



POLICIES FOR CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Best practices in an era of shifting cultural moral standards

INTRODUCTION

In light of the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling legitimizing same-sex marriage, your church or religious organization should review all current policies and procedures. This guide includes sample policy language for your Pastors/Deacon/Trustee/Elder Boards to review, with an eye toward protecting the church/ministry from potential liability resulting from Scripturally-based viewpoints on sexual orientation/gender identity (SOGI) and same-sex marriage. Many, but not all, of these suggestions are based upon the recommendations contained in the legal guides published by the Christian Legal Society (CLS) and the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF).

These suggestions and proposed policy language are just that, suggestions for careful review. Proper governing authorities of your church or ministry must approve any final action or language.

We suggest you consider updating your policies in the following areas:

I. STATEMENT OF FAITH.

Updating your statement of faith is of the utmost importance. In doing so you must clarify who holds final authority over issues at your church or religious organization. (e.g., state that your church's pastors/deacon board/elder board, etc., has the final authority to determine issues of religious doctrine at your church). Please see the attached sample statement of faith.

II. STATEMENT ON MORAL ISSUES

Your church should also consider adding a statement on moral issues to your statement

of faith. Create a specific section dealing with the SOGI, same-sex marriage, and other moral issues. Please see the attached sample statement on moral issues for suggested language.

III. ESTABLISHING EMPLOYMENT CRITERIA THROUGH AN EMPLOYEE AGREEMENT AND EMPLOYEE MANUAL

There are two main things you should require of all employees at your religious organization:

- a. Sign a statement that he/she has read, understands, and agrees to abide by your church or ministry's Official Statement of Doctrinal Beliefs, including specifically the Statement on Marriage, Gender, and Sexuality.
- b. Sign a statement that he/she has read, understands and agrees to abide by your church or ministry's standards of employee conduct/employee manual/etc. In this regard, you should establish a basic code of conduct for all employees.

One of the most important things your religious organization should do is to make sure **every** job description for **every** position explains the spiritual, ministerial and Biblical basis for the job at your church or ministry. Please see the attached sample language for an employee manual and employee agreement.

IV. FACILITY USE POLICY.

Your facility use policy should also conform to your Statement of Faith. An agreement that the user/renter will not use your facilities in any manner inconsistent with your beliefs and Statement of Faith

should be signed by every outside/non-member user of your facilities.

If you already have a facility use policy, consider adding the attached sample language after obtaining approval by your church or ministry's governing body. You should tailor the policy in accordance with your governing practices and governing documents, including specific facility and operational considerations. Best practice considerations warrant using a facility contractual agreement between a church and outside parties to describe the terms of usage including the mission-related purposes for the usage, payment, insurance, and other issues.

Finally, you must actually enforce the policy for it to be meaningful and effective. Apply it to everyone equally.

V. MEMBERSHIP AGREEMENT.

You may also want to be more proactive in having new members sign that they agree with the statement of faith. If you add the new language to your statement of faith and the member signs an acknowledgement to abide by your statement of faith, that would be sufficient. A prospective member can always lie and sign a membership agreement,

but it would protect the church if you had to take action later to discipline or remove the member for violating the statement of faith. Please see the attached sample language for membership agreements.

VI. MARRIAGE POLICY.

You should also adopt a marriage ceremony policy to protect your pastors if someone asks them to participate in a same-sex marriage ceremony. Consider adding language saying that participation in a same-sex ceremony is grounds for termination. Please see the attached sample language for marriage policies.

We hope the above analysis helps your church/ministry. Remember to enact these changes according to the procedure provided in your church constitution or by-laws. Finally, it is very important that your church/ministry legal counsel carefully review and approve all changes.

In His Service,

Great Lakes Justice Center

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*Please insert your church or religious organization's name anywhere you see [*] in these samples. The language contained in these sample policies is a combination of wording suggested by the Christian Legal Society, Alliance Defending Freedom, other churches, as well as our own suggested language.*

SAMPLE STATEMENT OF FAITH

WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURE accepting fully the writings of the Old and New Testaments as the very Word of God, verbally inspired in all parts and therefore wholly without error as originally given of God, the only infallible and authoritative rule of faith, life, and conduct (*Psalm 119:105, 133, 160; Proverbs 30:5a; II Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:19-21*).

