

## Holy Synod Statement on Same-sex Relationships and Sexual Identity



[At the 20<sup>th</sup> All-American Council] There was a resolution proposed to affirm the Church's stance on issues of same-sex relationships and sexual identity. This matter, however, falls outside the competence of the All-American Council, since, in the words of the Statute of the Orthodox Church in America, "All matters involving doctrine, canonical order, morals, and liturgical practice" are within the competence and jurisdiction of the Holy Synod. Nonetheless, meeting under the presidency of His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon, the Holy Synod has issued the following statement:

The Orthodox Church teaches that the union between a man and a woman in marriage reflects the union between Christ and His Church (Eph. 5). As such, marriage is by this reflection monogamous and heterosexual. Within this marriage, sexual relations between a husband and wife are an expression of their love that has been blessed by God. Such is God's plan for male and female, created in his image and likeness, from the beginning, and such remains his plan for all time. Any other form of sexual expression is by its nature disordered, and cannot be blessed by the Church in any way, whether directly or indirectly.

That said, the Holy Synod of Bishops expresses its pastoral concern and paternal love for all who desire to come to Christ and who struggle with their passions, temptations, and besetting sins, whatever those might be. The Church is a hospital for the sick; Our Lord has come as a physician to heal those who are ailing. Imitating our Savior, who stretched his arms wide on the Cross, we welcome with open arms all who desire the life of repentance in Christ.

Over the course of recent years, His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon and the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America have made numerous pronouncements affirming the Orthodox Christian teaching on marriage and sexuality. Metropolitan Tikhon, at the 18th All-American Council in Atlanta, Georgia, on July 20, 2015, in his opening address, stated that:

"... the Orthodox Church must continue to proclaim what she has always taught: that marriage is the union between one man and one woman and the Orthodox Church in America can in no way deviate from this teaching..."

Among the Holy Synod's affirmations of the same teaching are the "Synodal Affirmations on Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and the Sanctity of Life," from the 10th All-American Council, Miami, Florida, taking place from July 26-31, 1992; the "Synodal Reaffirmation of the SCOBA statement titled 'On the Moral Crisis in our Nation,'" issued May 17, 2004; and the synodal "Statement concerning the June 26 US Supreme Court decision," issued June 28, 2015.

Therefore, in accord with the timeless plan of God our Creator, the unchanging teaching of Christ the Savior announced through his holy apostles and their successors, and the consistent witness of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America, the Holy Synod affirms what the Scriptures clearly and plainly proclaim and the holy fathers unerringly confess, namely: that God made human beings in two sexes, male and female, in his own image, and that chaste and pure sexual relationships are reserved to one man and one woman in the bond of marriage.

As such, we affirm that sexual relationships are blessed only within the context of a marriage between one man and one woman. Motivated by love and out of sincere care for souls, we call those who suffer from the passion of same-sex attraction to a life of steadfast chastity and repentance, the same life of chastity and repentance to which all mankind is called in Christ.

We call upon all clergy, theologians, teachers, and lay persons within the Orthodox Church in America never to contradict these teachings by preaching or teaching against the Church's clear moral position; by publishing books, magazines, and articles which do the same; or producing or publishing similar content online. We reject any attempt to create a theological framework which would normalize same-sex erotic relationships or distort humanity's God-given sexual identity. The holy apostle Paul writes that such teachings will "increase to more ungodliness," and that such a "message will spread like gangrene" (2 Tim 2:16-17), misleading the faithful and inquirers seeking the truth.

Any clergy, theologian, teacher, or lay person who contravenes our directive thus undermines the authority of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America by disregarding the Holy Synod's consistent and unwavering teaching on these matters. We call on any such persons to cease their disruptive activities, which threaten the peace and tranquility of the Orthodox Church in America, cause scandal and uncertainty, and tempt those who struggle against their disordered passions to stumble. Consequently, those who teach these errors become participants in the sin of those whom they have tempted or whom they have failed to correct, and thus should seek remission of this sin in the mystery of holy confession. Those who refuse correction open themselves to ecclesiastical discipline.

Thus, we, the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in Americas, conclude by once again affirming that all clergy, theologians, teachers, and lay persons of the Orthodox Church in America should teach nothing other than the fullness of the Orthodox faith, which is the fullness of the saving truth.

We remind our faithful and clergy that every person of goodwill is welcome to visit our parishes. However, reception into the Church, and continued communion in Christ at the sacred Chalice, is reserved for those who strive to live a life of repentance and humility in light of these God-given truths, conforming themselves to the commandments of God as the only path of salvation in Christ. All of us are sinners, but it is for precisely this reason that Our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to "Repent and believe in the Gospel, for the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk. 1:15).

**The Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America**