

IPC Statement on Membership, Ordination, & Marriage

Membership: Immanuel Presbyterian Church is committed to being faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and being a community of faith that is welcoming and open to all people, including liberals, moderates, and conservatives. We accept all people who confess Christ as Lord into church membership. Membership is open to all, no matter one's race, gender, or sexual orientation.

Ordination: All members are eligible for ordination, no matter their race, gender, or sexual orientation. However, ordination is not a right, but a privilege that is discerned by the community of faith under the direction of the Spirit based upon our understanding of the candidate's faithfulness to Scriptural guidelines for leadership and matters of faith and practice.

Marriage: Immanuel Presbyterian Church holds that marriage is "a unique commitment between two people, traditionally between a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives." (Book of Order, W-4.9001)

Respect and Understanding: Our faith in Christ teaches us to seek understanding and to respect others because we are all made in God's image. At the same time, not all within our community of faith are in concurrence with Immanuel's ordination standard or definition of marriage, so we leave one's personal interpretation of ordination and marriage up to each individual's own conscience, under the authority of Christ and the Scriptures. We believe that our shared faith in Jesus Christ binds us together with the common bonds of love and joy more than our disagreements break us apart.

Rationale

The body of Christ and Immanuel Presbyterian church in particular, contains believers who hold a wide variety of views on a number of theological matters, including sexuality. We have Christians who believe that marriage should be expanded to include same-sex partners, in light of different Scriptural interpretations, scientific research, and the testimony of gay and lesbian Christians. We also have Christians who confess and seek to live by traditional Judeo-Christian sexual ethics that affirm the honorable nature of celibacy for the unmarried and faithfulness between a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage. Despite these real complexities and points of difference within our church, we continue to joyfully love one another because we believe our unity in Christ transcends these differences.

In the midst of our varying perspectives, there are crucial components of sexual stewardship on which Immanuel is in agreement. Every Christian, particularly those called to the order of ruling or teaching elder or deacon, should daily aspire by God's grace to exhibit sexual holiness in behaviors, choices, relationships, hopes, memories, marriage, health, fantasy, and desire in a way that honors God, neighbor, and oneself. Celibates are to be honored and encouraged in their commitment to be chaste for Christ. Elders and deacons are expected to be monogamous. Fidelity is a vital virtue for the health and well-being of the marriage relationship.

The Reformed perspective affirms that sex is a precious gift from God that is to be stewarded with joy and care within boundaries that are God-honoring and people-honoring. Yet we live in a sexually saturated culture that makes it challenging for people to live into this God-designed way of life. Society places a tremendous burden upon sex to deliver unceasing pleasure and worth physically, emotionally, existentially, and spiritually. In other words, the good gift of sex has been downgraded to one of the premier idols in America's pantheon of gods.

Sex isn't an idol or god for the Christian—the Creator alone is to be worshiped. Sexual wholeness and holiness is a crucial pursuit for all followers of Christ, especially those entrusted to Christian leadership as elders and deacons. The Christian's ultimate identity is not defined by sex, but that male and female—children of God—belong to God and are God's beloved. As the Apostle Paul says, "we are not our own." Despite this glorious reality, all people, including Christians, are in need of sexual healing throughout their lives by God's grace. There is no room for pride among any of us, yet we must never give up the life-long pursuit of sexual character.

The calling for every Christian, particularly those called to the order of ruling or teaching elder or deacon, is to steward their sexuality in such a way that leads to not only sexual holiness, but also that their sexuality would bear the fruit of the Spirit, privately and in all aspects of ministry.

Sexual addiction is harmful to relationships and care should be sought for recovery. Sexual holiness pertains to all components of life: private, public, institutional, and global. Manipulative, violent, exploitive, non-consensual, trivial, voyeuristic, commodified, or promiscuous sex towards adults or minors must be resisted and repented of.

Thoughtful study of the Scriptures; regular prayer and worship; healthy Christian fellowship; professional help as needed; and reflection on the Book of Confessions, theology, church history, science, and experience are tools to help each Christian to make wise and discerning decisions in these arenas of life. Christian sexual holiness should be expressed in love, humility, and dignity to all.