "a suitable helper for him." God brought all of the animals to Adam, but none of them was a suitable helper for him, so God then created Eve, the first woman, from part of Adam himself. God did not create a second man to be Adam's helpmate, or an assortment of multiple women, but rather one woman. Together they were man and wife and had "no shame" or sin in their union with each other. (Genesis 2:15-25).

Jesus Christ reaffirmed the teaching of the Old Testament when He said, as recorded in Matthew 19:4-6, "Haven't you read, he replied, that at the beginning the creator made them male and female and said for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

The Apostle Paul states in Ephesians 5:22-32 that marriage is not merely a human institution, but is a special divine metaphor that is supposed to illustrate the union of Christ and the church. For this reason also, only a union between a man and

a woman can be a proper marriage because a union between two men, two women, or one man and multiple women or any collection of people could not properly illustrate the relationship between Christ and His church.

I Corinthians 6:9-11 condemns a variety of lifestyles including those associated with adultery, prostitution, and homosexuality. The Bible condemns all forms of sexual immorality and encourages Christians to flee from it because of its destructive effects, and because the body of the Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit. (I Corinthians 3:16 & 6:12-20).

Romans 1:18-32 makes it clear that it is not only sinful to engage in homosexual unions, but also to approve of such sins in others or encourage their practice. As a result, in order to maintain our consistent Christian witness, we cannot sanction, approve, or promote in any way adultery, fornication (a sexual relationship between an unmarried man and woman; i.e. "living together"), pornography, pedophilia, polygamy, bestiality, or homosexual unions. This is made clear also by countless other verses throughout the Old Testament as well as by these and other passages in the New Testament.

Our church follows what the Bible reveals as the "sure foundation" of the teachings of Jesus Christ and his apostles (Matthew 7:24-29 and I Corinthians 14:37). The church is called to teach and practice these teachings and is not at liberty to depart from them for a different authority if it is to authentically bear the name "Christian." Though we strive to live peaceably with all people and to obey legitimate government authority, in instances involving matters as foundational as marriage we must ultimately obey God rather than man if the two come into conflict (Acts 4:18-22).

Sexual activities outside of marriage, including but not limited to fornication, adultery, incest, homosexuality, pedophilia, polygamy and bestiality are inconsistent with the teachings of the Bible and the church. Lewd conduct, transgender behavior, and the creation or distribution or the viewing of pornography are incompatible with God's intention.

Our Faith Based Policy on Marriage and Human Sexuality

As a result of these above described religious beliefs and our belief in the need for a practice of fidelity to these beliefs, it is our policy that the facilities of this church may not be used for any ceremony that in any way approves of, solemnizes, supports or allows a same-sex union or a polygamist or any union which, in the judgment of the church, is inconsistent with our beliefs. It is also the policy of the church that no pastor or member of the church staff shall officiate at any ceremony designed to solemnize, promote, create, or approve of such a union. Nor may any member of the church enter into such a union without being subject to church discipline.

A civil government's sanction of a union will be recognized as a legitimate marriage by the church only to the extent that it is consistent with the definition of marriage found in this Policy Statement.

Church Policy Regarding Sexuality

Recognizing that we all struggle with sin, ____ Church will provide an environment that welcomes people who struggle with sexual sin. We will seek to love all people in Jesus' name, pointing them towards Christ's power to forgive and heal. While the Bible teaches that those who engage in sexual sin, sin against their own body we also recognize that sexual sin is not characterized in Scripture as being more severe than other forms of sin. We will seek God to discern ways that we can directly and indirectly minister and share God's love with those who struggle with every kind of sin. We also recognize that there is a difference between temptation and behavior and while temptation is sometimes unavoidable we are responsible for our behavior.

Church Practices Derived from This Policy

Clergy

1. Ordained clergy or licensed ministers¹ employed by the church shall affirm the statement of faith on marriage and human sexuality adopted by this church.
2. Only ordained or duly licensed clergy approved by this church shall officiate at marriage ceremonies conducted on church property.
3. Clergy employed by the church shall be subject to dismissal for violating this statement of faith on marriage and human sexuality or by officiating at a marriage ceremony that violates the letter or the spirit of this policy.

