



A COVENANT ORDER OF EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIANS

Building flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.

One of ECO's foundational convictions is to uphold the biblical teaching on sexuality. From the outset, we firmly believed, and continue to uphold, the view that scripture unequivocally defines sexuality within the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman. Though our position was counter-cultural at its inception, during the last decade our culture has drifted even further from a foundational biblical perspective, accompanied by an increased hostility towards those defending an orthodox position.

One thing I love about the spirit of our denomination is the desire to both uphold biblical faithfulness while embodying a gracious witness to the world. We steadfastly refuse to accommodate to the prevailing cultural trajectory or withdraw or seek to be adversarial. Our stance aligns with the example set by Jesus, who welcomed all into his presence without affirming behaviors and attitudes contrary to his word and character. Instead, he worked to transform individuals and society to reflect the nature of his Kingdom with directness, kindness, and an invitation into Kingdom centeredness.

Recognizing the incredible challenge ahead, especially for biblically faithful churches like those in ECO, we understand the importance of discipling our congregations, leaders, and younger generations. ECO's desire is to cultivate a deeply formed biblical identity amid a culture that constantly promotes conflicting messages. Simultaneously, we are called to engage with our culture in a loving and gracious manner, bringing the transformative work of Jesus Christ to bear upon it.

I am particularly grateful to our Standing Theological Committee for crafting the document *Gender, Sex, and the Kingdom of God*, which provides a comprehensive explanation of The ECO Essential Tenets regarding God's design for marriage. While this document serves as a foundational resource, we acknowledge that additional resources are necessary. In the coming months, we will actively seek external resources and, if necessary, create internal ones to assist our congregations in navigating the increasing complexity surrounding the issue of sexuality.



Our desire is to make available resources that will help shape your congregation with a biblically informed sexual ethic and empower you to be a compelling witness to the world. *Gender, Sex, and the Kingdom of God* serves as a significant first step in this process. Modeled after the Barmen Declaration, it encompasses affirmations, renunciations, and confessions, providing robust support for our theological convictions while setting a tone of gracious Christ-like communication of truth.

We look forward to ongoing dialogue and engagement as we collectively navigate the challenges and opportunities before us. May our prayerful commitment to biblical faithfulness and grace always be a testimony to the transformative power of Jesus Christ in our lives.

In Christ's service,

Rev. Dr. Dana S. Allin, Synod Executive

Gender, Sex, and the Kingdom

1. Our New Life in Christ

See, I am making all things new.

Revelation 21:5¹

Gender and sexuality, like all human life, must be viewed through the lens of the Gospel, understanding that Jesus Christ is making all things new.

We affirm that life in Christ is lived forward in hope—not backward in longing, pain, or regret. The unremitting call of all women and men is to be reconciled to God in Jesus Christ, joining the kingdom he came to establish. We are promised, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”²

We affirm this not only as future promise but as present reality. This new creation is a free gift but not without responsibility before our heavenly Father and King. In this new life we are called to walk as children of light, discern what is pleasing to the Lord and expose unfruitful deeds of darkness.³

We affirm that our minds have been darkened in rejection of God as we have aimed to be like God by defining good things for ourselves.⁴ In Christ we are called to not be conformed to the patterns of the world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds.⁵ Therefore we reject conformity to the world’s definition of the good and affirm that the mind of Christ calls us to consider others more significant than ourselves, confident that every knee will bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.⁶

We affirm marriage between one man and one woman as a sign of God’s covenant with his Church, his faithfulness, the new creation and new life available to all.⁷ We equally affirm the high calling of celibacy in singleness as a sign of our ultimate belonging to the family of God.

We confess that the Church has too often compromised our witness and our participation in the Kingdom of God by allowing marriage and sex to become instruments for personal

¹ All Scripture quotations are taken from NRSV

² 2 Corinthians 5:17.

³ Ephesians 5:8–11.

⁴ Romans 1:21.

⁵ Romans 12:2.

⁶ Philippians 2:2–11.

⁷ Revelation 19:7–8.

fulfillment and the indulgence of lust rather than a means for the Holy Spirit to disciple men, women, and children,⁸ thus becoming captive to “philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition.”⁹

2. Our Identity in Christ

For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God, through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:26-28

*As Jesus’ disciples, we are crucified with Christ and Christ lives through us.*¹⁰

We affirm that those who are in Christ are being transformed from confusion to clarity about their identity.¹¹ Baptized with the Holy Spirit, we are clothed in the righteousness of God. This gift of righteousness defines us empowering our mission and community as children of God.¹²

We reject that identity is self-generated or self-discovered; instead we affirm that we receive our identities through the abundant life of Christ alone.¹³ We are made by him, for him, and called to grow into his image.

