



Title: Weddings for those Living Together Without Marriage

Policy #: 17

EXPIRES: When Replaced

ISSUED BY: Church Council

SIGNED:

1 History

VERSION	DATE APPROVED	UPDATED BY	PURPOSE FOR CREATION/UPDATE
1.0	4/99		STANDARD GUIDELINES ARE NEEDED FOR THOSE LIVING TOGETHER WITHOUT MARRIAGE WHO ARE SEEKING A WEDDING CEREMONY/MARRIAGE
2.0	5/02		UPDATED
3.0	2/13/23	ELDER TEAM	TO REFLECT CURRENT PRACTICE

2 Scope

This policy is part of St. Paul Lutheran Church's organizational policies. This policy applies to all congregation members, church staff and community members.

3 Policy

Temptation and sin are a fact of life for all Christians. The Bible makes it clear that we are at one and the same time both sinner and saint. Even though the Bible tells us that "The wages of sin is death..." it also tells us that Christians are considered by God as holy and cleansed of all of our sin through faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for us. By dying on a cross, Jesus chose to take our place in judgment under the curse of having been rescued from certain condemnation; we are called to a life of faithful obedience to God – not to earn God's favor (we already have it) – but as our expression of thanks to God for the sacrifice of Jesus for us.

The Bible makes it clear that there are no "degrees of sin" in God's eyes. Sin is sin, period. All of it has the potential of bringing a person down in condemnation through unbelief. Likewise all sin, in the case of believers, is paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus for us and is therefore forgiven. However, the apostle Paul says that there is something special about sexual sin. It is not more condemning, but it is sin against our own bodies which were created by God for fellowship with Him. Consider the

following Bible passages:

“...the body is not for sexual sin but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. God raised the Lord, and by his power God will also raise us. Don’t you realize that your bodies are parts of Christ’s body?...Stay away from sexual sins. Other sins that people commit don’t affect their bodies the same way sexual sins do. People who sin sexually sin against their own bodies. Don’t you know that your body is a temple that belongs to the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit, whom you received from God, lives in you. You don’t belong to yourselves. You were bought for a price. So bring glory to God in the way you use your body.” 1 Corinthians 6:13b-19

“It is God’s will that you keep away from sexual sin as a mark of your devotion to him. Each of you should know that finding a husband or wife for yourself should be done in a holy and honorable way, not in the passionate, lustful way of people who don’t know God.” 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

Paul makes it very clear that because the church cares about people who are living in sin, it has a responsibility to speak God’s word of warning to these couples so that they will repent and turn to God for forgiveness.

Because God’s Word clearly teaches that it is sinful for couples to live together outside of the bonds of marriage, procedures have been developed at St. Paul Lutheran Church so that we may be compassionate and consistent in working with couples who are living together without marriage.

4 Procedure

Before a wedding date for any couple is placed on the church’s calendar, they must visit with one of the pastors of St. Paul. During this initial meeting the couple will be asked if they are living together or have plans to move in together prior to their desired wedding date. If they are living together or plan to before the wedding, the pastor will share with them what the Bible says about their situation (both Law & Gospel) calling them to repentance. If repentance is expressed:

- A. Continue with pre-marriage counseling with a Pastor from St. Paul.
- B. As repentance can take many forms, including getting married, if the couple are members they will be considered in good standing. If one or both are non-members they will be allowed to proceed with Adult Instruction to Membership.
- C. The couple will be encouraged to refrain from a sexual relationship while going through marriage counseling and encouraged to work on the skills and tools the pastor provides to strengthen their relationship prior to the wedding.
- D. While we encourage the wedding to take place in a timely manner, the pastor will use grace in helping to make the arrangements.

Couples who are unrepentant and refuse to acknowledge their sin will be provided further counseling. However, until repentance is expressed, a St. Paul Pastor will not

preside over the wedding nor will the wedding be allowed to occur at St. Paul Lutheran Church.

5 Forms

None