Applicants for weddings performed by church staff:

1. Applicants wishing to have a ceremony performed by a member of the clergy employed or clergy or judiciary approved by the church or to use the church facilities for their wedding shall affirm the statement of faith regarding marriage and human sexuality and shall conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent therewith.
2. Applicants shall participate in premarital counseling by clergy or counselors employed by this church or other persons who, in the sole opinion of the pastoral staff of the church have the appropriate training, experience, and spiritual understanding to provide such counseling. All pastoral staff, counselors or other persons providing premarital counseling shall affirm the statement of faith of this church on marriage and human sexuality.

Use of Facilities:

1. Any marriage performed on church premises shall be officiated by an ordained or duly licensed member of the clergy. Any officiant not employed by the ____ Church shall serve at the discretion of the pastor or Deacons.
2. Clergy officiating marriage ceremonies on church premises, whether or not employed by the church, shall affirm their agreement with the statement of faith on marriage and human sexuality adopted by this church and conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent therewith.
3. Clergy and staff assigned by the church to implement the procedures contained in this Marriage Policy may, in his or her discretion, decline to provide church facilities for, and/or decline to officiate at a ceremony when in his or her judgment, there are significant concerns that one or both of the applicants may not be qualified to enter into the sacred bond of marriage for theological, doctrinal, moral or legal reasons.

Membership, Leadership and Staff:

1. Every minister and employee, hired by the church shall affirm their agreement with _____ Church statement on marriage and human sexuality and conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent therewith.
2. Church officers will be asked to affirm their agreement with this policy on marriage and human sexuality and shall conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent therewith.
3. Church leaders, teachers and members are expected to teach and live in a manner that is consistent with this policy.

Sample B

(This very comprehensive statement was developed by a Committee of the Evangelical Free Church in 2013)

A Church Statement on Human Sexuality: Homosexuality and Same-Sex "Marriage"

Context

Never have the sexual ethics of our culture been more confused and contorted. Divorce is rampant; co-habitation before or instead of marriage has become normal; new technologies have made pornography immediately accessible; and the once inconceivable notion of same-sex "marriage" is now recognized by law in a growing number of jurisdictions. The need for a clear voice from the church on these matters is critical, both for the health of our own community and for our faithful witness to the world.

This Statement, drawn from Scripture as our ultimate authority, sets forth a Christian vision of human sexuality as a good gift of God. The divine design for sexual expression within the commitment of marriage between a man and a woman is fundamental to the well-ordering of human society and is integral to human flourishing. We desire to articulate this ethic as moral truth binding on us all while recognizing our need of God's grace and forgiveness in the ways that we all fall short of this divine ideal.

In this Statement we will focus particularly on the subject of homosexuality and same-sex "marriage."

Affirmations

We affirm the following:

- Our views of this issue flow from our commitment to God (Dt. 6:5; Matt. 22:37-38) and to His Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17; cf. Dt.32:45-47; Matt. 4:4), as expressed in the first two articles of our Statement of Faith.

* God created human beings as male and female (Gen. 1:27). The complementary, relational nature of the human race as "male and female" reflects the created order given by God when He created human beings "in His image" (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1, 3; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jms. 3:9; cf. Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:23-24; Col. 3:10). It is with joy in our finitude that we are to receive the gift of being either male or female.

- Scripture grants two life-enhancing options for sexual behavior: monogamous marital relations between one man and one woman (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18, 21-24; Matt. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:5-8; cf. Heb. 13:4) or sexual celibacy (1 Cor. 7:7; Matt. 19:12).

Either is a gift from God, given as He wills for His glory and the good of those who receive and rejoice in His gift to them.

