

Human Sexuality Task Force

This task force was commissioned by the 2015 US National Conference, and appointed that fall by the Executive Leadership Team.

Report 41 is the working document which delegates will use to discuss the proposals on the floor.

Report 23 puts the proposals in context in the Family Standards chapter.

Report 24 gives miscellaneous information about the task force.

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There are times in history when specific social movements grow to impact the perspectives of society as a whole. These times rightfully warrant a response from the Church. Sometimes the Church must embrace the God-honoring impact of these social movements. Other times, the Church is forced to clarify doctrine and confront paradigms that are opposed to the will of God as revealed in the Bible. We are living in a time which requires a discerning response from the Church, especially as it pertains to human sexuality, marriage, gender, and sexual ethics.

The 2015 National Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (USA) authorized a Human Sexuality Task Force to review the *Discipline* to ensure that official denominational statements accurately reflect our deeply held biblical values related to human sexuality in a rapidly changing societal context. The Church of the United Brethren in Christ has long held a traditional Christian view that God created humans as male and female, and that sexual intercourse is only appropriate between a man and a woman who are united in marriage. The Task Force was not commissioned to change our traditional standards related to sexuality and marriage; rather, the Task Force was assigned to state expressly existing biblically-based, historical positions of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.

It is important that the Church of the United Brethren in Christ does more than stand against a cultural movement. The mission of Christ is not fulfilled by simply confronting untruth. God's Church is called to stand for truth while fulfilling Christ's redemptive mission on earth, which is characterized by mercy, grace, love, and humility. The Church of the United Brethren in Christ has historically prioritized reaching out to those who are far from God with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The goal of the Human Sexuality Task Force, therefore, has been to consider the intersection of our biblical convictions about marriage and human sexuality with our missional call to embody a Gospel of redemption and reconciliation in Christ. The Task Force has labored to recommend *Discipline* revisions to the 2017 National Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (USA) which reflect these two important historical characteristics of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and which set forth the Church's longstanding religious beliefs on the matter.

The Task Force is offering six recommendations for *Discipline* revision. In the following paragraphs, we have attempted to describe the foundational theological rationale for each of the six recommendations.

The Local Congregation and Human Sexuality

While sexuality is increasingly a public matter, sexual behavior remains among the most private aspects of a person's life. And yet, such behavior often cuts to the core of who a person is, as what is done in secret or in the company of one's most intimate companions, free from the observations and judgments of observers, most often reflects one's true values, pains, and beliefs. As the media reveals time and again, there is often a considerable disconnect between what one professes about sexuality and what one actually does, an observation that is true for more than just politicians and celebrities.

This disconnect can be healed, ignored, or exacerbated through one's involvement in a community of faith. In our discussions of human sexuality as understood by the United Brethren in Christ, we were vitally aware that whatever we wrote in terms of position or advocated in terms of posture could not be restricted to the individual believer (much less the nonbeliever), but must address matters of sexuality within the context

250TH
ANNIVERSARY
JULY 12-15, 2017
LANCASTER, PA

of the local congregation. We come to church as sexual beings; we do not leave this aspect of our identity at home. Our congregations are affected by how we understand and practice our personal sexuality, and such understandings and practices are deeply informed (albeit perhaps not as much as in previous generations) by what is both taught and modeled in our churches.

Churches and their leaders in our generation struggle to do this well. Some are so concerned to “take a stand” for godly sexuality that they forget the message of grace that is central to those who are in Christ. Others are so concerned to be hospitable that they forget that God’s hospitality includes the offer of transformation. Still others ignore questions of sexuality entirely, leaving their congregants without theological or spiritual guidance on this vital aspect of their lives. And yet others attempt to legislate behavior rather than heal what is broken. Thankfully, these are not the only options for our congregations. What we propose below constitutes, for lack of a better phrase, a brief “ecclesiology of sexuality.” That is, it attempts to expressly state, based on our longstanding biblical beliefs, what a church is, does, and offers, in terms of the sexuality of its participants.