We reject the practice of making penultimate things, like gender and sexual identity, fundamental. This practice is idolatry and is at the root of sin. However, we cannot choose even these penultimate things that we are tempted to allow to define us.

We affirm that God creates us as eternal beings, physically male or female¹⁴ and our ethnicity follows us into God’s kingdom.¹⁵ These physical traits are God’s good gifts to us, and cannot

⁸ This references Malachi 2:15 which states God seeks ‘godly offspring’ in marriage through the work of the Holy Spirit. We believe ‘godly offspring’ refers to more than just children but all whom a marriage impacts.

⁹ Colossians 2:8.

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:20.

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 3:18.

¹² John 1:12.

¹³ John 10:10.

¹⁴ Genesis 1:27. We understand that a small minority of people are born with one of many intersex conditions, which include some form of biological ambiguity, about .018% according to one study published by the National Institute of Health.

¹⁵ Daniel 7:14; Revelation 7:9-10.

be denied or denounced for God declared his creation “very good.”¹⁶ But to define ourselves ultimately by gender or sexuality, ethnicity, politics, tribe, or treasure is a betrayal of Jesus’ saving work in our lives, and a rejection of his grace and love.

We confess that we have too often loved these lesser things more than God, having dishonored him and “exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”¹⁷

3. Our Freedom in Christ

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).

Colossians 3:1-5

Jesus Christ is our true liberator from counterfeit claims of sexual freedom, fulfillment of desire, power and personal significance offer no liberty at all and only invite God’s wrath.

We affirm that our freedom in Christ must change how we live, and fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.¹⁸ Set free from our sin and the sins committed against us by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, we can live beyond carnal and material notions of identity and worldly patterns and practices of sexuality.

We affirm our accountability before God and others. This responsibility permeates every aspect of our experience, even the most personal, “for nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”¹⁹

We reject there are areas of our life which are not subject to Christ and the authority of his Word. The people of God are free only in Christ,²⁰ and the physical expression of our sexuality faithfully exists only in a marriage covenant between one man and one woman.²¹ We also reject that our full humanity requires the unrestricted expression of our sexuality.²² We affirm

¹⁶ Genesis 1:31.

¹⁷ Romans 1:25.

¹⁸ Galatians 5:13, Hebrews 12:2.

¹⁹ Luke 8:17, see also Matthew 12:36; Romans 14:12; Hebrew 4:13, and many others.

²⁰ Galatians 5:1.

²¹ Genesis 2:24-25.

²² Matthew 22:29-30.

that only in Christ we may faithfully confront the affliction of disordered desires and the passions of the flesh.

We reject the idolization of gender or sexual expression that enslaves ourselves and others to finding satisfaction and worth in desire and desirability. We affirm our new and present life in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and put to death those earthly things that mire us in the old life marred by sin.²³

We confess we have allowed our love of the poor, our care for creation and our physical bodies, and even our self-understanding to be corrupted by materialism. We have made idols of the tangible—food, drink, sex, money, power, politics and personal impact and significance. All idols imprison and enslave, but we are not hopeless because “From heaven the Lord looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die.”²⁴

4. Grace In Christ

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Ephesians 2:8-9

Grace is God’s undeserved and benevolent love toward us that calls us to show grace to one another, freeing us to live a new life as disciples of Christ and children of God.

We affirm God’s covenant of grace with his children made effective by Jesus Christ,²⁵ uniting us now and forever to our heavenly Father²⁶ through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

We affirm that in Christ all things are possible²⁷ and that only God’s grace creates new life in those dead in sin; because he created us, redeemed us, and calls us by name, we are his.²⁸

²³ Colossians 3:5.

²⁴ Psalm 102:19-20.

²⁵ Luke 22:20.

²⁶ Jeremiah 31:33.

²⁷ Matthew 19:26.

²⁸ Isaiah 43:1.

We reject the idea that grace allows us to continue sinning or even define ourselves by our sin. We affirm that continuing to sin after a knowledge of the truth profanes the sacrifice of Christ, inviting consuming fear and judgment.²⁹

We affirm that Christ's grace is good news that sets the captive free from sin, recovers the sight of the spiritually blind, and sets at liberty the oppressed.³⁰

We affirm that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,³¹ therefore we humble ourselves before the Lord living by his grace, refusing to speak evil of others, to make distinctions among ourselves or to become judges with evil thoughts.³²

We confess that we have seen the speck in our brother's eye while ignoring the log in our own eye and hypocritically we have not extended grace to others because we believe we have not been in need of God's gift of forgiveness ourselves.³³

We affirm the unlimited possibility of God's grace to redeem anyone, forgive any sin or repair any relationship because "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."³⁴

5. Together With Christ

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

Romans 12:4-5

The gospel involves the church as the people of God on the mission of God becoming the image of God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit; this is the primary work of our life and is for all whom the Lord calls.

