

Policies of Trinity Lutheran Church, Darmstadt, Indiana Regarding Beliefs, Marriage and Life, Facility Usage, and Membership

1.0 Statement of Belief

This congregation Trinity Lutheran Church is part of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS or Synod). The LCMS is a mission-oriented and Bible-based denomination that confesses the historic, orthodox Christian faith in the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a faith built on “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). With the universal Christian Church, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod teaches and responds to the love of the Triune God, who created all that exists; became man to suffer, die, and rise again for the world’s redemption; and brings people to faith and new life through His Word and Sacraments. The three persons of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – are coequal and coeternal, one God.

LCMS congregations voluntarily choose to belong to the Synod, and, although diverse in many ways, all hold to a shared confession of Jesus Christ as taught in Holy Scripture. We believe without reservation that the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament are the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice. In addition, the Synod accepts without reservation the writings contained in the *Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*.

Believing in the authority of Holy Scripture and that the Lutheran Confessions are a correct interpretation and presentation of biblical doctrine, our congregations agree to conform all their teaching and practice to the Scriptures and the Confessions.

The Synod “is not an ecclesiastical government, exercising legislative or coercive powers” (LCMS Constitution, Article VII) concerning its member congregations and ministers. However, the voluntary association of member congregations and ministers includes their agreement to respect and honor and uphold (Bylaw 1.7.2, 1.8.1) decisions (resolutions) made by the Synod in its national conventions regarding the understanding of the teachings of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and practices that are consistent with such teaching. The Synod in convention is the “principle legislative assembly” of the LCMS (Bylaw 3.1.1) and its resolutions and statements are the position of the Synod in matters of doctrine and life. The Constitution and Bylaws of the LCMS provide specific guidance for the implementation and supervision of the teaching and practice of its members (congregations and rostered church workers).

Congregations of the LCMS, while upholding teachings and practices that are consistent with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and while honoring Synod convention resolutions, are self-governed and establish policies based on local circumstance and expediency. An LCMS congregation or ministry operates according to its own constitution and bylaws – which are required by the Synod Bylaws to be reviewed by the District through which the congregation holds membership in the Synod – and therein establishes an orderly way of making decisions and determines which individuals or entities in the congregation (e.g., the pastor, church council, board of elders) will have authority to act on behalf of the congregation in specific circumstances. The Constitution and bylaws of Trinity Lutheran Church govern our decision-making and policies. A copy is available upon request.

1.1 Statement on Marriage, Gender, and Sexuality

We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (Gen. 1:26-27). Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person.

We believe that the term marriage has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture (Gen. 2:18-25). We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other (1 Cor. 6:18; 7:2-5; Heb. 13:4). We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.

We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God (Matt. 15:18-20; 1 Cor. 6:9-10).

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of Trinity Lutheran Church as the local Body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to the Trinity Lutheran Church members and the community, it is imperative that all persons employed by Trinity Lutheran Church in any capacity, or who serve as volunteers, agree to and abide by this Statement on Marriage, Gender, and Sexuality (Matt. 5:16; Phil. 2:14-16; 1 Thess. 5:22).

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (Acts 3:19-21; Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity (Mark 12:28-31; Luke 6:31). Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the doctrines of Trinity Lutheran Church.

Further explanation of beliefs of Trinity Lutheran Church as a member of the LCMS about marriage, gender, and sexuality are cited in Appendix A.

1.2 Statement of Final Authority for Matters of Faith and Conduct

We believe that the source of all religious authority for matters of faith and conduct is the Holy Bible, both Old and New Testament, and the *Book of Concord*, the Confessions of the Lutheran Church. Publications from the *Commission on Theology and Church Relations* (CTCR) of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod also describe particular applications of our Lutheran faith and conduct.

The final human interpreter of the above sources of religious authority for Trinity Lutheran Church is the pastor and board of elders who are authorized by the congregation to state the church's beliefs and practices on any disputed issue.

1.3 Statement on the Sanctity of Human Life

We believe that all human life is sacred and created by God in His image. Human life is of inestimable worth in all its dimensions, including pre-born babies, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, and every other stage or condition from conception through natural death. We are therefore called to defend, protect, and value all human life (Ps. 139).