First, the Church is holy. We understand the age-old temptation to define our holiness in terms of moral worthiness, but the biblical teaching is that we are a community of saints already held blameless through the atonement of Christ and our participation in the life of the Holy Trinity. We reflect on earth the same holy love that binds together in perfect unity the divine community of love. Our holiness is thus a “set-apartness” for the redemptive work of God in the world — the kingdom of God already at work in us, through us, and among us. Holiness is our current state, but it also remains our aspiration for, like the New Testaments saints, we continue to live in an “already-but-not-yet” mystery in which our salvation is still being worked out with fear and trembling. We are holy but not yet holy.

This means, second, that the Church be honest. We have received the Spirit of Truth; therefore, to be truthful to ourselves and to others, we acknowledge that all humans are broken or wounded in our sexuality. The saints who comprise the Body of Christ on Earth have to grapple with lust and inappropriate desire; we who are already deemed holy in Christ have used others for our own sexual gratification or have allowed ourselves to be used by others. The people of God have sometimes, to our deep shame and regret, ignored or even condoned unholy behaviors in our own churches, families and communities; we have been complicit in the wounding of others, particularly the most vulnerable. We do among ourselves so many of the things we despise about those who are not of us.

To acknowledge such is not to defame the people of God but merely to insist that the Church be humble. When we speak on matters of human sexuality, we do not do so from a lofty perch of judgment, but as those who have also been muddied by our own time in the pit. When we preach, seek, or attempt a redemptive approach to sexuality, we do so not as those who have always gotten it right, but as those who have so often gotten it wrong but have nonetheless experienced grace. We refrain from too much language of condemnation, lest we invite upon ourselves the condemnation we invoke on others. In our conversations with those outside the Church or those brothers and sisters we believe to be in error, we adopt the posture of humble penitents pointing the way toward mutual healing.

And the Church is healing. This word is for us both verb and adjective — something we do and something we are. We offer healing of all human brokenness, including our sexuality, through the transforming grace of Christ who forgives all sins, binds all wounds, cleanses all stains, and reconciles all things to himself. This healing is not our work, but His, and yet we participate in it through both word and deed. Like the Good Samaritan, we stop to bind wounds and provide needed care. And we guard ourselves from inflicting further harm to those who trust us with their most intimate pain; it is our responsibility to help protect from further harm by providing, to the best of our ability, safe spaces for those who choose to worship, serve, and be formed among us.

This holy, honest, humble, healing Church is the primary means by which God intends to redeem the deeply wounded sexuality of the human race. It is our opportunity, through both position and posture, to show to the world what a redeemed sexuality looks and acts like, so that we and others can live fully in the goodness that God intended for us from the beginning. We do not claim a perfect understanding of the will of God in all matters debated in our society in this generation, nor do we assert that we have the only correct hermeneutic for interpreting Scripture. The recommendations we make are not rooted in confidence in our own perspicacity but in our trust that the Spirit of all truth will guide us and that the Spirit of all grace will continue to perfect us in holy love.

The Task Force proposes the addition of the following statement to the Family Standards section of the *Discipline* in light of our understanding of the nature of the Church and its role in society.

Proposed Addition to “Family Standards” chapter.

All of this is new material.

The Local Congregation and Human Sexuality

1. All persons, irrespective of physicality, gender, or sexual orientation, are made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, a congregation should focus on:
 - a. Honoring all persons as created human beings who are deeply loved by God.
 - b. Extending hospitality to all persons who are drawn to its public gatherings.
2. All persons have been wounded in their sexuality and are in need of the full redemption of Christ. God desires that human beings live in loving, committed, life-giving, healing relationships in all aspects of life. Therefore, a congregation should focus on:
 - a. The redemption and wholeness of all persons.
 - b. The healing of relationships.
3. All persons can be tempted to use other people for their own sexual desires, contrary to the loving will of God. Therefore, out of honor for God and each other, a congregation should focus on:
 - a. Encouraging the creation and maintenance of healthy, biblical sexual boundaries.
 - b. Recognizing that celibacy can be a more radical, sacrificial expression of love than sexual intimacy.
4. All persons need opportunity for safety and authenticity. It is hypocritical to judge the sins of others while failing to acknowledge our own. Therefore, a congregation should focus on:
 - a. Protecting each other from harm, particularly when we are in each other’s care.
 - b. Healing those who have been abused.
 - c. Redeeming perpetrators of abuse.

