

More Light  on...

Sexual Ethics

Trusting that God's Spirit is at work making all things new, we are invited to delight in God's creation including our bodies and sexualities, to confess our sin when this sacred gift is misused, and to take responsibility for restoring relationships toward healing and justice.

Sexuality is God's amazing, life-enhancing gift that includes genital sex but refers more broadly to our capacity and longing for intimate connection and mutually pleasurable, mutually respectful touch. Throughout our lives we humans seek physical, emotional, and spiritual embrace of others. Our desire and energy for bonding is to be used responsibly to communicate love, respect, and tender regard. This power may also be misused to harm, control, or exploit.

Some traditional Christian attitudes have expressed suspicion about the body, fear of sex and passion, and an interest in controlling women, their bodies and their procreative power. Patriarchal norms have legitimated male ownership of women and children. Gay men, lesbian women, bisexual and transgender people have been devalued and denied full participation in church and society. The church has often failed to take seriously sexual violence, abuse, and coercion that cause enormous suffering, including sexual misconduct and abuse of power by its own leaders. Too often, when it comes to sex and matters of sexual injustice, the church has either reinforced our cultural negativity or maintained a deafening silence.

To speak a word of hope and to communicate the good news of the Gospel, *More Light Presbyterians* boldly promote an ethic of sexual justice that affirms the goodness of sexuality, honors sexual diversity, respect for sexual minorities, and attends to the socio-political as well as personal dimensions of sexual injustice, abuse, and exploitation. In particular, we maintain that sexuality is an indispensable component of our humanity and vital to spiritual integrity and well-being. Each person, regardless of gender, sexual orientation or bodily condition has a moral right to love and be loved, as well as a responsibility to express his or her sexuality in ways genuinely respectful of self and others.

More Light Presbyterians envisions that Christian sexual ethics marked by covenantal fidelity shall be the standard for all Presbyterians, irrespective of sexual orientation.

Statement of Sexual Ethics

Adopted by More Light
Presbyterians Board, 1999

The renewal of Christian sexual ethics depends on a break with the notion that there is a singular, ideal sexuality and that those abiding by this standard should police and control others. An ethic grounded in love of God and neighbor as one's whole self will value the bodily integrity of every person and honor the variety of ways in which people live sexually whole, morally responsible, and spiritually faithful lives. This ethic focuses on things that matter, including the dignity and worth of every person, the right to accurate knowledge about human sexuality, a single ethical standard for intimate relations, and the recognition that commitment, fidelity, and integrity are fundamental to all relationships of moral substance.

The MLP board approved the following statement, developed by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS):

Sexuality is God's life-giving and life-fulfilling gift. We come from diverse religious communities to recognize sexuality as central to our humanity and as integral to our spirituality. We are speaking out against the pain, brokenness, oppression, and loss of meaning that many experience about their sexuality.

Our faith traditions celebrate the goodness of creation, including our bodies and our sexuality. We sin when this sacred gift is abused or exploited. However, the great promise of our traditions is love, healing, and restored relationships.

Our culture needs a sexual ethic focused on personal relationships and social justice rather than particular sexual acts. All persons have the right and responsibility to lead sexual lives that express love, justice, mutuality, commitment, consent, and pleasure. Grounded in respect for the body and for the vulnerability that intimacy brings, this ethic fosters physical, emotional, and spiritual health. It accepts no double standards and applies to all persons, without regard to sex, gender, color, age, bodily condition, marital status, or sexual orientation.

God hears the cries of those who suffer from the failure of religious communities to address sexuality. We are called today to see, hear, and respond to the suffering caused by violence against women and sexual minorities, the HIV pandemic, unsustainable population growth and over-consumption, and the commercial exploitation of sexuality.

Faith communities must therefore be truth seeking, courageous, and just. We call for:

- Theological reflection that integrates the wisdom of excluded, often silenced peoples, and insights about sexuality from medicine, social science, the arts and humanities.
- Full inclusion of women and sexual minorities in congregational life, including their ordination and the blessing of same sex unions.
- Sexuality counseling and education throughout the lifespan from trained religious leaders.
- Support for those who challenge sexual oppression and who work for justice within their congregations and denomination.

Faith communities must also advocate for sexual and spiritual wholeness in society. We call for:

- Lifelong, age appropriate sexuality education in schools, seminaries, and community settings.
- A faith-based commitment to sexual and reproductive rights, including access to voluntary contraception, abortion, and HIV/STD prevention and treatment.
- Religious leadership in movements to end sexual and social injustice.

God rejoices when we celebrate our sexuality with holiness and integrity. We, the undersigned, invite our colleagues and faith communities to join us in promoting sexual morality, justice, and healing.

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