3.0 Facility Use Policy

The pastor or his official designee must approve all uses of church property and facilities [including the church school and early childhood center]. Generally, priority shall be given to church members, their immediate families, and organized groups that are part of the ministry, organization, or sponsored activities of the church.

The church believes that its property and facilities are to be used for the fellowship of the Body of Christ and to bring glory to God. Although the facilities are not generally open to the public, we sometimes make our facilities available to approved non-members as a witness to our faith, in a spirit of Christian service that is consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But facility use will not be permitted to persons or groups holding, advancing, or advocating beliefs or practices that conflict with the church's faith or moral teachings, which are summarized in, among other places, the church's constitution and bylaws, and in various places on its website trinitydarmstadt.org and on the website of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, lcms.org.

This facility use policy is consistent with our belief that allowing our property and facilities to be used for purposes that we determine are contrary to this church's beliefs would be an endorsement of those purposes and a contradiction and grave violation of the church's faith and religious practice (2 Cor. 6:14; 1Thess. 5:22). Further, it is important that the church present a consistent message to the community and that the church staff and members conscientiously maintain that message as part of their Christian life and as a witness to others that is consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in no event shall persons or groups who hold, advance, or advocate beliefs, or advance, advocate, or engage in practices that contradict the church's faith use any church facility. Nor may church facilities be used in any way that contradicts the church's faith. This policy applies to all church facilities, regardless of whether the facilities are connected to the church's sanctuary, because the church understands all of its property as a gift from God to be received with thanksgiving and to be set apart and used to the honor of Jesus' name in ways that are consistent with our faith in Him (Col. 3:17).

Consistent with this policy, church property, facilities and equipment [including the school and early childhood center] will be made available to non-members or outside groups which affirm that their beliefs and practices and planned uses of the facilities are consistent with the church's faith and practice.

3.1 Scheduling Events

Facility use requests shall be made to the office manager, pastor, or chairman of the board of properties by submitting the "Church Facility Reservation Request and Agreement" form. The event will be reserved and placed on the church calendar only when the pastor or official designee approves the use.

3.2 Fees

Use of church facilities is subject to a use and maintenance fee of \$10/hour to pay for the upkeep of church facilities but may be waived by the pastor or chairman of the board of properties for beneficial service organizations of the community. Use of the facility for weddings of members of sister LCMS congregations who also adhere to the beliefs of Trinity Lutheran Church is subject to a custodial fee of \$300. Church members are not required to pay a fee for usage because maintenance of the facilities is derived from member tithes and offerings.

3.3 Facility Use Guidelines

1. Alcohol Policy: No alcohol may be served in church facilities.
2. Smoking Policy: Smoking in any indoor church facilities is prohibited.
3. Groups are restricted to only those areas of the facility that the group has reserved.
4. Food and beverages are not allowed in the sanctuary.
5. Church equipment, such as tables and chairs, must be returned to original placement, unless arranged otherwise prior to the event.
6. All lights must be turned off and doors locked upon departure.
7. Clean-up: Any person or group using the facility is required to make a satisfactory clean-up which returns the facility to its original condition, otherwise a clean-up fee of \$15/custodial hour will be charged.
8. Abusive or foul language, violent behavior, and drug or alcohol abuse are strictly prohibited on church premises. Any person exhibiting such behavior will be required to leave the premises.
9. Any person or group must sign the "Church Facility Reservation Request and Agreement" form prior to reservation of church facilities.
10. Facility usage requires the presence of adult supervision at all times.
11. Note that certain unanticipated events may require your event to be relocated (i.e. funerals).
12. The congregation is not responsible for theft or damage to personal property brought into the building.
13. Group acknowledges that they will not bring or allow dangerous items to be brought into the facility.
14. This document constitutes the entire agreement between the parties and is not assignable.

3.4 Insurance

For all non-church-sponsored events, the group or person using the facilities must obtain liability insurance coverage in the amount of at least \$1,000,000. The user must also sign a "Facility Use and an Indemnity and Hold Harmless Agreement."

The "Facility Use and an Indemnity and Hold Harmless Agreement" is cited in Appendix B.

4.1 Churches – Formal Membership Policy

Membership in Trinity Lutheran Church is defined in its Constitution and Bylaws which are cited below.

CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE 5: MEMBERSHIP

- A. All members who have been baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are baptized members.
- B. Communicant membership in this congregation may be held only by those who:
 1. Are baptized in the Name of the Triune God.
 2. Have declared their acceptance of the confessions of this congregation as contained in Article 3 of this Constitution by profession of faith through the rite of confirmation.
 3. Have been accepted into communicant membership in accordance with the By-Laws of this congregation and shall remain faithful to the responsibilities of membership as contained in these By-Laws.
 4. Do not live in manifest works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) but lead a Christian life.
 5. Are not members of a secret society or any other organization conflicting with the Word of God and the conduct of a Christian (II Corinthians 6:14-18).
- C. The membership, and membership privileges, of each communicant member shall remain in force so long as each member shall maintain his eligibility according to the five points in Section B of this article and shall meet the requirements stated or implied in the disciplinary, or other provisions, of the By-Laws. A member who voluntarily severs his connection with this congregation, or who has been released or transferred, or who has been excommunicated or excludes himself according to the provisions of the By-Laws, shall be deemed to have terminated his membership in this congregation along with all rights and privileges of such membership.

BY-LAWS OF THE CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE 1: COMMUNICANT MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Application for Membership - Procedure

Applicants for communicant membership in this congregation shall consult the Pastor who shall determine whether such applicants are eligible for membership in accordance with Article 5 of the Constitution. Applicants not familiar with the doctrines and confessions of the Lutheran Church shall be required to attend a course of instruction and to make professions of their faith either before the congregation or, at the Pastor's discretion, before witnesses who are members of the Board of Elders, before being received as members.

Applicants from other Evangelical Lutheran churches with whom we are in fellowship shall submit a letter of transfer from their former congregation to establish their eligibility for membership. In the case of applicants whose previous membership in a Lutheran congregation has lapsed, the Pastor may, with the consent of the Board of Elders, arrange for a period of re-instruction prior to reaffirmation of faith for such applicant.

After applicants have given satisfactory evidence of their eligibility in accordance with the two preceding paragraphs, their admission as communicant members shall be recommended by the Pastor to the Board of Elders which shall have the authority to act on such applications in behalf of the Voters' Assembly. The roster of new members shall be publicized in the various news media of the congregation.

Section 2. Privileges and Duties of Communicant Members

It shall be the privilege and duty of members of this congregation to:

Grow in the Christian faith and life through faithful use of the means of grace, searching the Scriptures at home and in fellowship with the other members of the congregation and its agencies, and partaking of the Lord's Supper frequently.

Be an active witness for Christ to the church, the community, and to the world.

Live a morally decent life before God and men, abstaining from open works of the flesh (Gal. 5:18-21), and so conducting themselves at all times as to bring credit rather than blame upon the Church of Jesus Christ.

Provide for the proper Christian training of their children by instruction at home and through the agencies of the Church.

Contribute toward the maintenance of the congregation and the extension of the Kingdom of God at home and abroad to the limit of their financial ability.

Place their God-given talents and abilities at the disposal of the Pastor(s), the officers, and other agencies of the congregation as set forth in its Constitution and By-Laws, so that the purposes and functions of the congregation may be effectively implemented.

ARTICLE 2: VOTING MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Eligibility

Any communicant member of this congregation who is 18 years of age or over, both male and female, shall be eligible to apply for Voting Membership. Such application shall be made at a regular Voters' Meeting of the congregation. Upon affirmation by the applicant of his intention to fulfill such duties as are required of a Voting Member to the best of his ability, he shall be accepted as a Voting Member with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto and required to attend at least one regular Voters' Meeting a year to maintain membership. Any member who misses three consecutive regular Voters' Meetings will be notified by the Secretary that failure to attend the fourth consecutive meeting will result in removal from the roll. Application for reinstatement may be made without prejudice at any regular Voters' Meeting. He shall be required to sign the official copy of the Constitution and By-Laws of the congregation at the time of his acceptance into the Voters' Assembly.