Singleness

The Task Force looked at the *Discipline* section on Family Standards and observed that singleness was barely acknowledged. As the Task Force considered some of the implications of our traditional view of marriage, we recognized that one God-honoring choice for a variety of circumstances might be celibate singleness. It seemed important to the Task Force to articulate a statement affirming singleness and recommend it as an addition to the *Discipline*.

Recommended Statement to be added to Discipline.

All of this is new.

Singleness

Scripture affirms singleness. Some people experience singleness as a calling. Others experience singleness as a result of the circumstances of life. From Scripture, we understand the following:

1. Neither marriage nor sexual intimacy is essential for wholeness. All persons find wholeness in Christ alone (Galatians 2:20).
2. Jesus and Paul, both single adults, spoke of the advantages of singleness in order to serve God without distraction (Matthew 19:12, I Corinthians 7:32ff).
3. It is not good for humans to be alone (Genesis 2:18, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Psalm 68:6a, Hebrews 10:25). Therefore, the Church must function as the family of God, providing space for all people, especially singles, to find companionship and to pursue their calling (Matthew 12:48-50, Ephesians 2:19-22).

There are more single Americans now than at any time in our country’s history. As we seek to engage singles as whole persons with God-given identity and value, it is important for the Church to show respect to singles who are seeking to honor God with their life and relational choices. Too often singleness is not regarded as a valid choice, calling, or relational circumstance for Christians within the Church. While Church leaders will not likely make explicit statements against singleness, the assumptions implicit in church programming, teaching, and conversation can leave singles feeling devalued.

The Church should honor singleness in the same spirit that we see it valued throughout the New Testament. Jesus and Paul, both single adults, spoke of the advantages of singleness in order to serve God without distraction (Matthew 19:12, I Corinthians 7:32ff). Singleness may be a lifelong calling or a status that one experiences for a season of life. The Church should encourage all people, including singles, to recognize the unique opportunities that God has provided in their lives to be a part of advancing God's Kingdom.

Too often the Church has taken society's lead and exalted romantic relationships as the ultimate form of human fulfillment or completion. In doing so, we have unintentionally shifted the focus from a life fully devoted to Christ in whom we find fullness (Galatians 2:20) to a life devoted to a search for significance in romantic relationships. Many single Christians have been led to believe they will never experience life as God intended it until they find "the one." This search for ultimate fulfillment outside of Christ can be damaging to personal identity and faith. The ultimate relational purpose, for married and single people alike, is to find their identity in Christ. The Church should celebrate this wherever it is found in our congregations.

We affirm that it is not good for humans to be alone (Genesis 2:18, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Psalm 68:6a, Hebrews 10:25), but marriage is not the only path to companionship. One of the most meaningful functions of the Church is community, and family analogies are used throughout the New Testament to describe the Church. The Church must function as the family of God, providing space for all people, especially singles, to find companionship and to pursue their calling (Matthew 12:48-50, Ephesians 2:19-22). This requires us to regard singles as vital contributors to the local body and value them in every dimension of the life of the Church.

Marriage

Marriage was instituted by God. The account of Creation in Genesis 2 reveals that God created Eve to be with Adam because it was not good for Adam to be alone (Genesis 2:18). The writer of Genesis asserts that following the pattern established in Genesis 2, ". . . a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This exact language is borrowed in the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7) and in Paul's epistles (I Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 5:31). Implicit within the Genesis pattern is the idea 1) that God created humans as male and female (Genesis 1:27; and 2) that marriage is between a male and a female. Neither Jesus, Paul, nor any other biblical author offers an alternative marriage structure or challenges the assumption that marriage is intended only for a man and a woman.

The purposes of marriage are threefold. First, as stated above, marriage provides companionship (Genesis 2:18). A statement to this effect already appears in the *Discipline*.

