

# Tri-Rivers Baptist Area

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To: Tri-Rivers Baptist Area Churches and Pastors,

I am reporting on the issue that the Baptist Standard addressed in its March 6, 2015 article by George Henson entitled, "Lawyer urges churches to consider marriage bylaw statements". This article addressed the issue of Same-Sex Marriage as it relates to churches. Several pastors and churches in the Tri-River Baptist area asked if I could investigate this issue further and report back. Listed below is my report.

I sought counsel from various Director of Missions (DOM) and Pastors who serve in states that have legalized Same-Sex Marriage to get a first-hand account from those who are currently dealing with this issue. I was able to contact: DOM and Pastor Keith Lawrence of Maine Baptist Association whose state by Popular Vote (December, 2012) legalized Same-Sex Marriage; DOM and Pastor Mark Angerosa of Western Connecticut Baptist Association whose state by Court Decision (November, 2008) legalized Same-Sex Marriage; DOM and Pastor Rich Clegg of New Hampshire Baptist Association whose state by State Legislature (January, 2010) legalized Same-Sex Marriage and DOM and Pastor Ray Allen of Massachusetts Baptist Association whose state Court Decision (May, 2004) legalized Same-Sex Marriage.

1. Each DOM and Pastor reported that they had to be pro-active by putting statements in both their Constitutions and Bylaws that addressed this issue before the law was in place.
2. As of today, there have been no reports of lawsuits related to this law and the church or pastors in these states from those churches that have placed statements in their constitution and bylaws.
3. Recommended for **Church Constitution:**
  - a. **ARTICLES OF FAITH: "The Holy Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God and is the basis of our faith. This church accepts the "The Baptist Faith and Message" of 1963 or 2000".**
    - i. **The Baptist Faith and Message states in IVIII: "Marriage is the uniting of one man and one women in a covenant commitment for a lifetime."**
  - b. **MARRIAGE: "We believe the word "marriage" means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word "spouse" refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or wife. Marriages outside of these parameters will not be performed by church ministers on church owned or rented property."**
    - i. This safe guards the church ministers from performing marriage ceremonies.

4. Recommendation for **Church Bylaws**:

**a. MEMBERSHIP:** “The membership of this church shall consist of such persons as *confess Jesus Christ to be their Savior and Lord and receives the scriptures (Holy Bible) as its authority of faith and practice* and (1) after due examination by the church as to their Christian experience, and if coming from other churches, the receipt of an acceptable letter of recommendation or satisfactory therefore, (2) have been accepted by affirmation of the church and have been baptized, (3) enter into this covenant.”

i. This addresses the possible situation of a same-sex couple or someone who is living a lifestyle of a gay or lesbian wanting to join the church or hold office in the church. (Only if the church desires to address this)

**b. MARRIAGE CEREMONY:** “We believe the word "marriage" means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word "spouse" refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or wife. Marriages outside of these parameters will not be performed by church ministers, other licensed ministers, ordained ministers or other legal authorities on church owned or rented property.”

i. This addresses the issue of ministers that reside outside the church or public officials performing same-sex marriages on church property.

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I pray that this will assist your churches in making informed decisions regarding this issue.

Whenever the Bible mentions marriage, it is between a male and a female. The first mention of marriage, Genesis 2:24, describes it as a man leaving his parents and being united to his wife. In passages that contain instructions regarding marriage, such as 1 Corinthians 7:2-16 and Ephesians 5:23-33, the Bible clearly identifies marriage as being between a man and a woman.

To give sanction to same-sex marriage would be to give approval to the homosexual lifestyle, which the Bible clearly and consistently condemns as sinful. Christians should stand firmly against the idea of same-sex marriage. As Christians, we are not to condone or ignore sin. Rather, we are to share the love of God and the forgiveness of sins that is available to all, through Jesus Christ. We are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and contend for truth with “gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

If you have any questions or would like a sample template of a Constitution or By-Laws, please contact your Area Office.

In God’s Service,  
Rev. Richard Ray  
Director of Missions