Section 2. Privileges and Duties of Voting Members

It shall be the privilege and duty of a Voting Member of this congregation to:

- Conscientiously and prayerfully exercise his right of suffrage in all measures that will advance the work of Christ's Kingdom both locally and in the church-at-large.
- Willingly serve in any office or capacity for which his talents and abilities equip him.
- Faithfully attend all meetings of the Voters' Assembly.
- Assist with wholehearted diligence in administering the temporal and spiritual affairs of the congregation.
- Encourage, by personal example, friendly interest, and judicious counsel, such eligible communicant members who are not yet Voting Members to consider seriously accepting the responsibilities and privileges of Voting Membership.

Section 3. Honorary Members

When a member who has been faithful in his attendance and duties for a number of years and can no longer attend the meetings regularly because of age, illness, or for any other good reason, he may be recommended by the Board of Elders for honorary membership and declared to be an honorary member by the Voters' Assembly. An Honorary member is entitled to all privileges of voting membership but is not required to attend the meetings to maintain his status.

4.1.2 Formal Membership Policy: Procedures for Member Discipline

4.1.3 Formal Membership Policy: Disassociating Membership

Procedures for member discipline in Trinity Lutheran Church and disassociating membership is defined in its Bylaws which are cited below.

ARTICLE 3: DISCIPLINE IN THE CONGREGATION

All discipline in this congregation shall be administered in accordance with the order of discipline laid down in Matthew 18:15-20 and other related New Testament passages. The following procedure shall be followed under the direction of the Pastor(s) and the Board of Elders.

Section 1. Communicant Membership - Termination

A. Transfers

A member desiring transfer to another Lutheran congregation with whom we are in fellowship shall apply to the Pastor. Upon approval by the Pastor and the Board of Elders, a letter of transfer shall be issued by the Pastor. The Board of Elders shall report all transfers to the congregation via church publications and to the Voters' Assembly at the next regular meeting of that body.

B. Joining Other Churches

In cases where communicant members of this congregation have joined a church body with whom we are not in fellowship, they shall, upon the decision of the Pastor(s) and Board of Elders, be deemed to have terminated their membership in this congregation, forfeiting all rights and privileges of such membership. Their name(s) shall be removed from the membership list of the congregation and reported at the next regular voters' meeting.

C. Whereabouts Unknown

The names of members whose whereabouts are unknown and cannot be established within a period of six months shall be removed from the membership list of the congregation and terminated at the next regular meeting of the Voters' Assembly.

D. Self-Exclusion and Excommunication

When a member of Trinity Lutheran Church of Darmstadt has not communed for six months, he or she will be contacted by an elder, and shall be admonished and encouraged. If such a member has not communed after nine months, he or she shall receive a visit by at least two members of the congregation, one an elder and the Pastor or some other concerned member of the congregation. Additional admonition and encouragement shall be given. If, after one year, such a member still has not communed, he or she shall be evangelically admonished more firmly and told that if such neglect continues for another three months, it shall be interpreted as impenitence, lack of faith in Jesus Christ, and indifference to church membership, privileges, and responsibilities. If, then, after fifteen months, the member has not yet responded to Christian admonition as outlined above, the member's name shall be transferred to the mission file of the congregation or turned over to the Board of Christian Outreach. The individual shall be notified of such action by registered mail and shall be declared to have excluded himself from this Christian congregation. The Board of Elders may deal differently with cases on an individual basis when they deem necessary.

Excommunication is to be applied to any member who openly and impenitently conducts himself in an unChristian manner; i.e., to one who openly adheres to false doctrine or gives evidence of an immoral and offensive life. The Board of Elders shall administer church discipline in accordance with Biblical principles in behalf of the congregation.

An individual who has been removed from membership for whatever reason is released from all responsibilities to this congregation. The individual is also excluded from the privileges of

church membership, such as Christian burial, Holy Communion, transfer to a sister congregation, and of any claim against the properties of this congregation. **SUCH A PERSON, HOWEVER, WILL AT ALL TIMES BE CORDIALLY WELCOME TO ATTEND ALL DIVINE SERVICES IN OUR CHURCH.**

Persons who have been removed from membership for whatever reason shall be restored with all rights and privileges when they repent and ask forgiveness through the Pastor(s) and the Board of Elders. Both acts of discipline and restoration shall be made known to all communicant members by whatever method the Pastor(s) and the Board of Elders deem most suitable.