The Task Force chose to recommend two additional sentences to the section on Marriage in the *Discipline* which expand on the purposes of marriage:

The marriage relationship reflects the relationship between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:22ff). It is out of the marriage relationship that God intended for children to be produced and nurtured.

Marriage provides an analogy of the self-giving love that Christ has for His Bride, the Church. This analogy is present in the teachings of Jesus, the epistles of Paul, and the Revelation of John. The analogy of marriage is also used in the Old Testament prophetic writings to illustrate God's relationship with Israel.

A stable, loving, God-honoring marriage between a man and a woman provides the context within which God intended for children to be produced and nurtured. The Task Force is not saying that Christian couples who may be unable to bear children or may choose not to have children are outside of God's will. Further, the Task Force is not saying that children born outside of a marriage relationship are in any way inferior to children born to a Christian marriage. The Task Force is simply affirming that God's plan for the family includes children being born into the home of a mother and father who live out their faith in the home.

The Task Force generally affirms the work of the 2015 National Conference which added language to the paragraph on Marriage providing specific guidelines for pastors and churches regarding solemnization of marriages and facility usage for marriage ceremonies. The Task Force is recommending the removal of the statement about recognizing marriages because the recognition of marriages is primarily a legal/governmental function.

The Task Force is ambivalent about the decision made by the 2015 National Conference to add the adject-

tives “genetic, biological” before the words “man” and “woman” in several statements. While not disagreeing with the apparent intent of the wording, the Task Force feels that this language is unnecessarily technical and moves beyond a theological position on these matters. However, out of respect for the deliberative process and the decision made at National Conference 2015, the Task Force is not recommending the removal of “genetic, biological” from this section.

Current statement:

Marriage was instituted by God and is regulated by him. For this reason, the Church must resist all attempts to alter marriage from what the Bible has revealed about it. The purpose of marriage is companionship between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:18) in a permanent relationship which can end only when one of the partners dies.

A Christian should marry only another Christian (I Corinthians 7:39, II Corinthians 6:14). Their relationship is to express God’s original intention for marriage: the wife’s role alongside her husband as an equal.

Because God ordained marriage and defined it as the covenant relationship between a man, a woman, and himself, the Church of the United Brethren in Christ USA will only recognize marriages between a genetic, biological man and a genetic, biological woman.

Further, the ministers classified with the authority to conduct weddings shall only participate in weddings and solemnize marriages between one genetic, biological man and one genetic, biological woman.

Finally, the facilities and property of churches in covenant with the Church of the United Brethren in Christ USA shall only host weddings between one genetic, biological man and one genetic, biological woman.

Revised statement (new sentences in bold, reordered language italicized, deleted language struck through):

Marriage was instituted by God and is regulated by him. For this reason, the Church must resist all attempts to alter marriage from what the Bible has revealed about it.

God ordained marriage and defined it as the covenant relationship between a man, a woman, and himself. The purpose of marriage is companionship between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:18) in a permanent relationship which ends when one of the partners dies. **The marriage relationship reflects the relationship between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:22ff). It is out of the marriage relationship that God intended for children to be produced and nurtured.**

A Christian should marry only another Christian (I Corinthians 7:39, II Corinthians 6:14). Their relationship is to express God’s original intention for marriage: the wife’s role alongside her husband as an equal.

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250TH
ANNIVERSARY
JULY 12-15, 2017
LANCASTER, PA

Pornography

The *Discipline* contains a statement about pornography (§145). As the Task Force reviewed the current statement in light of changes in technology, *Discipline* statements on other social issues, and proposed *Discipline* revisions related to singleness, marriage, and human sexuality, it seemed prudent to update the statement on pornography for three reasons.

1. First, the current statement appears to have been written before the advent of the internet and the proliferation of digital pornography.
2. Second, the *Discipline* provides direction to members concerning similar social issues (drug abuse, gambling and the occult). Each of these statements includes clear instructions which limit or prohibit the use of specific substances or participation in specific activities. The current statement about pornography offers no such instruction.
3. Third, while the Task Force was created to consider responses to recent societal shifts in views about the definition of marriage, sexual identity, and issues related to these things, it was important to prepare a broad and comprehensive theology of human sexuality, marriage, and human personhood.

