

HUMAN SEXUALITY
Board of General Superintendents
Manual 32

RESOLVED that *Manual* paragraph 32 be amended as follows:

32. [The Church of the Nazarene views human sexuality as one expression of the holiness and beauty that God the Creator intended for His creation. It is one of the ways by which the covenant between a husband and a wife is sealed and expressed. Christians are to understand that in marriage human sexuality can and ought to be sanctified by God. Human sexuality achieves fulfillment only as a sign of comprehensive love and loyalty. Christian husbands and wives should view sexuality as a part of their much larger commitment to one another and to Christ from whom the meaning of life is drawn.

The Christian home should serve as a setting for teaching children the sacred character of human sexuality and for showing them how its meaning is fulfilled in the context of love, fidelity, and patience.

Our ministers and Christian educators should state clearly the Christian understanding of human sexuality, urging Christians to celebrate its rightful excellence, and rigorously to guard against its betrayal and distortion.

Sexuality misses its purpose when treated as an end in itself or when cheapened by using another person to satisfy pornographic and perverted sexual interests. We view all forms of sexual intimacy that occur outside the covenant of heterosexual marriage as sinful distortions of the holiness and beauty God intended for it.

Homosexuality is one means by which human sexuality is perverted. We recognize the depth of the perversion that leads to homosexual acts but affirm the biblical position that such acts are sinful and subject to the wrath of God. We believe the grace of God sufficient to overcome the practice of homosexuality (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). We deplore any action or statement that would seem to imply compatibility between Christian morality and the practice of homosexuality. We urge clear preaching and teaching concerning Bible standards of sexual morality. (Genesis 1:27; 19:1–25; Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; 1 Timothy 1:8–10)]

Human Sexuality and Marriage

The Church of the Nazarene views human sexuality as one expression of the holiness and beauty that God the Creator intended. Because all humans are beings created in the image of God, they are of inestimable value and worth. As a result we believe that human sexuality is meant to include more than the sensual experience, and is a gift of God designed to reflect the whole of our physical and relational createdness.

As a holiness people, the Church of the Nazarene affirms that the human body matters to God. Christians are both called and enabled by the transforming and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit to glorify God in and with our bodies. Our senses, our sexual appetites, our ability to experience pleasure, and our desire for connection to another are shaped out of the very character of God. Our bodies are good, very good.

1 We affirm belief in a God whose creation is an act of love. Having
2 experienced God as holy love, we understand the Trinity to be a unity of love
3 among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are made with a yearning for
4 connection with others at the core of our being. That yearning is ultimately
5 fulfilled as we live in covenanted relationship with God, the creation, and loving
6 one's neighbor as one's self. Our creation as social beings is both good and
7 beautiful. We reflect the image of God in our capacity to relate and our desire to do
8 so. The people of God are formed as one in Christ, a rich community of love and
9 grace.

10 Within this community, believers are called to live as faithful members of
11 the body of Christ. Singleness among the people of God is to be valued and
12 sustained by the rich fellowship of the church and the communion of the saints. To
13 live as a single person is to engage, as Jesus did, in the intimacy of community,
14 surrounded by friends, welcoming and being welcomed to tables, and expressing
15 faithful witness.

16 Also within this community, we affirm that some believers are called to be
17 married. As defined in Genesis, "a man leaves his father and mother and clings to
18 his wife, and they become one flesh." The marriage covenant, a reflection of the
19 covenant between God and the people of God, is one of exclusive sexual fidelity,
20 unselfish service, and social witness. A woman and a man publicly devote
21 themselves to one another as a witness to the way God loves. Marital intimacy is
22 intended to reflect the union of Christ and the Church, a mystery of grace. It is also
23 God's intention that in this sacramental union the man and woman may experience
24 the joy and pleasure of sexual intimacy and from this act of intimate love new life
25 may enter the world and into a covenantal community of care. The Christ-centered
26 home ought to serve as a primary location for spiritual formation. The church is to
27 take great care in the formation of marriage through pre-marital counseling and
28 teaching that denotes the sacredness of marriage.