- In Scripture monogamous heterosexual marriage bears a significance which goes beyond the regulation of sexual behavior, the bearing and raising of children, the formation of families, and the recognition of certain economic and legal rights, all of which are important. Marriage between a woman and a man is emphatically declared in Scripture to create a “one flesh” union (Gen. 2:23-24; Matt. 19:5), which in turn signifies the mystery of the union between Christ and His body, the Church (Eph. 5:22-33). This means that the foundational understanding of marriage is as a covenant grounded in promises between a man and a woman which finds its divinely intended expression in the “one flesh” union of husband and wife, and between the “one flesh” union of husband and wife and God (cf. Prov. 2:16-17; Mal. 2:14; Eph. 5:31-32).
- All of human existence, including our sexuality, has been deeply damaged by the fall into sin (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:23; 5:12). We all are sinners, broken in some measure by this fall. Though Christians are rescued, reconciled, renewed and in process of being transformed, this brokenness also affects us in that we groan, as the whole creation, eager to experience final redemption knowing at present we live in a not-yet-glorified state (Rom. 8:22-23).
- Everything, from our environment to our bodily genetic code, has been ravaged by sin and the fall. Whether the homosexual attractions people experience are the product of their environment, their genetics, or another source, they are not what God intends and so do not render homosexual behavior legitimate.
- Temptation, including sexual attractions, is not sin. Sin is yielding to temptation. Jesus himself was tempted, yet without sin (Matt. 4:1-11, Heb. 4:15).
- The Scriptures have much to say about sexual behavior, from the beautiful affirmations of the Song of Songs to the clear prohibitions found throughout the Bible (e.g., Rom. 13:13-14; 1 Cor. 5:1-2; 6:9-10, 15-18; Gal. 5:16-21; 1 Thess. 4:3-8). The Apostle Paul affirms that among believers “there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality” (Eph. 5:3). All homosexual behavior is specifically condemned as sin in both the Old Testament and the New Testament (Gen. 19:4-11 [cf. 2 Pet. 2:6-7; Jude 7]; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Judges 19:22-25; Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:8-11). This includes both male and female homosexual activity, both the more passive and more active roles in homosexual practice, and all varieties of homosexual acts.
- The gospel is full of grace and truth. It is an offer of grace and forgiveness to sinners as well as a call to live a holy life. It empowers us in the struggle to resist sin, including the sin of homosexual practice (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 4:20-24; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; Tit. 2:11-13).

- The church is to be a new community that resembles a family of brothers and sisters united in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit displaying deep relationships of love (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Rom. 12:10; 1 Tim. 5:1-2). Celibacy and singleness is to be celebrated and affirmed within the church family.

Implications

Based on these biblical affirmations, we live and minister with pastoral and practical implications

- We Christians who attempt to follow biblical mandates on sex and marriage are not immune to expressing our own sexuality in sinful ways, for “all have sinned and fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). We must always be mindful of this and humbly relate to others accepting that we are all fallen creatures.

**At the same time, all human beings deserve to be treated with dignity and respect because each of us bears the image of God. An LGBT person deserves this dignity and respect no less than any other, and we, as Christians, should demonstrate this in our thoughts, speech, and behavior. Speech, including humor, which demeans LGBT people, has no place in the Christian community. Likewise, this means we oppose any mistreatment of those who identify as LGBT.*

- We mourn with those who struggle with same sex attractions, and with their families, but as we grieve, we encourage behavior that follows the clear divine teachings of Scripture.*

- We must carefully distinguish between same-sex attraction, sinful lust, self-selected identification, and sexual behavior. It is not a sin to be tempted in the area of same-gender sex. Jesus himself was tempted, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He sympathizes with our weaknesses, and he promises to provide a way of escape in every temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). In some cases it may not be wrong for a person to self-identify as LGBT. This may be a way for the person to identify the stable trajectory of the person's sexual attractions or acknowledge the struggles she or he faces with same-sex attraction.”*

However, such self-identification may in fact be sinful if it includes an insistence upon behaviors that express that attraction. Moreover, a believer's fundamental identification should be first as a person “in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:4-10; cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11); the prioritization of sexual identity must be seen as a form of idolatry.