As a result, the work of the Task Force in other areas has informed the reformulation of the statement on pornography in order to reflect the revisions in those other areas. Revising the statement will bring it into conformity with our statements on other social issues, give instruction to members in a culture where pornography's acceptance and influence is growing, and address the reality that pornography is a ubiquitous issue in society and in the Church.

One final aspect of the proposed revision is the biblical response a church should take in order to minister to those who struggle in this area of their lives. As with other issues, this revision is designed to strengthen our long-held stance on pornography, and not to weaken or remove it.

The Bible teaches that sex is a unique and wonderful gift from God that is to be experienced, expressed, and enjoyed within the context of a lifelong marriage covenant between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:22-24, Matthew 19:4-6). Sexual nakedness was never meant to be observed except within this context (Genesis 9:22-23, Exodus 28:42, Leviticus 18:6-18, Habakkuk 2:15). Pornography removes sex from its proper context by creating arousal apart from the God-given, responsible relationship in which it was designed to function. Pornography fuels the sin of lust (Matthew 5:27-28, Job 31:1) and substitutes the relational intimacy and self-giving inherent in the sexual act with self-gratifying action. Pornography damages individuals and marriages, and contributes to systemic social ills such as the objectification of people made in the image of God, abuse, and funding and encouraging the sex trade industry.

All members are to abstain from using pornography, as it is a sin that is deeply damaging, personally, relationally, and societally. Those struggling with pornography or an addiction to sexually explicit materials should seek help in the body of Christ through the counsel of Christian therapists as well as the support and accountability of fellow followers of Christ (James 5:16). Churches, are urged to teach on the dangers of pornography while creating avenues to help brothers and sisters in the Lord who are struggling in this area (Galatians 6:1-3).

With the above considerations in mind, the Task Force is proposing the following revision to the *Discipline* statement on Pornography. We are also proposing that the statement be relocated from the Social Standards section of the *Discipline* into the section on Family Standards.

Current Statement (§145 in "Social Standards" chapter):

The distribution of pornographic material in various media is one of the causes of the moral decline of our nation. We encourage our local churches to take an active part in any local movement to eliminate the distribution of pornographic material in their respective communities. In case there is no such movement in their communities we encourage our local churches to take the initiative in carefully and prayerfully organizing such a movement.

Replace the current statement with the following, and place it in Family Standards chapter:

Pornography

1. Pornography is a sin that is deeply damaging to individuals, relationships, and society. All members are to abstain from using pornography.
2. We oppose the use of pornography for these reasons:
 - a. Sex is a unique and wonderful gift from God that is to be experienced, expressed, and enjoyed within the context of a lifelong marriage covenant (Genesis 2:22-24, Matthew 19:4-6).
 - b. Sexual nakedness was never meant to be observed except within the context of marriage (Genesis 9:22-23, Exodus 28:42, Leviticus 18:6-18, Habakkuk 2:15).
 - c. Pornography removes sex from its proper context by creating arousal apart from marriage.
 - d. Pornography fuels the sin of lust (Matthew 5:27-28, Job 31:1).
 - e. Pornography substitutes self-gratification for the relational intimacy and self-giving inherent in the sexual act.
 - f. Pornography is destructive to marriages and families.
 - g. Pornography contributes to such systemic social ills as the abuse and objectification of people made in the image of God.
 - h. Pornography funds and encourages the sex trade industry.
3. Those struggling with pornography or an addiction to sexually explicit materials should seek help through the counsel of Christian therapists as well as the support and accountability of fellow followers of Christ (James 5:16).
4. Church leaders are urged to teach on the dangers of pornography and to create avenues to help Christians who are struggling with pornography (Galatians 6:1-3).

Sex and Gender Distinctions

We live in a time in the United States where boundaries have become confused regarding sex/gender distinctions. As a result of changes in our cultural context with regard to an understanding of gender and sexuality, it is important for the Church of the United Brethren in Christ to provide a theological and biblical understanding of this very important dimension of human experience.

