

LIFE PACIFIC COLLEGE

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SOGI Biblical/Theological and Pastoral Position Paper

Life Pacific College's (LPC) stance regarding sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) should be understood in relation to LPC's values. These values are:

- **Scripture** as our authoritative guide for faith and practice and the foundation for how we think, learn, live, and minister. (2 Tim. 3:16)
- **Grace-based community** exemplified by excellence organizationally, and Christ-like character individually. (Eph. 2:11-22; John 15; Romans 8:28-30; Gal. 5:22-25/Eph. 5:15-20)
- **Foursquare heritage** and its appeal for moderation in doctrine and practice, a Spirit-empowered lifestyle, and an interdenominational mission to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. (Titus 1:7-9; Eph. 4:11-13, Acts 1:4-8)
- **Global awareness** displayed through valuing diversity, understanding our place in the world, the far-reaching impact of decisions and actions, and innovatively engaging the world (I Cor. 12:12-31; Matt 28:19-20; John 17:15-19)

These values frame our dialogue regarding SOGI in the follow ways:

- In keeping with our value for Scripture, we believe we must yield to Scripture's guidance, interpreted in its historical, cultural, literary, and canonical context in addressing sexual orientation and gender identity.
- In keeping with our value of a grace-based community, we recognize that only by grace can we live Christ-like lives, but that such grace is available through the power of the Spirit to demonstrate Christ's humility, holiness, and submission regardless of our sexual orientation or gender identity.
- In keeping with our Foursquare heritage of moderation in doctrine we will seek to avoid extremism in our responses to these topics and the persons involved, looking always for ways to respond that do not hinder but rather advance the spread of the Good News regarding Jesus Christ.
- In keeping with our value for global awareness, we recognize and respect perspectives and interpretations¹ on these topics that differ from our own. Likewise, we value the

¹ For a resource presenting reasoned, but opposing positions on the topic of homosexuality and the Bible, see Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003. For evangelical authors affirming same-sex relationships see Mark Achtemeier, *The Bible's Yes to Same-sex Marriage: An Evangelical Change of Heart*. Revised edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015; James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*. Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2013; and Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-sex Relationships*. New York: Convergent Books, 2014. For evangelical authors affirming a traditional view see Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change*.

diversity of the Church where people across the SOGI spectrum who are committed to living for Christ find love, acceptance, and forgiveness. We acknowledge that the decisions we make and the practices we employ in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity have far-reaching impact in our world and community.

In addition, we believe it is necessary to specify two assumptions—displayed in the position statement that follows—we hold in relation to interpreting Scripture:

- Scripture must be interpreted within its context and, thus, may not directly parallel the context and issues in which we find ourselves. Regardless, since Scripture is our authoritative guide we seek to apply principles embedded in the biblical text to our context.
- We must consider the whole of Scripture rather than rely simply on isolated texts. A singular text may apply only to one type of situation but if Scripture has a consistent voice on an issue it is more likely to yield principles that transcend context and culture.

Biblical/Theological Position

LPC’s biblical/theological position on SOGI topics is formed around four areas for theological development: the creation of humanity, marriage and sexual activity, humanity’s fall, and living in grace and hope. These areas provide principles for guiding pastoral care of students and staff, as well as, for establishing policies and practices.

Creation of Humanity

- Scripture affirms the divine creation of humanity in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). That image is shared by all humans equally and, therefore, all individuals are equally valuable. Differences in sexual orientation or gender identity do not change this.
- The same text affirms God’s creation of humans in a biologically-gendered (male and female) pair. This does not deny the humanity of an unmarried person—the male and the female were each made in the image of God, while humankind as a whole also presents the divine image.
- The command to the original pair to be “fruitful and multiply” supports the necessity of biologically-gendered pairs. The command is reaffirmed after the flood (Gen. 9:1), indicating it is a continued expectation for humanity.
- While Scripture sometimes supports gender roles (i.e., patriarchal society) it also at times undermines those roles (i.e., women leaders), indicating gender roles may be cultural rather than a divine prescription.

Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013; Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015; Robert A. J. Gagnon. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Text and Hermeneutics*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2001; and Walter Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001.

- However, since Scripture never undermines biological sex at birth as a core distinction between males and females (Jesus affirms creation of ‘male and female’—Matt. 19:4; Mark. 10:6), an individual’s sex at birth is left as the prime factor in determining gender identity.

Marriage & Sexual Activity

- The command to ‘be fruitful and multiply’ indicates that God intended for humans to engage in sexual intimacy and that this is a good thing (it is included in a blessing—Gen. 1:28). However, this factor does not indicate that procreation is the only purpose for sexual intimacy. Indeed, the reference to a man leaving his father and mother, clinging to ‘his wife’ and the two becoming ‘one flesh’ (Gen. 2:24) affirms sexual intimacy—as an action exclusively between a heterosexual, monogamous pair—separately from procreation.
- Creation of a single pair (rather than any other combination of males and females) along with the language of Gen. 2:24 denotes that sexual activity was intended to exist in a mutually and exclusively committed pair of male and female. This conclusion is supported in that the man in Gen. 2 finds his equal counterpart only in the biologically-complementary woman rather than in any other created being. Further, Jesus (Matt. 19:3-6) cites Genesis 2:24 when questioned about the acceptability of divorce, affirming it as a foundational text on marriage.
- Through the texts above along with images such as God being a jealous God (Exod. 20:5; Deut. 4:24; Josh. 24:19), Israel’s marital unfaithfulness to Yahweh (Hosea), proverbial instructions concerning faithfulness in marriage (Prov. 2:17; 5:15-18), and the Church being presented as a spotless bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25-27; 2 Cor. 11:2) among others, Scripture affirms marital exclusivity. As a result, only sexual intimacy inside a marriage between a man and woman is appropriate. While the biblical text includes accounts of sexual activity outside of what is intended (polygamy, adultery, etc.), and these accounts do not always pass direct judgment on the behavior’s appropriateness, the results of the actions (David with Bathsheba, the rape of Tamar, Solomon’s many wives, etc.) provide clear evidence that those actions are detrimental and, thus, do not meet God’s expectations for human sexual relations.
- Scripture’s consistent affirmation of sexual intimacy only within the exclusive confines of marriage between one man and one woman prevents one from assuming the limits Scripture places on acceptable sexual activity are merely cultural (in contrast to what Scripture does with gender roles).
- Some argue that where Scripture provides injunctions against or presents as sinful same-sex sexual activity (for instance Gen. 19:1-11; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deut. 23:18-19; Judges 19; Rom. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:9), it was not addressing sexual intimacy as seen today among committed same-sex couples. Even if this is correct, the consistent voice of Scripture (as outlined above) on sexual intimacy indicates the basic principle applies—only sexual activity inside a marriage between one man and one woman is appropriate.

- Scripture affirms celibacy as the appropriate action for all those not in a marriage between one man and one woman: Jesus (Matt. 19:6) described voluntary celibacy as a choice some make for the sake of God’s kingdom and Paul (1 Cor. 7) insists that any who cannot control themselves sexually (i.e., practice celibacy) should marry.
- Celibacy does not keep the person from experiencing intimacy. Intimacy can be found in faithful, life-long, platonic friendships. Such friendships are modeled in Scripture by David with Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1-5; 19:1; 20:17, 41)² and Jesus with his disciples (see especially the ‘beloved’ disciple—John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7).

Fall of Humanity

- Genesis 3:14-24 affirms that the original pair’s disobedience had immediate effects on them (pain in childbirth, difficulty in working the field) and creation (the serpent goes on its belly, lowered productivity of the land). Further, the text presents a disconnection between God and His creation in the original pair being sent from the garden where God and His creation had communed.
- Romans 8:18-25 indicates that the long-term effect of the fall and separation is all creation (including humans) groaning in longing to be set free from the decay and futility it experiences. Therefore, creation and all created beings are no longer in their ideal state and the human propensity towards sin along with the effects of sin on creation continue until the final “redemption of our bodies.”
- Since Scripture affirms that the fall’s effect is experienced by everyone (all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory—Rom. 3:23) all people experience states and desires that are less than ideal—inconsistent with God’s original intent. Those states and desires, whatever they may be, need to be reordered.