29 The Scriptural story, however, also includes the sad chapter of the
30 fracturing of human desire in the fall, resulting in behaviors that elevate self-
31 sovereignty, damage and objectify the other, and darken the path of human desire.
32 As fallen beings, we have experienced this evil on every level – personal and
33 corporate. The principalities and powers of a fallen world have saturated us with
34 lies about our sexuality. Our desires have been twisted by sin and we are turned
35 inward on ourselves. We have also contributed to the fracturing of the creation by
36 our willful choice to violate the love of God and live on our own terms apart from
37 God.

38 Our brokenness in the areas of sexuality takes many forms, some due to
39 our own choosing and some brought into our lives via a broken world. However,
40 God's grace is sufficient in our weaknesses, enough to bring conviction,
41 transformation, and sanctification in our lives. Therefore, in order to resist adding
42 to the brokenness of sin and to be able to witness to the beauty and uniqueness of
43 God's holy purposes for our bodies, we believe members of the body of Christ,
44 enabled by the Spirit, can and should refrain from:

- 45 • Unmarried sexual intercourse and other forms of inappropriate sexual
46 bonding. Because we believe that it is God's intention for our
47 sexuality to be lived out in the covenantal union between one woman
48 and one man, we believe that these practices often lead to the
49 objectification of the other in a relationship. In all its forms, it also
50 potentially harms our ability to enter into the beauty and holiness of
51 Christian marriage with our whole selves.

- 1 • Sexual activity between people of the same sex. Because we believe
2 that it is God's intention for our sexuality to be lived out in the
3 covenantal union between one woman and one man, we believe the
4 practice of same-sex sexual intimacy is contrary to God's will for
5 human sexuality. While a person's homosexual or bi-sexual attraction
6 may have complex and differing origins, and the implication of this
7 call to sexual purity is costly, we believe the grace of God is sufficient
8 for such a calling. We recognize the shared responsibility of the body
9 of Christ to be a welcoming, forgiving, and loving community where
10 hospitality, encouragement, transformation, and accountability are
11 available to all.
- 12 • Extra-marital sexual relations. Because we believe this behavior is a
13 violation of the vows that we made before God and within the body of
14 Christ, adultery is a selfish act, a family-destroying choice, and an
15 offense to the God who has loved us purely and devotedly.
- 16 • Divorce. Because marriage is intended to be a life-long commitment,
17 the fracturing of the covenant of marriage, whether initiated
18 personally, or by the choice of a spouse, falls short of God's best
19 intentions. The church must take care in preserving the marriage bond
20 where wise and possible, and offering counsel and grace to those
21 wounded by divorce.
- 22 • Practices such as polygamy or polyandry. Because we believe that the
23 covenantal faithfulness of God is reflected in the monogamous
24 commitment of husband and wife, these practices take away from the
25 unique and exclusive fidelity intended in marriage.

26
27 Sexual sin and brokenness is not only personal but pervades the systems
28 and structures of the world. Therefore, as the church bears witness to the reality of
29 the beauty and uniqueness of God's holy purposes we also believe the church
30 should refrain from and advocate against:

- 31 • Pornography in all its forms, which is desire gone awry. It is the
32 objectification of people for selfish sexual gratification. This habit
33 destroys our capacity to love unselfishly.
- 34 • Sexual violence in any form, including rape, sexual assault, sexual
35 bullying, hateful speech, marital abuse, incest, sex trafficking, forced
36 marriage, female genital mutilation, bestiality, sexual harassment, and
37 the abuse of minors and other vulnerable populations. All people and
38 systems that perpetrate sexual violence transgress the command to
39 love and to protect our neighbor. The body of Christ should always be
40 a place of justice, protection, and healing for those who are, who have
41 been, and who continue to be affected by sexual violence.

42 Therefore we affirm that:

- 43 • Where sin abounds grace abounds all the more. Although the effects of
44 sin are universal and holistic, the efficacy of grace is also universal
45 and holistic. In Christ, through the Holy Spirit, we are renewed in the
46 image of God. The old is gone and the new comes. Although the
47 forming of our lives as a new creation may be a gradual process,
48 God's healing is effective in dealing with the brokenness of humanity
49 in the areas of sexuality.
- 50 • The human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We affirm the need
51 for our sexuality to be conformed to God's will. Our bodies are not our

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own but have been bought with a price. Therefore, we are called to glorify God in our bodies through a life of yielded obedience.