- Some heterosexual acts are sinful, but all homosexual acts are sinful according to Scripture. One may not equate morally a committed heterosexual relationship within marriage with a committed homosexual relationship.

- Though recognizing that due to sin and human brokenness our experience of our sex and gender is not always as God the Creator originally designed, our recognition of our sex as male or female as a gift from God dictates that we cannot support or affirm the resolution of tension between a person's biological sex and experience of gender by the adoption of a psychological identity

discordant with that person's birth sex, nor support or affirm attempts to change via medical intervention one's given biological birth sex in favor of the identity of the opposite sex or of an indeterminate identity.

- We in the Church must seek ways to minister to and support those among us who struggle with same-sex attractions, and those who have family members or others close to them who identify as LGBT
- We in the Church must seek ways to reach out in love to those in our society who identify as LGBT.
- We regard marriage as a good creation of God, and marriage within the Church as a rite and institution tied directly to our foundational belief of God as creator who made us male and female. We also regard marriage as a sacred institution which images the mysterious and wonderful bond between Christ and His Church. To us, then, marriage is much more than merely a contract between two persons (a secular notion). It is a covenant grounded in promises between a man and a woman which finds its divinely intended expression in the "one flesh" union of husband and wife, and between the "one flesh" union of husband and wife and God (the divine design). We therefore will only authorize and recognize heterosexual marriages.
- Recognizing the church as a family, we will seek ways to encourage deep spiritual friendships, with a special effort to include those who are single. We will model the counter-cultural reality that intimate, loving relationships need not be erotic.

In all these implications we must never compromise the biblical standard for sexuality while at the same time we must treat everyone, including those who identify as LGBT, with gentleness, compassion, and love, while pointing them to the only hope any of us have, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. We will be "welcoming but not affirming".

Suggestions for a Church Policy

In order to avoid confusion and possibly legal action it is helpful for a church to have a written and officially approved policy on marriage. This policy should include:

- A clear biblically-based understanding of God's design for marriage. You might include something like this: "Marriage is the original and foundational institution of human society, established by God as a one-flesh, covenantal union between a man and a woman that is life-long (until separated by death), exclusive (monogamous and faithful), and generative in nature⁵ (designed for bearing and rearing children), and it is to reflect the relationship between Christ and the Church."

- A statement that only such marriages which fit the definition above may be conducted on your church property and/or officiated by members/staff of your congregation.
- Clear parameters for marrying cohabitating couples, divorced persons, etc., while acknowledging that such parameters must be interpreted with pastoral sensitivity and judgment.
- A statement of how our definition of marriage is intimately connected to other foundational matters of our faith (here our Statement of Faith may be cited). Therefore we regard any restrictions and definitions we apply in our churches concerning marriage to be an exercise of the freedom of religion clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

It is important to remember that a policy is intended to help us to live out faithfully the truths of God's Word and to apply it consistently in and through the ministries of our local church contexts. It is also vital to remember that a policy is applied in the lives of specific people, which means we implement them relationally and pastorally with grace and truth.

Issues to Address

The current state of confusion in our culture regarding sexuality and especially homosexuality and same-sex "marriage" raises a number of issues for Christians and for the church:

- Should we work toward defending or strengthening laws that define marriage in the traditional sense or work toward repealing laws that expand marriage beyond what we believe to be right?
- Should we be content to retain the authorization of marriages in the church, as understood in the traditional way between one man and one woman, while the state recognizes civil unions which may include same-sex "marriage"? This is the situation in many European nations.
- How should we deal with a married same-sex couple who come to faith and wish to attend or join a congregation? What if the couple has children (adopted or biological)? As our churches welcome individuals manifesting a variety of moral and ideological commitments regarding sexuality, can we articulate to what level of integration and leadership such individuals can aspire in our congregations, e.g., occasional visitor, regular visitor, member, minor leadership roles such as usher, substantive leadership roles such as teacher, major leadership roles such as elder or deacon?
- How should we extend the gospel message to those in the LGBTQ community?
- How should we balance the need to oppose mistreatment of those who identify as LGBTQ without appearing to defend homosexual behavior?