We affirm that the Church takes its form in a band of sinful women and men among whom Jesus Christ, through no virtue of our own, forms a fellowship whose work is to proclaim the free grace of God to the world. Our presence among the company of Christ's elect supersedes but does not destroy associations with nations, races, governments, families, and

²⁹ Hebrews 10:26-27.

³⁰ Luke 4:18.

³¹ Romans 3:23.

³² James 2:4, 4:11-12.

³³ Matthew 7:3-5.

³⁴ Lamentations 3:22-23.

tribes. Where those loyalties conflict, we must submit to Jesus Christ, who is over all things and preeminent.³⁵

We reject alliances of expediency that compromise the Gospel—be they with liberal or conservative groups. Neither will we rage powerlessly against the culture as if we are victims of a sinful world rather than victorious in Christ.³⁶

We affirm the breathtaking cultural diversity of humanity as a reflection of the Kingdom of God³⁷ and claim that we are effectively united only as a work of the Holy Spirit who bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and heirs of our heavenly Father the King.³⁸

We affirm that the Spirit joins together in unity and the bond of peace God's warring, and wounded children.³⁹ This astonishing unity among sinners made holy demonstrates the character of God to move the world to believe and confess Jesus Christ as Lord.⁴⁰

We reject that we are united in a holy bond of unity by anything else—be it sexual desire, political agendas, shared causes, or even common enemies. Where there is no Spirit-inspired fellowship, there is no Church and no witness.

We confess that we have sought other means to unite us and even rejected God to achieve unity and power behind sinful human leaders, making ourselves "like all the nations."⁴¹

We affirm that the unifying power of the Holy Spirit for the Kingdom requires no fallible human mediator, priest, essential hierarchies, or distinctions. It is available to all women and men called by God who has promised, "Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."⁴²

³⁵ Colossians 1:15-20.

³⁶ 1 John 5:4.

³⁷ Matthew 8:11.

³⁸ Romans 8:16-17.

³⁹ Ephesians 4:3-6.

⁴⁰ John 17:21.

⁴¹ 1 Samuel 8:5.

⁴² Isaiah 43:6-7.

6. The Love of Christ

We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

1 John 4:19-21

Those who are in Christ are called to love uniquely and are compelled to join Christ's mission of reconciliation in a community that produces ambassadors of Christ who love God and their neighbor as themselves.

We affirm that in love God is reconciling all things to himself.⁴³ The Church loves God and the world by making disciples, baptizing believers in the name of the Triune God and teaching obedience to God's commands.⁴⁴

We affirm there is no love that does not keep the Lord's commands and serve him as King.⁴⁵

We reject the Church serving herself by seeking approval and acceptance from a world that rejects its Maker, winning the world to our good intentions rather than proclaiming Jesus Christ and his propitiation for our sin.⁴⁶ Speaking truth in love can give the impression to the world of intolerance.

We affirm love is patient but not permissive.

We affirm love is kind but not weak.

We affirm love does not rejoice at wrongdoing but in the truth.⁴⁷

We reject the equivocation of love as something that exists apart from God. Love is not love apart from God.⁴⁸ We affirm that Jesus modeled and taught there is no greater love than laying down our life for others.⁴⁹

We reject any claim to love Jesus that does not also love our brother, sister, neighbor, or even our enemy.

⁴³ 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Colossians 1:20.

⁴⁴ Matthew 28:19-20.

⁴⁵ John 14:15.

⁴⁶ 1 John 4:9-10.

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:4-6.

⁴⁸ 1 John 4:7-12.

⁴⁹ John 15:13.

We affirm that to receive and share the love of God is to grow into the measure of the fullness of the stature of Jesus Christ.⁵⁰

We confess that too often we have only loved those who have loved us, and we have rejected the wounded, the sexually broken, those unlike us, the lost and sinners—the very ones whom Jesus came to heal.⁵¹ In the love of God the glorious hope of the Kingdom that is both present and coming is revealed.

“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are... What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 3:12-14.

⁵¹ Mark 2:17.

⁵² 1 John 3:1-3.