- The people of God are marked by holy love. We affirm that, above all the virtues, the people of God are to clothe themselves with love. The people of God have always welcomed broken people into our gathering. Such Christian hospitality is neither an excusing of individual disobedience nor a refusal to participate redemptively in discerning the roots of brokenness. Restoring humans to the likeness of Jesus requires confession, forgiveness, formative practices, sanctification, and Godly counsel – but most of all, it includes the welcome of love which invites the broken person into the circle of grace known as the church. If we fail to honestly confront sin and brokenness, we have not loved. If we fail to love, we cannot participate in God’s healing of brokenness.

As the global church receives and ministers to the people of our world, the faithful outworking of these statements as congregations is complex and must be navigated with care, humility, courage, and discernment.

REASONS:

1. If this resolution is adopted, *Manual* paragraphs 30-30.4 (Marriage and Divorce and/or Dissolution of Marriage) may also need to be amended or deleted. The comprehensive nature of the new statement on Human Sexuality causes some parts of *Manual* paragraphs 30-30.4 to be redundant and may possibly make these paragraphs unnecessary. With the work of the Covenant of Christian Conduct on Human Sexuality Commission, there was conversation that if the Christian Action Legislative Committee and/or the 2017 General Assembly delegation believe that these other five paragraphs should also be amended (or deleted entirely), then appropriate actions could be taken by either or both of these entities during the General Assembly, or a recommendation could be made to refer this task to the 2017 *Manual* Editing Committee.
2. As leaders in the global Church of the Nazarene, we recognize that the conversations about human sexuality are some of the most important and difficult conversations the church faces in this generation.
3. In the first place, they are important conversations because “our bodies matter.” As a holiness people, Nazarenes are convinced that Christians are not only called but they are also made capable – by the transforming and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit – to glorify God in our bodies.
4. Secondly, conversations about our sexuality are important because these issues are so closely tied to the “formation of community.” In the Scriptural narratives of creation, God not only forms humankind in His image, but He also forms them in the relational community of male and female. The creation of the human is an expression of God’s self-emptying

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love. We are made with an innate need for connection with others at the core of our being. That need for connection is ultimately fulfilled as we live in covenanted relationship with God, others, and loving our neighbor as our self. As social beings, we reflect the image of God in our capacity to relate and our desire to do so.

5. These conversations about sexuality are also critical because of “the counter-cultural nature of the gospel.” The calling of the church is not just responding to surrounding cultures but embodying an alternative kingdom that the world cannot understand on its own terms. So while the church always embodies the love and mercy of Christ, we are also called to serve as a prophetic witness to the life that is only made possible by submission to the lordship of Jesus and the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.
6. Finally, we recognize the significance of these conversations because of how “deeply personal and potentially divisive these questions are for a global body of Christ.” Because issues of sexuality are tied so closely to questions of identity and belonging, they are rightly felt and experienced deeply and personally. Conversations about sexuality cannot simply be abstracted from the reality of particular people who are valued and loved by God and by the church. Although a holiness people are convinced that sin and brokenness need not have the last word in any person’s life, we are also convinced of the reality of sin and its effects on every life. This means that – as was the case in the incarnation – grace and truth cannot be divided from one another but must be expressed in unity. When it comes to the questions around sexuality pastoral concerns must be taken into account alongside the ethical concerns. It is not enough for the church to think rightly about these issues, the church must also respond to all people in ways that reflect the love and graciousness of God revealed in Jesus Christ.
7. As leaders for the global church, we not only recognize the significance and the sensitivity of these issues, but we also recognize that they are taking place within various contexts.
8. Our conversations about sexuality are taking place in “global cultural contexts.” We recognize that as a global church the issues that press upon the people of God in the areas of sexuality are incredibly diverse. The challenge the church has is to speak and give guidance to the whole church in ways general enough to cross cultures and cultural perspectives but also specific enough to give much needed biblical guidance and direction for pastors and laypeople facing complicated and important questions.
9. Our conversations about sexuality are taking place in “diverse political contexts.” The people of God have always been called to be a unique people – “resident aliens” – living in the midst of political systems that range from gracious and supporting to oppressive and persecuting toward those committed to the Christian faith. The challenge of being a holy people in the midst of an often unholy empire is as old as the Exodus narratives. The church recognizes the need in many current global political

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contexts to work diligently – by all appropriate means – to ensure the dignity and freedoms for people of Christian conviction. But the leaders of the church also recognize the need for people of Christian faith to be willing to extend those same freedoms and dignities to those who hold different convictions. It is always the goal of God’s people to do everything possible to live peaceably with all and to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with and for those most vulnerable and often oppressed in these areas.

