

North American Division Statement on Human Sexuality

November 2, 2015

North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists stands in full support of the General Conference guidelines regarding human sexuality, released in the spring of 2014,¹ as well as the other official statements on marriage, family, homosexuality, and same-sex unions. To address issues specific to the NAD, this statement is presented not as a theological document but as one drawing from biblical teachings some practical understandings and guidelines for the Adventist Church in North America.

Biblical Principles

First and foremost, as a Christian church, we fully subscribe to and follow the model of Jesus. He challenged and overturned the assumptions of His culture about rank and status, interacting with people from all walks of life (Matt 8:5-13; 9:11; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:30, 15:2) and offering unconditional love and compassion to everyone (John 3:16, John 4:1-26; 8:1-11). As imitators of Jesus we welcome all people, inviting them into our faith communities and sacrificially serving them. Followers of Jesus, regardless of their views on alternative human sexualities, treat people with dignity and respect and extend hospitality and grace to all.

Second, in harmony with biblical teaching, we affirm that sexual relationships are to be celebrated and endorsed only within the context of heterosexual marriage between one man and one woman (Gen 1:26-27; Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4-6, 8; Mark 10:6-9; cf. Lev 18:22; Lev 20:13, Rom 1:26-27, Jude 1:7; 1 Cor 6:9). We recognize that this belief may be in conflict with the philosophy and practice of contemporary culture outside of the Adventist Church; however, Christian beliefs have been challenged in other times and places, and we hold to the historic Christian position on this issue. We believe that we must not compromise biblically grounded compassion or conviction (Rom 15:1, 7; 1 Cor 6:19-20, 10:31; 1 Thes 4:4-11; Col 3:12-14; Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 1:14-16).

Third, in today's world where there are divergent perspectives regarding human sexuality, God uses His church to work out His divine purpose of bringing salvation to all

¹ Guidelines on "Responding to Changing Cultural Attitudes Regarding Homosexual and Other Alternative Sexual Practices," Spring 2014. See also statement on "Same-Sex Unions," October 17, 2012, "Homosexuality," originally issued on October 3, 1999, and revised on October 17, 2012.

people. Therefore, the church must provide freedom and protection from social marginalization (Gal 6:1) and must point people to Christ (Matt 22:36-40) for forgiveness, redemption, and a new life (Rom 8:4-14; Eph 4:13).

Sexual Orientation and Practice

We differentiate between *sexual orientation*, which denotes an enduring pattern of romantic or sexual attraction to one or both genders, and *sexual behavior* or *activity*. Given the complexities of the fallen human condition (Rom 3:23), we recognize that individuals may experience same-sex orientation through no choice of their own. The struggles they face call for the active support and loving compassion of fellow Christians, and the Adventist church can help them find their identity in Christ (1 Cor 6:11).

While the Bible does not address sexual orientation, it does describe appropriate and inappropriate sexual behavior. We acknowledge that attraction to someone of the same gender may be temptation, but not an act of sin (Matt 5:27-28; Rom 6:1-23; Col 3:1-10; James 1:14-15); therefore, those with same-sex orientation, who conform to biblical teachings about sexual behavior, may fully participate in the life of the Adventist Church.

Nature and Nurture

In view of the fact that scientists and other experts have not reached a consensus concerning the factors leading to sexual orientation—usually understood to involve the complex roles of “nature” and “nurture”—the Adventist Church does not presume to have settled the scientific and social questions regarding the cause of non-heterosexual orientation.

The vital and opportune role of the Adventist Church is to educate its members about sexuality and purity within the context of grace. We need to be well informed and consistent in our application of the Word of God and the best science, and maintain both compassion and conviction.

It is with these principles in mind that the North American Division, as an integral part of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church, proposes the following practices and protocols in the areas of church attendance and Christian fellowship, church membership, leadership roles, employment and benefits, educational institutions, healthcare ministries, and the marriage ceremony.

Church Attendance and Christian Fellowship

Based in the belief that Christ’s death for all signifies the infinite value God places on every human being, the Seventh-day Adventist Church promotes open church attendance

and fellowship. Modeling the love of Jesus Christ, Adventists welcome people from all walks of life to join them for Sabbath School, the worship service, the communion service, Bible study groups, and other church-based activities. Churches that involve non-members in ministry activities should be careful about engaging those who promote values that are not in harmony with Seventh-day Adventist Church beliefs and conviction.

Church Membership

The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* explains the criteria for becoming a member. Individuals desiring membership are expected to affirm and commit to the Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs and the responsibilities and practices of membership. This includes holding to a biblical view on human sexuality. Principles and criteria relative to membership are to be applied with fairness, consistency, and an attitude of love.

Leadership Roles

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, only members in regular standing are to fill leadership roles such as teaching and preaching. Leaders are held to a high standard of care as representatives and role models carrying out a sacred trust on behalf of Christ and His church.

Employment

Seventh-day Adventists employed by the Church are expected to respect and practice the beliefs and convictions of the organization. Church members engaging in inappropriate sexual activity or the promotion of any sexual behavior that is inconsistent with Adventist beliefs and mission are ineligible for employment. Church entities that employ non-members should use discretion when hiring individuals whose values may be contrary to the beliefs and convictions of the Adventist Church.

Educational Institutions

Adventist education is a vital ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and our educational institutions are Christ-centered communities whose core beliefs and policies are deeply embedded in Adventist doctrine. Adventist educational institutions do not condone gay, lesbian, or bisexual sexual practice or the promotion of sexual behavior outside of our biblical beliefs. Institutional governance documents, such as bylaws and student handbooks, must align fully with Church beliefs; and students are expected to adhere to the codes of conduct and all relevant institutional policies.

Employees of Adventist educational institutions are called to love students and colleagues regardless of sexual orientation. This includes strictly guarding against harassment.

Facilities Use

Adventist churches and entities should exercise discretion in allowing non-Adventist groups to use meeting spaces. Groups with beliefs contrary to the Adventist Church should be carefully screened. Denominational buildings and property shall not be used for a same-sex wedding ceremony or reception. Members, employees, or students who use denominational facilities are expected to function in harmony with the mission of the Adventist Church.

Marriage Ceremonies

Seventh-day Adventist Church employees are not to officiate, perform, or have an active, participatory role in same-sex wedding ceremonies. Attending a same-sex ceremony is a matter of personal conscience and should be considered with discretion.

Healthcare Ministries

As a vital ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Adventist healthcare systems in the North American Division are committed to the principles on human sexuality as taught by our church. While providing healthcare to the general public in the communities they serve, these institutions function in a rapidly changing environment, often involving mandatory compliance with regulations or fiduciary responsibilities accompanying grants and government contracts. The institutions also have the necessity of employing a wide variety of individuals with essential expertise, a high percentage of whom are not members of the Adventist church. The healthcare institutions are, therefore, in the best position to honor Adventist values and align with Church guidelines as they manage human sexuality issues through their executive committees and boards, with careful attention to the guidance from church leaders.

Transgenderism

While the Seventh-day Adventist Church has formulated teachings on gender and sexuality that may have a bearing on issues related to transgenderism, the Church has not yet articulated an official position applying these teachings to the issue. The complex nature of transgenderism calls for further discussion before recommendations can be made for the Church.

This statement was voted during the Year-end Meeting of the North American Division Executive Committee on November 2, 2015 in Silver Spring, Maryland.