

Sample Policy—Marriage, Gender and Appropriate Behavior

Personal Conduct

The purpose of this type of policy is to state your ministry's expectations for employees, volunteers, and others with respect to marriage and interpersonal relationships. A bylaw provision that clearly explains your organization's position on marriage, gender, and appropriate behavior can be helpful regardless of your ministry's specific beliefs. To reflect your distinct expectations, we strongly encourage you to modify this policy in accordance with the standards set by your organization.

This type of policy also can be helpful when addressing facilities-use questions. If you wish to restrict the use of your ministry-owned facilities to individuals or groups who share your ministry's religious beliefs, then you may want to consider limiting the use of your facilities to members in good standing. If your ministry does not have formal membership procedures, then consider adopting a policy that says all individuals or organizations that wish to use ministry-owned facilities must agree to use the facilities only in accordance with your ministry's religious beliefs.

One key to any personal conduct policy of a Christian ministry is referencing Scripture as a basis for any behavior that's prohibited or discouraged. Citing supporting Scripture will strengthen your ministry's First Amendment (freedom of religion) position in the event of litigation.

Consistency is important when applying this policy. For example, if you terminate a volunteer who has become pregnant out of wedlock because she's violated the policy against premarital sex, this is legally permissible so long as it is applied consistently. In other words, the same discipline should be taken against a male volunteer who engages in extramarital sexual relations.

SAMPLE BYLAW PROVISION: MARRIAGE, GENDER, AND APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

[Ministry name] operates on a strongly held belief that the marriage relationship has been established by God as a union between one man and one woman. (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31). [Ministry name] further holds that, in accordance with Scripture, sexual intimacy and sexual activity is appropriate only within the marriage relationship, between one husband and one wife. (1 Corinthians 7:2; Hebrews 13:4). [Ministry name] believes God has created two distinct and complementary genders, male and female, and each person is created in accordance with God's perfect design (Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:4).

Accordingly, [Ministry name] views the following behaviors as inappropriate and contrary to Scripture:

- 1) Any sexual intimacy or sexual act between individuals who are not married to one another.
- 2) Any marriage or civil union that is not between one man and one woman.
- 3) Any attempt to adopt or present as a different gender than that assigned at birth.
- 4) Any other activity, teaching, or behavior that is contrary to a biblical view of marriage, gender, and/or appropriate behavior as outlined in this provision.

All members* of [Ministry name] and all individuals involved in [Ministry name] operations, activities, and events are expected to uphold the ministry's perspective on marriage, gender, sexual intimacy, and appropriate behavior as set forth in this provision. Individuals and organizations who desire to use [Ministry name's] facilities must also act in accordance with this provision.

**This provision is applicable only to those ministries that have policies or procedures for formal membership.*

Note: These sample policies should be carefully reviewed and fine-tuned, expanded, or otherwise revised so that they accurately reflect the beliefs of your ministry. Including appropriate scripture references is strongly encouraged. When reviewing and revising organizational documents, it's always advisable to involve a local attorney.

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