All human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The imbuelement of the image of God within a human person is not dependent upon that person's sex; God created male and female in his image. Because of the fall, God's perfect created order for humans has become disordered in various ways (Genesis 3, Romans 6:12-18). This affects every aspect of human experience: sexual, physical, psychological, social, and spiritual.

1. Intersex Persons

Biological sex, or the genetic and anatomical distinction between male and female, is sometimes unclear so that not all human persons may be precisely classified as either male or female. Individuals whose biological sex is unclear (because at birth their genetic sex does not match their physical sex-related characteristics or they possess physical characteristics of both male and female) are known as intersex persons.

Although humans are sexual beings, it is being created in God's image that defines humanity. This reaches far beyond sexuality to encompass every aspect of the human soul. Neither maleness nor femaleness is in and of itself equivalent to the image of God. Being male or female is common among many species, whereas in the creation account, being created in the image of God is unique to humankind.

With this in mind, the Church should affirm all persons equally as image bearers of God. This does not mean abandoning the idea of sexual distinctiveness among humans, but recognizes that even in the midst of sexual or biological disorder, all humans bear the image of their Creator.

The Church should support and encourage intersex persons as co-image bearers to live in holiness and to follow Christ in a way that brings honor and glory to God.

2. Transgenderism

Persons who struggle with gender identity experience within themselves the suffering that comes when God's good work of creating the human mind and body is disordered as the result of the Fall (Genesis 3).

Only in Christ can persons struggling with gender identity experience reconciliation between mind and body. A person may not experience perfect reconciliation between mind and body in this life. However, God may work through an individual's gender identity struggle for his glory (II Corinthians 12:7-9).

As those who struggle with gender identity suffer along with all believers while waiting for our glorified bodies (I Corinthians 15:42-44), the Church should welcome them and walk in unity with them, seeking to be oriented toward the Triune God in whose image each person is created.

The Church must not demean or trivialize individual suffering related to the struggle with gender identity. The Church must also resist cultural pressure to celebrate or support efforts to transition from one sex or gender to another.

God created humankind male and female, and a distinction between the sexes should be honored and maintained, even as specific gendered behavior and characteristics may vary from one culture to another. To utterly reject and seek to change one's birth sex to reflect a self-conceived image is, in a sense, to assert that human design is superior to God's design. Each person should strive to glorify God as one made in his image and according to his design, recognizing that such a commitment honors God although it may also involve temporary suffering.

Gender dysphoria, experienced when a person struggles with gender identity, exists at different levels of severity in different persons. Those suffering from gender dysphoria should confide in their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and seek competent Christian counseling when appropriate. Persons addressing their own gender dysphoria should understand the importance of God's order and design for human sexuality and exercise discretion when deciding how to live faithfully in the midst of a very real inner struggle.

Likewise, believers who may not experience this particular hardship should take care to manifest the fruit of the Spirit when interacting with persons who do, both within and outside of the Church, encouraging them to find their ultimate identity in Christ. The Church should compassionately minister to those struggling with sexual identity issues by becoming a place of understanding, healing and hope; affirming the value of all persons while pointing them to Christ, the healer of all brokenness.

With this theological backdrop in mind, here is a proposed addition to the UB *Discipline*:

Proposed Addition

All of this is new material.

Sex and Gender Distinctions

1. Created in the Image of God

a. All human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The imbueing of the image of God within a human person is not dependent upon that person's sex; God created male and female in his image.

b. Because of the fall, God's perfect created order for humans has become disordered in various ways (Genesis 3, Romans 6:12-18). This affects every aspect of human experience: sexual, physical, psychological, social, and spiritual.

c. Even in the midst of sexual or biological disorder, all humans bear the image of their Creator.

d. Each person should strive to glorify God as one made in his image and according to his design. Such a commitment will lead to eternal rewards, but may also involve temporary suffering.