- How should we respond to educational materials that seem to promote homosexual behavior?
- How do we respond to individuals within our congregations who while themselves manifesting commendable biblical moral behavior in their own lives, nevertheless express confusion or disagreement with the biblical teachings on sexual morality outlined here? What are the implications of such views for the level of leadership for which such individuals can be considered in our congregations, e.g., member, minor leadership roles such as usher, substantive leadership roles such as teacher, major leadership roles such as elder or deacon?

In considering these questions, we must recognize, first, that they are often at the intersection of our understanding of church-state relations and how we practice our responsibility as individual believers and churches in a state where we have been granted the right to speak out on public policy and the right to vote for public officials. Second, decisions need to be made regarding how much effort is given to a particular issue, especially in the political realm, as we could be diverted from other things we ought to be about as the church. Third, we must recognize that our responses to these issues may differ from those of other believers (Rom 14:1ff; 1 Cor. 8-10).

(This statement and an extensive annotated bibliography on homosexuality can be found at http://go.efca.org/sites/default/files/resources/docs/2013/05/a_church_statement_on_human_sexuality_3.pdf)

Sample C
Saddleback Church Statement

What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

The Bible very clearly says that homosexuality is a sin.

"Homosexuality is absolutely forbidden, for it is an enormous sin." (Lev. 18:22 TLB)
"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor 6:9-11 NIV)

While all sin is destructive, Romans 6 warns us of the great dangers in sexual sin when it says, "Run away from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body." (1 Cor 6:18 NLT) This includes not only homosexuality, but all sexual immorality: adultery, sex without marriage, pornography. We must not act as if homosexuality is the only serious sexual sin, and we must not act as if homosexuality is not a serious sexual sin.

I've heard it asked, "Isn't being homosexual something that a person is physically born with?" First of all, there are absolutely no facts to support this claim. From time to time studies have been reported in the news that seemed to indicate this, but every one of these studies has proven to be wrong. Secondly, even if some physical difference were discovered, it would be no excuse for sin. We know that some people can develop a stronger physical addiction to alcohol than others, but that's obviously no excuse for living an alcoholic lifestyle.

Finally, a word about being judgmental. It's not judgmental to say that what the Bible calls a sin is a sin, that's just telling the truth. Not being willing to talk to someone caught up in sin, or not believing that they can be forgiven, or thinking that you are not just as much in need of Jesus as they are ... that's being judgmental.

Because membership in a church is an outgrowth of accepting the Lordship and leadership of Jesus in one's life, someone unwilling to repent of their homosexual lifestyle would not be accepted as a member at Saddleback Church. That does not mean they cannot attend church – we hope they do! God's Word has the power to change our lives.

In equal desire to follow Jesus, we also would not accept a couple into membership at Saddleback who were not willing to repent of the sexual sin of living together before marriage. That does not mean this couple cannot attend church – we hope they do! God's Word has the power to change our lives.

Sample D

From Missouri Baptist Convention

MARRIAGE POLICY

Our statement of faith, the Baptist Faith and Message (2000), expresses our fundamental biblical conviction that Christian marriage is, by definition, the spiritual and physical uniting of one man and one woman in an exclusive covenant commitment for their joint lifetime. Christian marriage is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His Church.

As such, this local church believes that wedding ceremonies on church property are spiritual observances of worship of God who created this divine institution. As worship services, weddings on church property shall be officiated by one or more ordained ministers of the gospel. The church may decline to make its facilities or ministers available for any wedding if it is determined that one or both of the parties are not biblically and/or legally qualified to marry. Such determinations may be made by the [*pastor, church council, or wedding committee, etc.*], subject to the direction of the church.

No minister or employee of the church shall officiate at any marriage ceremony unless such marriage is consistent with this policy.

