

Family Standards

Chapter

This document is for information purposes only. It shows the proposals of the Human Sexuality Task Force in context with all other proposals in the Family Standards chapter.

Only paragraphs 122, 123, 125, 127, and 129 are subject to revision on the conference floor.

¶121 Family: Definition (No change; not subject to revision)

We recognize that a family can take four forms:

1. A married couple (male husband and female wife) who may or may not have children.
2. A single parent household, in which a male or female parent is charged with the responsibility of raising and nurturing his/her natural or adopted children.
3. A widow or widower who is left without children at home.
4. A single person who has chosen to live on his/her own as a separate household.

¶122 Singleness (New)

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).

¶123 Marriage (Revised: changes in bold)

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.

~~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 United Brethren licensed 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.~~

¶124 Cohabitation (No change; not subject to revision)

We believe that simulating the marriage relationship by living together without the covenantal commitments associated with marriage circumvents God's plan for family life (Genesis 2:18). Even when the couple's intention is to remain sexually pure, cohabitation increases the temptation for sexual sin and fails to avoid the appearance of evil (1 Corinthians 6:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:22). Members must avoid cohabitation prior to marriage.

¶125 Illicit Sexual Relations (Revised; changes 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).

¶126 Sex and Gender Distinctions (New)

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 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.
- 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.

¶127 The Local Congregation and Human Sexuality (New)

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.

¶128 Family Life (No change; not subject to revision)

Married couples (husband and wife) should cultivate a relationship of mutual love and respect (Ephesians 5:21, 22, 25, 33). They should remember their unique oneness (Mark 10:6-9), their equality (Genesis 1:27, Galatians 3:28), the complementary nature of their union (Genesis 2:18), and their responsibility to help bring each other to full Christian maturity in all areas of life (Ephesians 5:22-28).

A husband should follow the Bible's admonition to love his wife in the way Jesus loved the Church (Ephesians 5:25). Such Christian love, as described by the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 13:4-7), demands that the husband respond openly and cooperatively with his wife (Ephesians 5:21, 28-31).

As the head of the Christian home (1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 5:25), the husband and father should exercise his delegated authority without being authoritarian, and should fulfill his responsibility under Christ by providing for the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of each family member (1 Timothy 5:8). In the case of a single parent, he/she will be considered the "head of the house" along with the responsibilities that accompany this position.

The wife should follow the Bible's admonition to be submissive, though not subservient, to the headship of her husband (Ephesians 5:22-24) by cooperating with his efforts to provide the home with authority and stability under Christ.

Together, the husband and wife should exercise proper discipline tempered with love (Proverbs 3:11-12, Hebrews 12:5-11, Colossians 3:21). They should also create and maintain a Christian atmosphere within the home (Ephesians 6:4, 2 Timothy 3:14-15). Such an atmosphere should consist of the following:

1. Communication with the heavenly Father through spontaneous prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17), especially at mealtimes, whether in seeking his aid or giving thanks.
2. Daily, directed worship as a way for the family to express love and trust in God, and to sense his presence in the home (Matthew 18:20).
3. Spontaneous and directed teaching of Bible truths at every opportunity (Deuteronomy 6:20-21a).
4. Christian symbols and works of art in the home (Deuteronomy 6:6, 9).
5. A consistent example in Christian living (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Christian parents are encouraged to present their children to the Lord before the church body for the blessing (or dedication) of children and the affirmation of Christian parenting.

Children and young people should obey their parents in all things in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1, Colossians 3:20). This was the example of Jesus (Luke 2:51).

¶129 Pornography (Replaces current ¶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.~~

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).

¶130 Abuse (No change; not subject to revision)

We believe that abuse in any form, either inside or outside of the family, destroys the dignity and value God has placed in people.

¶131 Divorce (No change; not subject to revision)

Divorce was never in God’s original plan, and is really one of the consequences of the fall of man. According to Jesus in Mark 10:5, the Mosaic directive concerning divorce came only as a concession to man’s hardheartedness.

In the New Testament, Jesus indicated that divorce may be granted on the basis of fornication (Matthew 5:32, 19:9). Fornication includes all forms of sexual sin, such as adultery, prostitution, sodomy, incest, bestiality, homosexuality, and lesbianism. Continual and deliberate sexual sin by a marriage partner is a justifiable cause for divorce.