4.2 Churches – Marriage Policy

The marriage policy of Trinity Lutheran Church, a member congregation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, is and always has been consistent with the Synod's beliefs on marriage. We believe that marriage is a sacred union of one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24-25), and that God gave marriage as a picture of the relationship between Christ and His bride the Church (Eph. 5:32). The official position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, as set forth in 1998 Res. 3-21 ("To Affirm the Sanctity of Marriage and to Reject Same-Sex Unions"), is that homosexual unions come under categorical prohibition in the Old and New Testaments (Lev. 18:22, 24; 20:13; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-10) as contrary to the Creator's design (Rom. 1:26-27). These positions and beliefs can be found on the LCMS website, along with other statements, papers and reports on the subject of homosexuality and same-sex civil unions and marriage. Our pastors will not officiate over any marriages inconsistent with these beliefs, and our church property may not be used for any marriage ceremony, reception or other activity that would be inconsistent with our beliefs and this policy.

Appendix A

LCMS – Statement on Marriage, Gender, and Sexuality

The Holy Scriptures teach that God, in creating the world, gave marriage to be the lifelong union of one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24), a gift to be held in honor and kept pure (Heb. 13:4; 1Thess. 4:2-5). As a man and woman freely commit themselves to one another, God himself joins them as one. Marriage is far more than a social contract or a mere interpersonal bond. It is an act of God the Creator. So our Lord Jesus says in Matt. 19:4-6: “Haven’t you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife and the two shall become one flesh?’”

Marriage cannot be rightly understood apart from another gift: the gift of children. As he creates man and woman, God says, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). As the two become one flesh, the highest possible result of this marriage union, when it is God’s will, is the conception and birth of a child. The child is in every sense the one flesh of the mother and father and the living sign of their union. The optimal setting for the care of children is the loving marital unity of a man and woman. In such marriage children are nurtured within the distinctive uniqueness and created differences of male and female serving together in the family.

This biblical understanding of the marriage union of man and woman is both purposeful and beautiful. Its purposes include the procreation and nurture of children, the mutual joy and the support and encouragement given to one another by husband and wife, and the restraint of selfishness and sin as each seeks to serve the other’s needs. Such purposes reveal a beauty so great that Eph. 5:21-33 connects marriage to the holy union of Christ and His bride, the church. The apostle Paul writes that even as Christ, the bridegroom, pours forth sacrificial love for his church, the bride, and she trustingly commits her life to him, so also husbands are called to sacrificial love toward their wives and wives to a willing respect for their husbands.

This, in brief, is the Bible’s teaching on marriage – and so it is also the doctrine of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Every congregation and called worker of the LCMS accepts the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice. Congregations and church workers also gladly declare their unswerving conviction that the confessions of the Lutheran church, as found in *The Book of Concord* (1580), are in full agreement with the Scriptures. LCMS congregations, pastors, and other called servants thus agree to abide by the doctrine of the Synod. To believe that marriage is a sacred union of one man and one woman is not a political opinion or a cultural bias, it is the clear teaching of Holy Scripture, something that the members of the Synod believe, teach, and confess as the very truth of God.

This understanding of marriage is not, however, the view of many people in North America and Western Europe (the West). Recent legislative and judicial actions throughout the West reveal an undeniable fact: marriage is no longer understood to be the lifelong bond of one man and one woman. Countless millions now believe that marriage is a loving, legal commitment between any two individual adults. According to the Pew Research Center, a significant shift of opinion, largely generational in nature, has taken place in the United States. In 2001 only 35 percent of U.S. adults supported same-sex marriage and 57 percent opposed it, believing that marriage was only between a man and a woman. In 2013 the numbers are radically different with 50 percent favoring same-sex marriage and only 43 percent opposing it. The 2013 United States Supreme Court decisions striking down California’s same-sex marriage ban and the federal Defense of Marriage Act reflect this changed view of marriage.

For the LCMS and its congregations these societal and legal trends present great challenges. Pressure on churches to accommodate their teachings and practices to the changing societal view of marriage is increasing. Some church bodies have endorsed same-sex marriage in contradiction to clear biblical teaching. Will cultural attitudes or biblical truth guide our teaching and practice?