Sample E

Sample E **Example of one local church's policy**

Church Marriage Policy

Marriage is a holy covenant, a solemn agreement made by a man and a woman with each other and with God. This covenant is not something to enter without considering how it is defined by God, Who created marriage. Because of these truths, we make the following requests of couples who want either to be married at ___ Baptist Church or by a Pastor of ___ Church. We believe they will help you to understand and enjoy the fullest benefits of the marriage covenant.

Complete our church's Instructions for Weddings document, and review it in detail in a meeting with the Wedding Coordinator as soon as possible.

Attend a minimum of six counseling sessions with the pastor, to begin no less than 4 months prior to your wedding date. As part of these sessions you will be asked to read at least one book and complete weekly assignments. The purpose is to ensure that you learn God's plan for marriage.

In planning your wedding ceremony, keep in mind that it will be conducted in a Christian setting, which will include prayer, scripture reading, and a great deal of reference to God's plan for marriage. Musical selections, vows, poetry, dress and behavior are to be consistent with the truths about marriage outlined in the counseling sessions.

Attend worship services together in this church (or your own church, if you currently attend one) at least twice a month between the date below and the wedding. The purposes for this include the following basic facts about the importance of the church:

- Worshipping God, fellowshiping with believers, and learning God's Word are indispensable to a truly happy life, especially in our homes and families;
- God, in His Word, clearly commands us to gather frequently with believers to worship Him and to be encouraged to obey Him (see Hebrews 10:24-25); and,
- Statistics compiled from many studies unanimously indicate that families who worship together consistently throughout their family life are less likely to experience divorce.

If you have been sexually active with each other, we will expect you to refrain from sexual intercourse until the wedding. The ability to control your sexual desire is vital to a successful marriage. If you don't govern your sexual desire before marriage, it is unlikely that you will be able to do so afterwards. Sexual purity until marriage is an investment in a fulfilled life together. The divorce rate for those who are sexually active prior to marriage is much higher than for those who refrain from sex until marriage. If you have already had intercourse with each other, now is a good time to begin exercising self-restraint and invest in your future.

If you have been living together, we will expect you to change or adjust your living arrangements until the wedding. While we understand what society says about living together without marriage (e.g. "if we break up, we won't have to get a divorce," "Well, you test drive a car before you buy it"), we believe that God's plan is far better. Indeed, statistical studies prove that God's plan is twice as good! The divorce rate among couples who live together before marriage is about 80%. By contrast, for couples who don't live together and who stay sexually pure, it is less than 40%. Clearly, God's plan -- to stay sexually pure and live apart from each other until marriage -- is more successful than the way society sees it. If you want God's blessing on your marriage, we will ask you to enter the marriage covenant God's way.

We have read this document and as an investment in the future happiness of our marriage, agree to abide by its terms.

Groom

Bride

Pastor

Sample F
Another local church policy

Marriage and Human Sexuality

We believe marriage is a monogamous, heterosexual union instituted and ordained by God (Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-33). As such, it is to be an exclusive covenantal union of one man and one woman for the purpose of a lifetime of mutual commitment and companionship. A civil government's sanction of a union will be recognized as a legitimate marriage by this church only to the extent that it is consistent with this belief.

A. Position on Marriage & Human Sexuality

We believe that the term "marriage" has only one meaning- it is a union sanctioned by God that joins one man and one woman in a single, exclusive relationship, as delineated in Scripture.

We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to only occur between a man and a woman who are married to each other.

We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity is to occur outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.

We believe that any form of sexual immorality, such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, polygamy or any attempt to change one's gender, or disagreement with one's biological gender, is sinful and offensive to God.

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of the church as the local Body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to the church members and the community, it is imperative that all persons employed by our church in any capacity, or who serve as volunteers, should abide by and agree to this position statement on Marriage and Human Sexuality and conduct themselves accordingly.

We believe the recognition of same-sex or trans-gendered marriages, civil unions or domestic partnerships is prohibited by Scripture. Rather than promoting the family and the common good of a community, the recognition and sanction of same-sex marriage, civil unions or domestic partnerships is detrimental to a society. Such a redefinition of marriage devalues the institution, the family and the unique role of both a man and a woman in a child's life.