- 10. Our conversations about sexuality are taking place in “shifting cultural contexts.” The rapid development of technology has expanded the reach of secularism, individualism, and consumerism around the globe. Although much of the church is thankful for the elevation of human rights and freedoms that these developments have often brought for many across the world, the church recognizes that these forces have also brought destruction, distortion, and even the increased commodification of people – in particular in the areas of sexuality.

- 11. Our conversations about sexuality are taking place in “ever-changing generational contexts.” The church recognizes that passing the mission of the church on to the next generation has never been an easy task. But with the developments mentioned above, it is clear that passing on the faith – and the leadership of the church – to the coming generation is as challenging as it has ever been. Many in the generation quickly moving into leadership are not aliens to a secular and technological age. Although the church cannot and will not surrender a biblical standard of sexual morality, the church must move forward with sensitivity to all those for whom the increasingly complex questions of sexuality are very personal and relational.

- 12. Our conversations about sexuality are taking place directed by “biblical and theological contexts.” The primary source and authority for the church in dealing with these questions is the inspired and revealed truth of God’s nature and character as witnessed to in the Holy Scripture. The Word of God – interpreted through the lenses of Christian orthodox tradition, reason, and personal experience – occupies the privileged position as the final authority for the faith and practice of the people of God in all aspects of our lives, including our sexuality.

- 13. Our conversations about sexuality are taking place in “an ecclesial context.” An age-old problem that continues to shape our struggle with sexuality is what it means to submit one’s self to the authority and accountability of the body of Christ. The leadership of the church must always lead in ways that model the call of Jesus for the first to be last and for the leader to be the servant; but the members of the body of Christ must also constantly work toward unity. In areas as diverse and controversial as human sexuality, the leadership of the church realizes that complete unanimity will be impossible. But it is the prayerful hope of the church that – as Nazarenes have attempted to do from their inception – unity can be found on essentials, liberty can be given on non-essentials, and in all things charity or love will be extended.

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14. Finally, our conversations about sexuality are taking place in “pastoral contexts.” It is imperative that the body of Christ commit to loving unconditionally. God so unconditionally loved the world that He sent His one and only Son, not to condemn but to save. Although sin and brokenness in the areas of sexuality are deeply personal and therefore often difficult conversations, it still remains just one aspect of our all-encompassing human sinfulness. Loveless judgmentalism and ungracious reactions do little to enable Christ’s body to grant grace and to show forth God’s unconditional love. As the complexities of local contexts for doing ministry increase, the need for the church to grant not only wisdom but also grace to those who are attempting to show love, accountability, grace, and transformation to those caught in the bondage of sin will also increase.
15. Because of the great cultural shifts that have taken place over the last decades, the leadership of the church is recommending the adoption of a revised *Manual* statement on human sexuality and marriage. In writing this statement, the goal has not been to set aside the historical position of the Church of the Nazarene on sexuality but to more clearly articulate the truth and grace necessary for the church in this time on these issues.
16. Because of the diverse and various contexts listed above, the proposed statement is intentionally general and concise. There is no possible way in the context of the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* to address all of the pastoral and diverse cultural issues that are connected to human sexuality. It is therefore the intention of the Board of General Superintendents (BGS) to leave space for regional leadership and for other church leaders to address the diversity of pastoral issues that face the church through sermons, statements, and pastoral letters.
17. The challenges of faithfulness in sexuality also require the church to develop further resources for instruction and formation of the church to use in the equipping of pastors and the discipling of our people.
18. Because of the difficulty and nuance required for crafting a globally appropriate statement of this importance from the floor of the General Assembly, it is the hope of the BGS that the proposed statement would be accepted or rejected as it is written. “The statement was developed by a specially assigned global committee and then was re-worked, refined, and accepted unanimously by the current BGS. It therefore comes to the Christian Action Committee and to the General Assembly for adoption.”