2. Intersex Persons

a. Individuals whose biological sex is unclear (because at birth their genetic sex does not match their physical sex-related characteristics or they possess physical characteristics of both male and female) are known as intersex persons.

b. It is being created in God's image that defines humanity. This reaches far beyond sexuality to encompass every aspect of the human soul. Neither maleness nor femaleness is equivalent to the image of God.

c. The Church should affirm all persons equally as image bearers of God. This does not mean aban-

doning the idea of sexual distinctiveness among humans, but recognizes that even in the midst of sexual or biological disorder, all humans bear the image of their Creator.

d. The Church should support and encourage intersex persons as co-image bearers to live in holiness and to follow Christ in a way that brings honor and glory to God.

3. Transgender Persons

a. Persons who struggle with gender identity experience within themselves the suffering that comes when God's good work of creating the human mind and body is disordered as the result of the Fall.

b. Only in Christ can persons struggling with gender identity experience reconciliation between mind and body.

c. A person may not experience perfect reconciliation between mind and body in this life. However, God may work through an individual's gender identity struggle for his glory (II Corinthians 12:7-9).

d. Those who struggle with gender identity suffer along with all believers while waiting for our glorified bodies (I Corinthians 15:42-44). The Church needs to come alongside them and collectively strive to be oriented toward the triune God, in whose image each person is created.

e. The Church must guard against any attempt to demean or trivialize individual suffering related to struggle with gender identity.

f. The Church cannot celebrate or support the choice to alter one's sex or gender, because this harms individual identity.

g. God created humankind male and female. A distinction between the sexes needs to be honored and maintained, even as specific gendered behavior and characteristics may vary from one culture to another.

h. Gender dysphoria is experienced when a person struggles with gender identity. It may exist at different levels of severity in different persons. Those suffering from gender dysphoria need to confide in their brothers and sisters in Christ and seek competent Christian counseling when appropriate. Persons addressing their own gender dysphoria need to understand the importance of God's order and design for human sexuality and exercise discretion and care when deciding how to live faithfully in the midst of a very real inner struggle.

i. Believers who may not experience this particular hardship need to take care to manifest the fruit of the Spirit when interacting with persons who do, both within and outside of the Church, encouraging them to find their ultimate identity in Christ.

j. The Church must compassionately minister to those struggling with sexual identity issues by becoming a place of understanding, healing, and hope. The Church must affirm the value of individuals who are struggling while pointing them to Christ, the healer of all brokenness.

250TH
ANNIVERSARY
JULY 12-15, 2017
LANCASTER, PA

Illicit Sexual Relations

God created humans as sexual beings and intended for human sexual relationships only to be entered into within the marriage relationship. In a world that consistently resists the creation or maintenance of sexual boundaries, it is essential for the Church to identify sexual behaviors that are outside the will of God and to express why this is the case. Christians are admonished to flee from sexual immorality (I Corinthians 6:18), and the Church must help Christians identify behaviors which are to be avoided.

Although it would be impossible to create an exhaustive list of every type of sexual immorality, the Task Force thought it was important to identify broad categories of illicit sexual relations and to concisely indicate why these behaviors are contrary to the will of God. Some of these categories merited their own expanded discussion (which you will find in other sections of this report).

The sexual relationship between husband and wife was created and ordained by God; it should not be substituted. Pornography substitutes this good reality with a sinful counterfeit. Instead of two people giving of themselves in a loving marital relationship, the use of pornography objectifies the opposite sex and requires no relationship at all.

Adultery and polygamy are essentially the duplication of the sexual relationship between man and wife. When God instituted marriage in the beginning, it was between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24). While the Bible does not disallow polygamy in so many words, we see repeated illustrations — in the lives of

Abraham, Solomon, and others — of the discord and even disaster that can result. Regarding adultery, Scripture gives us great clarity: you shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14). Sexual relationship should be wholly within the marriage relationship. In that vein, sexual relationship prior to marriage is also outside the will of God. This is true whether the persons involved contemplate marriage in the future or not.

