

## A Christian Vision for Healthy Relationships and Sexuality

There are a number of important values that guide our community of faith as we form healthy relationships and seek to express our sexuality in God-honouring ways.

### Relationship

The acknowledgment in Genesis 2:18, “it is not good for the man to be alone,” speaks to a fundamental human need for relationship. We are created to be in relationship; to experience the depth and beauty of community.<sup>1</sup>

We can experience true community in a variety of places, including families, friendships, and in committed relationships such as Christian marriage. It is in our life-giving relationships with one another that we most clearly reflect the image of God.<sup>2</sup>

### The Church

In the New Testament, the most frequent analogy for the church is that of a family, and so a local church itself is intended to be a community where we bear witness to one another’s fundamental need for relationship. *Our Key Values*<sup>3</sup> articulate our commitment to living this out.

As a community of Jesus’ followers, we believe that it is important to encourage and provide support for relationships in a number of ways - and where the bonds of family, friendships, or marriage falter or fail, we will respond by being present and available for one another.

### Sexuality

There is a sanctity - a holiness - to the human body, and therefore what we do with our bodies matters and matters deeply. This is particularly true with respect to our sexuality, where our actions affect both our relationships with one another and with God.<sup>4</sup>

Just as the Genesis narrative acknowledges our need for relationship, it also points out the significance of our sexuality by referring to the unique bond it creates between partners in the covenant of marriage: When “a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife...they become one flesh.”<sup>5</sup>

But our longing for sexual intimacy doesn’t begin with the exchange of marriage vows, so we have to discover what it means to be sexual beings outside of this covenant. In this space, we embrace the virtue of chastity, choosing to reserve the most intimate of sexual acts for marriage, the most intimate of relationships.

Whether or not we are in a marriage relationship, we will honour our sanctity and that of our fellow image-bearers by resisting the urge to cheapen or objectify one another’s sexuality. Sex is not a spectator sport and is not a commodity to be bought or sold.

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<sup>1</sup> Wendy Vanderwall-Gritter, [www.generousspace.ca](http://www.generousspace.ca)

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:26-27

<sup>3</sup> <http://elevationwaterloo.org/history/#keyvalues>

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 2:24

We will also seek to refrain from the temptation to use guilt and shame as weapons against people who falter in pursuit of the vision we're describing, or who were never pursuing it to begin with. We want to inspire one another toward this goal in a positive way without falling prey to judgment and self-righteousness.

## Marriage

"Sexual drives are strong, but marriage is strong enough to contain them and provide for a balanced and fulfilling sexual life in a world of sexual disorder."<sup>6</sup>

In a marriage relationship, sexual intimacy provides a source of physical pleasure between partners and opens a husband and wife to the possibility of procreation.<sup>7</sup> Sexual intimacy also provides an opportunity to demonstrate a deep respect for our partner and is always to be engaged with mutual consent. But a healthy sexuality must go further than mere consent and become an expression of servant love, a sign of life-long commitment, and somehow also a mysterious picture of the union between Christ and the church.<sup>8</sup>

Christian marriage involves a uniquely intimate relationship between two adults who freely choose to enter a sacred covenant before God and the community of faith. The biblical narrative presents a positive vision of marriage as a union between a man and a woman, and provides us with imagery describing this unique relationship. Because faithful people can and will interpret scripture differently, we believe there is room for differing opinions on the place of same-sex relationships in the life of the church.<sup>9</sup>

A marriage covenant is not to be entered into lightly. As Jesus declared when he was questioned about the conditions for divorce, "What God has joined together, let man not separate."<sup>10</sup> Faithfulness to a spouse is paramount, with scripture pointing to sexual infidelity as a clear breach of the marriage covenant.<sup>11</sup> Even so, marital unfaithfulness should not automatically lead to divorce, but should be considered an opportunity for Christian grace, forgiveness, and restoration.

Divorce involves the dissolution of a marriage covenant, and in this regard, the weight of the biblical record is negative.<sup>12</sup> Our first priority is reconciliation and the healing of the marital union wherever possible, however where all attempts at reconciliation have failed and a divorce has been finalized, we extend Christ's love and compassion.<sup>13</sup>

## Discipleship

In each of our relationships, whether we find ourselves in families, friendships, or in committed relationships such as Christian marriage, we are first and foremost followers of Jesus and therefore ambassadors of the good news of God's reconciling work in Christ.<sup>14</sup> And so our vision is ultimately to bring the fullness of our faith into play as we form healthy relationships and seek to express our sexuality in God-honouring ways.

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:3, *The Message*

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 1:22a

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 5:22-33

<sup>9</sup> <http://elevationwaterloo.org/history/#unityindiversity>

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 19:4-6

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 19:9

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:8

<sup>13</sup> PAOC, *Statement of Fundamental and Essential Truths*

<sup>14</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20