This Statement of Faith does not exhaust the full extent of our beliefs. While we accept and follow the teachings of the Bible as our final authority in all matters (as set forth above), for the purposes of the faith, doctrine, practice, policy, discipline, building use, employment practices, etc., of [*] Church, the Pastors/Board/etc. is our final interpretive authority on the Bible's meaning and application at [*] Church in all matters.

SAMPLE STATEMENT ON MORAL ISSUES

Certain sins have become acceptable in our society and are clear violations of Scripture. In the spirit of I Corinthians 6:9-11, we as a church recognize that some in the church may have participated in these sins. When a person is born again, God forgives all sin. This is not an exhaustive list. Our purpose is to promote Biblical standards in these areas where society has drifted away from its Biblical roots.

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of [*] Church as a local Body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to its members and the community, it is imperative that all persons employed by [*] Church in any capacity, or who serve as volunteers, agree to and abide by this Statement on Moral Issues and the entire Official Statement of Doctrinal Beliefs (*Matt 5:16; Phil 2:14-16; 1 Thess. 5:22*).

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (*Acts 3:19-21; Rom 10:9-10; 1 Cor. 6:9-11*).

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity (*Mark 12:28-31; Luke 6:31*). Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the doctrines of [*] Church. However, preaching and teaching God's Truth as revealed in Scripture is not hateful or harassing of any person.

RIGHT TO LIFE. We believe that human life begins at conception and that the unborn child is a living human being. Abortion constitutes the unjustified taking of a human life and is murder (*Genesis 9:6; Psalm 139:14-16; Proverbs 6:16; Isaiah 44:24; 49:1; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:35-44*).

MARRIAGE, GENDER AND SEXUALITY. We believe that God has established marriage as a lifelong, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman and that all intimate sexual activity outside the marriage relationship, whether heterosexual, homosexual, or otherwise, is immoral and therefore sin (*Gen. 2:18-25; Ex. 20:14, 17, 22:19; Lev. 18:22-23, 20:13, 15-16; Matt. 19:4-6, 9; Rom. 1:18-31; 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 15-20; 1 Tim. 1:8-11; Jude 7*). We believe that the cohabitation of unrelated persons of the opposite sex in a marriage-like relationship, without the marriage bond, is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. (*1 Thessalonians 5:19; Hebrews 13:4*). We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, polygamy, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God (*Matt 15:18-20; 1 Cor. 6:9-10*). We believe that God created the human race male and female and that all conduct with the intent to adopt a gender other than one's birth gender is immoral and therefore sin (*Gen. 1:27; Deut. 22:5*). We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (*Gen 1:26-27*). Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person.

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE. We believe that God hates divorce and intends marriage to last until one spouse dies. We believe that the New Testament allows for divorce and remarriage on grounds of fornication or desertion. (*Malachi 2:14-17; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-10; Romans 7:1-3; I Corinthians 7:15; I Timothy 5:8*).

ABUSE OF ADDICTIVE SUBSTANCES AND BEHAVIORS. We believe that participation in addictive behaviors and the abuse of addictive substances is not only destructive but also hinders our ability to be controlled by the Holy Spirit (*I Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 5:17*).

SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR EMPLOYEE MANUAL

WELCOME: We welcome you to [*] Church and thank you for your service. We appreciate the vital role of [*] Church employees in accomplishing the mission of [*] Church to the people we serve and to the broader Christian community. We consider all employees of [*] Church to be an integral part of our ministry and each employee is critical to our ongoing ministry and ministry function.

COMPLIANCE WITH BIBLICAL STANDARDS: A relationship with Jesus Christ is central to the purpose and mission of [*] Church. For this reason, all [*] Church affairs are conducted in full accordance with the Bible, [*] Church's Mission, its Official Statement of Doctrinal Beliefs as contained in the [*] Church bylaws, as well as related policies reflecting [*] Church's religious nature. Likewise, it is [*] Church's policy to employ only committed disciples of Jesus Christ. Consequently, each employee is expected to review and affirm his or agreement with such standards as a condition for continued employment with [*] Church, both in terms of doctrinal belief and practical application. For example, all employees are expected to reflect Christian values in their interaction with persons we serve, fellow employees, and others. In addition, employees are required to refrain from behavior that reflects negatively on the [*] Church Christian standards. Violation of these requirements shall constitute cause for discipline up to and including employment termination.

MISSION STATEMENT: [Insert your church/ministry statement here].

