

# Statement on Marriage and Marriage Policies for WELS Congregations

With the rapid changes in society regarding views on marriage, it is a virtual certainty that the congregations of our synod will face situations and challenges that they have not faced before. Some in our society are attempting (and, sadly, succeeding in their effort) to change the biblical definition of marriage. As a result, cultural views are shifting rapidly and the legality and acceptance of same-sex marriages is becoming increasingly widespread. In that context our called workers and members will need to be ready to give a clear and bold confession regarding the biblical teachings about marriage and homosexuality.

In addition, one would safely assume that there will be those who will challenge our synod's position and practice in court, as has already been done with governmental and business entities. Since our synod's teaching on marriage and its practices regarding marriage are clear and consistent, congregations would do well to adopt a written policy that articulates our long-held doctrine as well as how that doctrine is applied in our congregations.

After consultation with the synod's legal counsel, the following document was crafted as a sample of such a statement that can be adopted by congregations. There is no need to incorporate this policy into congregational bylaws; it can stand alone as a separate congregational policy.

## *Doctrine and Policy Regarding Marriage* *(Congregation's name) Evangelical Lutheran Church*

**The Bible teaches that marriage was established and given by God at the time of creation. As he designed and instituted it, marriage is the life-long union of one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-6). It is a relationship that is to be honored and kept pure (Hebrews 13:4; Ephesians 5:22-33). As a man and woman promise life-long faithfulness to each other as husband and wife, God himself joins them as one. Marriage is not simply a contract between two consenting individuals, nor is it merely a creation of human society, culture, or tradition. God himself instituted marriage at the time of creation, and God himself joins a man and woman in marriage today.**

The biblical teaching on marriage emphasizes the blessings God intends to convey to those joined together in the marital relationship. Through marriage God provides partners well suited and complementary to one another. In marriage, God provides a partner who will provide encouragement and support. Marriage is also to be the God-ordained means to procreate and to establish a stable environment in which children can be nurtured both physically and spiritually. Marriage is the one context God intended for the use of the blessing of sexual intimacy, where the sexual union of one man and woman is an expression of love and oneness rather than a sinful satisfaction of lust. Finally, since we live in a fallen world, in marriage God provides a restraint for selfishness and sin as each partner strives to live the pure life that God intends for his people (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8).

This is the Bible's teaching about the origin, definition, and nature of marriage. For that reason it is also the doctrine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Every congregation and called worker accepts the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice. That marriage is the God-ordained union of one man and one woman is the clear teaching of the Bible, and therefore is the teaching and confession of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

The policy and practice of (Congregation's name), a member congregation of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, is consistent with the synod's beliefs and teachings regarding marriage. We believe that marriage is the sacred, life-long union between one man and one woman. Therefore, our pastors will not officiate in any marriage ceremony or celebration and our church sanctuary may not be used for any activities related to a marriage ceremony or celebration that is inconsistent with these beliefs.