God designed both marriage and sexual relationship to occur between a man and a woman. It should not be altered to include two men, two women, or any combination of persons beyond that which God has established. Significantly, Jesus never sought to change or expand the institution of marriage from being between a man and a woman, though he taught on the subject more than once. On the contrary, he quoted from the Genesis account: God made humans male and female, and the two shall become one flesh (Matthew 19:4-6).

Too often, the Church has listed various types of prohibited sexual conduct without distinguishing among them. It is important to differentiate between sexual behavior that is sinful due to its sexual nature and sexual behavior that is sinful principally for other reasons.

Sexual assault or abuse, for example, could occur within the confines of a marital relationship. Clearly this is not God's design for sexual activity, and it is no less sinful when sexual assault or abuse is perpetrated against a spouse than it is when it is perpetrated against an acquaintance or a stranger. The force and coercion involved in sexual assault or abuse represents a corruption of the sexual act itself, which was intended to be one of loving union between man and woman, created in the image of God.

Similarly, pedophilia is a corruption of the sexual relationship because it involves the victimization of children. It is sinful because it is exploitative. The sexual nature of the exploitation makes it uniquely harmful both to the victims and perpetrators.

Yet another form of corruption exists in the practice of bestiality, and God's people are not permitted to engage in such activity (Leviticus 18:23). Bestiality not only takes the sexual relationship outside the confines of marriage; it also deviates from God's design for the sexual relationship between humans created in his image. The human sexual relationship is unique in this way from any other sexual activity that occurs in creation.

Submitting to God's will for human sexual relationship allows the whole community of believers to share in the joy of holy living. We live in a world where sexual license and corruption are all around, but if we understand God's plan for sex to be confined to the marriage relationship and how even that relationship can be corrupted by sin, we can more effectively flee from sexual immorality.

The Task Force proposes that the *Discipline* section on Illicit Sexual Relations be amended as follows:

Current Statement

The biblical view of sex firmly establishes it within the framework of marriage and family life. Therefore, the church cannot condone premarital sex, adultery, or any form of homosexual behavior (I Corinthians 6:9-10). All are clearly contrary to the expressed will of God concerning the union of man and woman together in this most sacred and binding of human relationships (Romans 1:20-32; Deuteronomy 22:23-27).

Proposed Revision

Deleted language struck through, new language in bold.

~~The biblical view of sex firmly establishes it within the framework of marriage and family life. Therefore, the church cannot condone premarital sex, adultery, or any form of homosexual behavior (I Corinthians 6:9-10).~~

The Bible firmly establishes sex within the framework of marriage. This design must not be:

1. **Substituted (e.g. pornography).**
2. **Duplicated (e.g. adultery, polygamy).**
3. **Pre-empted (e.g. premarital sex, cohabitation).**
4. **Altered (e.g. same-sex relations).**
5. **Coerced (e.g. sexual assault, abuse).**
6. **Exploited (e.g. pedophilia, sex trafficking).**
7. **Corrupted (e.g. non-human sexual relations).**

All are clearly contrary to the expressed will of God concerning the union of man and woman together in this most sacred and binding of human relationships (I Corinthians 6:9-10; Romans 1:20-32; Deuteronomy 22:23-27).

Conclusion

The Human Sexuality Task Force has sought to carefully articulate Christian responses to various issues related to human sexuality. Our commitment has been to prayerfully and scripturally interact with the culture in which we find ourselves. Our desire is to offer a framework within which local congregations can make decisions with regard to specific ministry practices which fit their local contexts. We do not presume that all congregations will respond to these challenging questions in precisely the same ways.

The proposals of the Task Force serve as a starting point for a discussion that will likely last for the foreseeable future. The work of this National Conference will not be the final United Brethren voice on matters related to human sexuality, nor can it be if we are to effectively engage an ever-changing world. We invite others to offer their Spirit-guided wisdom in response to questions left unanswered and questions yet to be anticipated. We trust the Body of Christ to continue to develop and articulate biblically faithful and theologically consistent positions for the Church of the United Brethren in Christ with regard to human sexuality in the years to come.

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*The United Brethren Discipline can
be read online at: ub.org/discipline*