The Apostle Paul cites another exception which applies to the marriage of a believer and an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:12- 15). If an unbelieving partner chooses to dissolve the marriage, the believing partner may

yield to the divorce. This same exception also applies when a believer renounces faith in Christ or assumes the position of an unbeliever and chooses to dissolve the marriage. Such persons are considered unbelievers because they place themselves outside the divine directive.

Even though the Bible admonishes Christian spouses not to divorce each other (1 Corinthians 7:10-11b), there may be situations in which a spouse decides a divorce is essential, e.g., when the spouse or children suffer severe physical or emotional abuse. The Bible seems to suggest that the spouse may make the decision to divorce, but must then remain unmarried or be reconciled to the former partner (1 Corinthians 7:11). God does not advocate divorce in such situations, but when it does occur, He regulates it. The principle remains—no divorce—but the Bible recognizes that the ideal is not always observed because of hardheartedness.

In all cases, however, every effort should be made to bring about repentance, restoration, and reconciliation. Bringing about reconciliation which leads to harmony and compatibility is always preferable to divorce.

¶132 Remarriage (No change; not subject to revision)

We believe the Christian has biblical grounds for remarriage in the following situations:

1. When the spouse dies. In this case, the partner may remarry a believer (1 Corinthians 7:39).
2. When the marriage and divorce occurred prior to salvation (2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:1-7).
3. When the spouse is guilty of marital unfaithfulness and will not repent and live faithfully with the partner, and the offended partner is innocent of such conduct. Marital unfaithfulness includes adultery, prostitution, sodomy, incest, bestiality, homosexuality, and lesbianism.
4. When an unbelieving partner has willfully deserted a believing partner (1 Corinthians 7:12-15).
5. When the spouse has assumed the position of an unbeliever by choosing to divorce the believing partner. In this case, the believing partner may remarry another believer (1 Corinthians 7:12-15).

¶133 Family Planning (No change; not subject to revision)

In the Christian view as based in the biblical revelation, it is only within the marriage relationship that children should be conceived, brought into the world as a precious gift in trust from God, and nurtured to full personhood.

As responsible Christians and parents, some couples may for valid reasons determine not to have children, or others may need to determine the number and spacing of children. The church admonishes its members to weigh carefully and prayerfully the responsibilities of family planning and to use those methods which are medically and psychologically suited to their needs. They shall not use methods which conflict with the church's stand on abortion, as stated in ¶129.

For those couples who for physical reasons cannot bear children, the church advises them to consider the adoption of children. Such couples should seek the assistance of reliable placement agencies to avoid possible unfortunate circumstances and to avail themselves of competent counsel.

¶134 Abortion (No change; not subject to revision)

Abortion is a major moral problem in our society. We believe that human life is sacred from the moment of conception, and that abortion must not occur anytime after conception. Consequently, abortion cannot be recognized morally and Scripturally as a means of birth control, as a solution to a pregnancy resulting from rape or incest, or as a way to prevent or eliminate congenital or hereditary defects.

The church recognizes the possibility of therapeutic abortion. However, it can be performed in Christian conscience only when the mother's life is in imminent danger, as determined by two competent physicians, one of whom has been or would be attending her pregnancy.

¶135 Genetic Engineering (No change; not subject to revision)

Genetic engineering, the ability to manipulate the genetic formation of the living cell, is part of our scientific culture. However, the church does not condone sex selection or genetic screening as reasons for abortion, through information obtained by amniocentesis.

The church does not approve of artificial in ovulation (the process by which a fertilized ovum is placed in the fallopian tube or the uterus), except in the case of a married couple whose own sperm and ovum are used. The church also rejects the process of cloning in the human reproductive system. Neither does the church

condone experiments to develop artificial uteruses and placentas with the ultimate goal of developing a full-term fetus without the mother's presence.

Genetic engineering raises legal, medical, ethical, and religious issues. The church is concerned that scientific knowledge, without a moral system, will lead to devastating results.

¶136 Euthanasia (No change; not subject to revision)

Because of the commandment, "Thou shalt not murder" (Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 5:17), the church cannot condone the taking of life for the purposes of escaping the suffering and difficulties caused by sickness, disease, injury, old age, infirmity, or for any other such reasons.

Because of the dignity of human life and the Christian's privilege of dying and going to be with Christ, the Christian or the Christian's family members, in the event that the person lacks the capacity to do so, should have the privilege of rejecting artificial means for the sustaining of life when the maintenance of life is dependent upon these artificial means.