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to one's created identity as male or female to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking forgiveness and mercy through Jesus Christ.

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with the Scriptures nor the doctrine and practices of this church.

B. Policy Regarding Marriage and Human Sexuality

The Bible explains the original intention and core elements of marriage. In the New Testament, various epistles give explicit instructions on the union of a man and a woman. In light of this revelation from God, our church views marriage as a profound spiritual institution established by God. Due to the nature and importance of marriage in the biblical record, we adopt the following policy:

Clergy

1. Only licensed or ordained pastors shall officiate at marriage ceremonies conducted on church property.
2. Clergy not employed by ___ Church may officiate at weddings on church premises only after agreeing to follow the marriage beliefs and policies of ___ Church, including this document. Such clergy need the approval of the Senior Pastor or his designee before officiating at any wedding.
3. Pastors shall not officiate at a same sex or trans-gender marriage ceremony regardless of where it is held.

Applicants

1. Applicants desiring to have a ceremony performed by a pastor or director employed by ___ Church, or to use the facilities of the church, shall affirm their agreement with the doctrinal statement and Marriage and Human Sexuality Policy of ___ Church, and shall conduct themselves in a manner consistent therewith.
2. Applicants shall receive the necessary premarital counseling as required by ___ Church before a ceremony may be performed by a pastor or director.

Premises

1. We reserve the right to decline the request of any person to use ___ Church facilities or property for a ceremony when, in our judgment, there are significant concerns that one or both of the applicants may not be qualified to enter into the sacred union of marriage for theological, doctrinal, moral or legal reasons.
2. We reserve the right to decline the request of any person to use ___ Church facilities or property to host or house any group, function or event inconsistent with the biblical standards for marriage and this policy on Marriage and Human Sexuality.

Weddings

We reserve the right to decline the request of any person to use Church facilities or property to perform or participate in any wedding ceremony inconsistent with the biblical standards for marriage and this policy on Marriage and Human Sexuality.

Sample G
Another local church policy

_____ ***Church Marriage Policy***

This Marriage Policy as a guideline for what we believe to be a Christ honoring marriage, according to God's Word. Couples who have questions or comments about the policy are welcome to meet with a pastor for further discussion. Couples who wish to have a pastor officiate their wedding, or who wish to use our building for their wedding ceremony, must abide by our marriage policies.

It is the desire of ____ Church that your marriage be all that God intends for you. Since God designed the marriage relationship, He knows best how to build a marriage that will last a lifetime.

As we read His Word, we are able to discern basic principles which must be understood and applied if we hope to experience joy and fulfillment in marriage. Ignoring these principles will result in frustration and possible failure in the marriage relationship.

Because we are committed to building healthy marriages that can go the distance, we want to present the following guidelines. Our purpose is not to condemn or reject anyone, but to comply with God's principles for marriage. We value the permanence of marriage. It is our desire that your marriage models the Biblical relationship between Jesus Christ and His bride, the Church; a covenant relationship characterized by joy, intimacy and permanence.

1. **We recommend a minimum of six months of marital preparation.**
This allows plenty of time for the program required for all couples who desire to be married by one of the Church pastors or who wish to use the church facilities for their ceremony and/or reception.
2. **A minimum of a one-year dating/courting relationship is recommended before marriage.** Even though some people have the skills and maturity to build a committed relationship sooner than others, there really are no shortcuts to building intimacy, trust and communication.
3. **Divorced persons may be considered for marriage at ____ Church** provided they meet one of these biblical criteria:
 - a. The former spouse is now deceased (Romans 7:2, 1 Corinthians 7:39)
 - b. The divorce occurred because of sexual unfaithfulness by the former spouse (Matt 19:3-9)
 - c. Desertion by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15)
 - d. The former spouse initiated divorce and has remarried (Romans 7:3)

If none of the above criteria apply to your situation, a meeting with a pastor may be arranged to consider your individual case. We acknowledge that other extenuating circumstances often relate to divorce.