AFFIRMATION OF STATEMENT OF FAITH: All pastors, officers, directors, and staff of [*] Church shall, as a condition of their employment in [*] Church, acknowledge in writing their acceptance of, and agreement with the following Statement of Faith, as set forth in [*] Church's corporate by-laws:

SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR EMPLOYEE AGREEMENT

I, _____, hereby state and affirm that I have read, understand and agree to abide by [*] Church’s Statement of Faith and Statement on Moral Issues (a copy of which is attached). I further hereby state and affirm that I have read, understand and agree to abide by [*] Church’s standards of employee conduct/employee manual/etc. (a copy of which is attached). I further understand that my services are engaged by mutual consent, I am an “at will” employee, and that both the church and I reserve the right to terminate my employment services at any time. I understand that the employee conduct/employee manual/etc. does not contractually bind [*] Church and is subject to change without notice at any time by [*] Church.

I have received a copy of [*] Church’s Employee Handbook (dated _____) and have read it carefully. I understand all of its rules, policies, terms and conditions and agree to abide by them. I realize that failure to do so may result in disciplinary action or termination of employment. I understand and agree that my employment may be terminated at will, so that both [*] Church and I remain free to choose to end our work relationship at any time. I also understand that [*] Church remains free to change, revise, or eliminate any or all of the employment benefits provided in the Handbook at any time.

I understand that nothing in this Handbook in any way creates an express or implied contract of employment between [*] Church and me. I also understand that this Handbook is only intended to provide a better and more understandable working atmosphere so long as the employee/employer relationship exists.

Date: _____

Employee’s Signature

Employee’s Name (Printed)

SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR FACILITY USE POLICY

[*] Church (“the Church”) owns certain real estate, including a worship facility [describe additional rooms or areas as needed: _____] all of which is used to promote its religious purposes. The Church seeks to exercise wise stewardship over all aspects of the Property. Such stewardship may include occasional guest use [and/or other description of anticipated use] from time to time for purposes consistent with the Church religious purposes and doctrinal beliefs. Based on these considerations, the Church shall allow use of its Real Estate by others in accordance with the following requirements and guidelines.

1. DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY. The Church’s Pastors/Board of Elders/Deacons/Trustees (choose which applies) shall make decisions as needed regarding the use of the Church’s Real Estate, all in the best interests of the Church. Such decision-making authority may be delegated to a committee of persons appointed by and responsible to the Pastors/Board, subject to the following doctrinal restrictions. The Church’s Pastors/Board (or a committee delegated thereby) shall be responsible for memorializing guest facility use. Such written agreements shall include identification of the religious purposes served by a guest’s facility usage, with appropriate Scripture references (e.g., worship, strengthening families, outreach to the lost, etc.).

2. DOCTRINAL RESTRICTIONS. The Church’s Real Estate may be used only for purposes and in ways consistent with the Church’s doctrinal beliefs as reflected in the Bible, the Church’s Statement of Faith, and otherwise, particularly with respect to sexual activity standards and other conduct. [Include other restrictions, if appropriate—e.g., no alcohol, smoking, etc.] The Church Pastors/Board shall be the final decision-maker regarding whether any use is in conformity with, or contrary to, the Church’s religious doctrine.

3. FEES/COSTS. The Church may request donations or charge for cost-sharing contributions (“fees”) in order to defray the estimated cost of facility use. No such fees shall be charged with any impermissible view to profit, and any and all fees are subject to waiver or reduction based on the prospective user’s financial need.

4. INSURANCE. Insurance coverage shall be maintained by the user in an amount approved by the Church for all uses of the Church’s Real Estate, including certificates of coverage from other users as appropriate **(have your church’s insurance agent look at this section and add any necessary language)**.

5. NOTICE. The Church’s Pastors/Board (or a committee delegated thereby) shall be responsible for communicating these requirements and other guidelines to all prospective users of the facility.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE FOR MARRIAGE POLICY

God has ordained and defined marriage as a covenant relationship between one man, one woman, and Himself (*Gen. 2:18-25; Ex. 20:14, 17, 22:19; Lev. 18:22-23, 20:13, 15-16; Matt. 19:4-6, 9; Rom. 1:18-31; I Cor. 6:9-10, 15-20; I Tim. 1:8-11; Jude 7*). Therefore, [*] Church will only recognize marriages between one biological man and one biological woman. The Pastors and employees of [*] Church shall only participate in weddings and solemnize marriages between one man and one woman. If a pastor or employee of [*] Church violates this policy it is grounds for immediate termination from his or her position at [*] Church. Moreover, the facilities and property of [*] Church shall only be used for weddings between one man and one woman.