Living in Grace and Hope—Christ-like Life

- Since, as indicated above, all creation and all created beings experience the decay and futility brought about by the original pair’s disobedience, all humanity is in need of redemption. *That is true regardless of our sexual orientation or gender identity.*
- This redemption is accomplished by grace (for by grace we have been saved), and while we experience some portion of redemptive wholeness now through the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit, ultimate wholeness for each of us awaits the “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:19-21).
- In the present we are to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28-30). Christ’s holiness, humility, and compassion set the model toward which the Spirit shapes our character as we yield to the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-17; Gal. 5:16-26). This means that all our activities, including sexual ones, must be re-ordered to align with Christ.

² For a discussion of whether Jonathan and David’s relationship should be seen as homosexual see Richard M. Davidson. *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. Pp. 165-167.

- Grace, not simply as an allowance for being out of alignment with Christ, but positively as the power to live for Christ and in conformity with His will, is available to everyone who responds to Christ.
- Scripture clearly recognizes we live our lives ‘less than ideal’ and unmistakably indicates that there is no condemnation for those “in Christ Jesus”—those who have committed themselves to Christ (Rom. 8:1). Nevertheless, Scripture never lowers the expectation that we seek conformity with the ideal. Thus, irrespective of the orientation for the desires we experience sexually, we are called to submit ourselves to the Spirit to live in conformity to the ideal, even where that means not being able to act upon the desires we have when others can. This also indicates that where we experience states (for instance when our sense of our gender does not match the biological gender of our birth) that do not match the ideal we yield ourselves to the Spirit to live in conformity to Christ.
- Regardless, we choose to love others as Christ has loved us—without condemnation and yet with continual encouragement to live as God intended. This means that all our words and actions toward others must be seasoned with grace and compassion, coming alongside and encouraging each other towards Christ. Demeaning, abusive, and dehumanizing actions and words do not reflect the love for God and others to which we are called.

Pastoral Response

These theological convictions drive our pastoral response—a call to discipleship. All of us, regardless of our sexual orientation or gender identity, are called to submit the entirety of who we are and what we do to Christ’s lordship. As Christ followers our identity is found in Christ and not in our sexuality or any other area we or society may wish to use to define us.

As such, our response to sexual topics of all kinds (marriage, family planning, dating, pornography, promiscuity, adultery, polygamy, gender identity, homosexual sexual activity, divorce, etc.) is first that of self-reflection and repentance in light of the reality that we are all sinners—we are all living less than the ideal of Christ. We all must let the light of God’s word (Scripture) shine into the depth of our own lives and submit all our sexual desires and activity to God and His ideals. We are all called to a life centered wholly and completely in Christ. We cannot let our sexuality or gender identity stand between us and God.

Our response must always be a response of great compassion and grace. It is God’s love that led Him to reconcile humanity to Himself despite humanity’s disobedience. It is that same love and grace that draw us to God. As God so richly bestowed His grace on us through His son Jesus, we are called to extend the same to others, especially in their brokenness. It is often in how God acts toward our areas of brokenness where we most clearly see God’s grace and love for us. God’s strength is revealed in our weakness, as we submit our weaknesses to Him.

Therefore, as those called to be leaders in the Christian community, our response is to walk alongside each other in our brokenness in order to learn, live, and grow in holiness as we are transformed by Christ and the Holy Spirit into Christ-likeness. We believe Christ invites us all to walk with Him and one another as we pursue holiness in every area of our lives. God’s kindness

draws us to repentance. We do not seek holiness to find God's love; rather it is His love that makes us holy. The transformation in our thinking and actions can happen in a moment of God's healing touch or it can take a lifetime of endurance. In fact, it may not fully happen in this lifetime, but we know when we see Him face-to-face we will all be transformed fully and finally into the likeness of Christ.