



Title: Membership for those Living Together Without Marriage
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Policy #: 16

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 MEMBERSHIP
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.

St. Paul gives us many examples of sin. *"Now the effects of the corrupt nature are obvious:*

illicit sex, perversion, promiscuity...I've told you in the past and I'm telling you again that people who do these kinds of things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Galatians 5:19-21

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 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 engaged in unrepentant sin, it has a responsibility to speak God's word of warning to these individuals so that they will repent and turn to God for forgiveness.

Because God's Word clearly teaches that it is important for people to come to repentance and the eternal consequences for those who refuse to acknowledge God's Word, procedures have been developed at St. Paul Lutheran Church so that we may be compassionate and consistent in working with individuals who are engaged in open unrepentant sin.

4 Procedure

Individuals who apply for membership at St. Paul and for example are engaging in a sexual relationship without marriage will be counseled by one of the pastors regarding their sinful situation. They will be offered the opportunity to:

- A. Begin pre-marriage counseling with a Pastor from St. Paul. The pastor will explain and teach about God's desire for the couple and help them to see their sin and call them to repentance. If they are repentant the pastor will share the Good News of forgiveness because of Jesus life, death and resurrection with them.
- B. As repentance can take many forms, including getting married, the individuals 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.

5 Forms

None