

## **Marriage Policy & Bylaws for Churches**

In light of the current trend of states enacting laws to allow same sex marriages, churches should now act to protect their theological integrity regarding marriage ceremonies and other related activities.

A church planning to adopt a marriage policy should review the following Model Marriage Policy for Churches and then edit it to make it fit what that church believes about marriage. The policy adopted by the church need not be included in the church bylaws, but should be adopted by the appropriate church body and made a part of that adopting body's business meeting minutes. It is also important that the church's Statement of Faith accurately reflects the church's Biblical view of marriage, homosexuality, and transgenderism.

To legally protect the church from a potential lawsuit or other legal action against the marriage policy, the church must follow its bylaw procedures for adopting amendments to the Statement of Faith and other pertinent bylaws. The following sample language may be used by a church to bring its policies and Statement of Faith up-to-date and to offer the optimum protection for the church in maintaining it right to take a Biblical stand on these politically charged issues.

### **Model Marriage Policy for Churches**

Marriage is a union ordained by God. It was first instituted by God in the early chapters of Genesis and codified in the Levitical law. Old Testament prophets compared marriage to a relationship between God and his people. Historical narratives give many examples of marriages and wisdom literature discusses the unique unity of the marriage relationship. Jesus explained the original intention for and the core elements of marriage, and several New Testament Epistles give explicit instructions on this union. Since marriage is considered by the church to be a typology of Christ and His Church, churches hold marriage to be a profound spiritual institution established by God. Due to the importance of marriage in the Biblical witness, [ministry name] adopts the following policy:

#### **Clergy:**

1. Only duly ordained clergy shall officiate at marriage ceremonies conducted on church property.
2. Clergy employed by the church shall be subject to dismissal and/or loss of ordination for officiating a same gender marriage ceremony.

#### **Applicants:**

1. Applicants wishing to have a ceremony performed by a member of the clergy employed by the church, or to use the church facilities, shall affirm their agreement with the Articles of Faith and shall conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent therewith.

2. Applicants shall receive \_\_\_\_\_ hours of premarital counseling by clergy or counselors employed by the church or other persons who, in the sole opinion of the pastoral staff of the church, have appropriate training, experience, and spiritual understanding to provide such counseling.

**Premises:**

1. Any marriage performed on church premises shall be officiated by a member of the clergy.
2. Clergy officiating marriage ceremonies on church premises, whether or not employed by the church, shall affirm their agreement with the Articles of Faith and shall conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent therewith.
3. The clergy assigned by the church to implement the procedures contained in this Marriage Policy may, in his or her sole discretion, decline to make church facilities available 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.

**Model Human Marriage and Sexuality Language for Churches, Religious Schools and Other Faith-Based Organizations** (*add to Statement of Faith*):

- a. We believe that the term “marriage” has only one, legitimate meaning, and that is marriage sanctioned by God, which joins one man and one woman in a single, covenantal union, as delineated by Scripture. Marriage ceremonies performed in any facility or space owned, leased, or rented by this church will be only those ceremonies sanctioned by God, joining one man with one woman as their genders were determined at birth. Whenever there is a conflict between the church’s position and any new legal standard for marriage, the church’s statement of faith, doctrines, and biblical positions will govern. (Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:22-23; Mark 10:6-9; I Cor. 7:1-9)
- b. We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of marriage as defined in (a) above. We believe that any other type of sexual activity, identity or expression that lies outside of this definition of marriage, including those that are becoming more accepted in the culture and the courts, are contradictory to God’s natural design and purpose for sexual activity. (Gen. 2:24; Gen. 19:5; Lev. 18:1-30; Rom. 1: 26-29; 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:9-10; 1 Thess. 4:1-8; Heb. 13:4)
- c. We believe that God creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, unchangeable genders together reflect the image and nature of God, and the rejection of one’s biological gender is a rejection of the image of God within that person. (Genesis 1:26-27)
- d. Although our marriage and sexuality standards are firmly based on the Bible, we also believe that every individual must be treated with dignity and respect, free of threats or harassment.