Additionally, remarriages after divorce of a spouse will be performed only after one year has passed from the time the divorce is finalized. A divorce recovery program must be completed. We believe a new relationship should not be pursued until the potential of a healthy reconciliation has been exhausted and significant healing has taken place.

4. **Remarriage following the death of a spouse should occur after one year from the spouse's death.**
5. **Church Pastors will not marry couples and church facilities cannot be used if the couple is "unequally yoked" spiritually.** Both people must have surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and be committed to establishing a Christian home.
6. **The couple must remain celibate (ie. refrain from sexual activity and contact) from this time forward and not live together at any time between now and the wedding.** The pastor will not perform the ceremony if the couple is currently living together. This is in accordance with Scripture and is a protection for you against divorce, as research has found that couples who live together have a higher divorce rate than those who do not. The couple, along with their Accountability Partners must agree to and sign the Purity Covenant prior to beginning any premarital programs associated with the church.
7. **In accordance with Biblical teaching and _____ Statement of Faith, marriages performed at _____ Church will only be between one man and one woman.** This church recognizes marriage as exclusively the legal union of one man and one woman in which such union is a lifetime commitment. Gen. 2:18-24; Matt. 19: 3-9; Mk. 10: 6-8; I Cor. 7:2

In conclusion, these guidelines have been created based upon the Church's belief in God's plan for marriage, and are meant to encourage, protect, and strengthen the couple's commitment to Christ.

II. Facility Use Policies

Draft Facility Use Statement

Sample H

Slightly Modified from a version suggested by the Alliance Defending Freedom

(Note: Comprehensive Church facility use policies would typically include aspects of permitted and non-permitted uses, procedures for requests and approvals of use, rules and guidelines when using the facilities, any costs and possibly forms such as releases from liability etc. Here we are only noting clauses related to the church's limitation on uses which would be inconsistent with its beliefs, such as in the same-sex marriage context.)

CHURCH FACILITY USE POLICY

Statement of Purpose

The church's facilities were provided through God's benevolence and by the sacrificial generosity of church members. The church desires that its facilities be used for the fellowship of the Body of Christ and always to God's glory. Although the facilities are not generally open to the public, we make our facilities available to approved non-member persons and groups as a witness to our faith, in a spirit of Christian charity, and as a means of demonstrating the Gospel of Jesus Christ in practice.

However, facility use will not be permitted to persons or groups holding, advancing, or advocating beliefs, or advancing, advocating, or engaging in practices that conflict with the church's faith or moral teachings, which are summarized in, among other places, the church's governing documents such as our statement of faith, constitution and bylaws. Nor may facilities be used for activities that contradict, or are deemed by the church as inconsistent with, or contrary to the church's faith or moral teachings.

This restricted facility use policy is necessary for two important reasons. First, the church may not in good conscience materially cooperate in activities or beliefs that are contrary to its faith. Allowing its facilities to be used for purposes that contradict the church's beliefs would be material cooperation with that activity, and would be a grave violation of the church's faith and religious practice. See 2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:22.

Second, it is critical to the church that we present a consistent message to the community, which the church staff and members conscientiously maintain as part of their witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To allow facilities to be used by groups or persons who express beliefs or engage in practices contrary to the

church's faith would have a negative impact on the message that we strive to promote. It could also be a source of confusion to our church members and the community because they may reasonably perceive that by allowing use of our facilities, the church is in agreement with the beliefs or practices of the persons or groups using church facilities.

Therefore, in no event shall persons or groups who hold, advance, or advocate beliefs, or advance, advocate, or engage in practices that contradict the church's faith use any church facility. Nor may facilities be used in any way that contradicts the church's faith. This policy applies to all church facilities, regardless of whether the facilities are connected to the church's sanctuary, because the church sees all of its property as holy and set apart to worship God. See Colossians 3:17.

The final and exclusive authority for any decision whether any particular use would violate this policy shall rest exclusively with the church body acting in accord with the church's governing documents.