We cannot concede to Caesar what belongs only to God (Matt. 22:21). His Word and His alone must guide the church, not human opinions. “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). To do anything less is to sacrifice the beauty and purposes of marriage as it has been given by God.

LCMS beliefs, practices and policies regarding marriage are firmly established and have long been documented. They are set forth in any number of documents. As examples, please refer to the following materials concerning the Synod’s beliefs on marriage:

Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective (English | Spanish) (1981) – A report by the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations.

Plan for Ministry to Homosexuals and their Families (1999) – A compassionate discussion of the spiritual needs of individuals who experience same-sex attraction and their families, together with suggestions for ministering to them. Our Lord deals with sin in one way, calling each of us to repentance that we might receive His forgiveness.

FAQ on Same-Sex Marriage and FAQ on the LCMS Response to Homosexuality – In other words, while we reject same-sex marriage, we do not reject individuals who struggle with same-sex attraction, but we seek to love them and call them to repentance and faith in Christ’s forgiveness, just as we do for all sinners. We cannot bless same-sex marriage (just as we cannot bless sexual intercourse outside of the marriage of one man and one woman) because we cannot bless what God calls sin. To do so would be to place those who engage in such behavior outside the need for repentance and forgiveness, and thus outside the need for redemption in Christ. Our concerns are always ultimately pastoral, focused on the care of souls in Christ. We seek to be faithful to the Word of God because we care about people.

Response to Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust (2012) – A Commission on Theology and Church Relations response opposing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s decision to affirm same-sex relationships.

Appendix B

Church Facility Reservation Request and Agreement

Name of person or organization requesting use of facilities: _____

Please state whether you are a:

Church Member Church-Sponsored Ministry
 Non-Member Non-Member Group/Organization

Contact Information:

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

If the requested use is by an organization not affiliated with the church, please briefly state the organization's purpose and mission:

Please list the organization's website, if any: _____

Please list the names of the organization's officeholders and leaders:

Regardless of type of user, please describe which church facilities you are requesting use of and the purpose for which you intend to use the facilities:

What date(s) and time(s) are you requesting to use the facilities:

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If you are requesting use of the church's facilities for a wedding and/or wedding reception, please list the names and contact information of the bride and groom:

Bride:

Groom:

Please list the name, contact information, and religious affiliation of the person officiating the wedding:

Please describe the marriage preparation counseling or training undertaken by the bride and groom:

I affirm that:

1. I understand that the church does not allow its facilities to be used in a way that contradicts its faith or by persons or groups holding beliefs that contradict the church's faith.
2. To the best of my knowledge, the purpose for which I am requesting use of church facilities will not contradict the church's faith, and I commit to promptly disclose any potential conflict of which I am aware or become aware to church staff.
3. I am not aware of any beliefs that are professed by me or the organization I represent and which is requesting use of the church's facilities that contradict the beliefs of the church. I agree to promptly disclose any potential conflicts in belief to church staff.
4. I understand that upon approval of my facilities use request, I will need to provide a certificate of insurance for at least \$1,000,000 of coverage, and any other fees required by the church.
5. I understand that the church does not allow its facilities to be generally available to the public, and that my use of these facilities is subject to the pastor's approval, which is conditioned in part on my agreement to the requirements in the "Church Facility Use Policy," a copy of which I have read and understood.
6. I understand that I will be responsible for any damages to the church facilities resulting from this proposed use of facilities.
7. The church believes disputes are to be worked out between parties without recourse to the courts. See, generally, Matt. 18 and 1 Cor. 6. Accordingly, users of the facility agree to attempt resolution of any disputes through Christian mediation.

Name

Date

2.0 Religious Employment Criteria

Every LCMS church, school, and ministry should consider establishing religious criteria for its employees and volunteers. Federal law prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or age.⁵ However, religious organizations may consider an applicant or employee's religious beliefs in hiring and firing.⁶ And under a First Amendment doctrine known as the ministerial exception, churches, Christian schools, and other qualifying organizations are exempt from employment non-discrimination laws for hiring and firing their ministerial employees – individuals who are tasked with performing the organization's rituals or teaching and explaining its beliefs.⁷

State and municipal employment nondiscrimination laws often mirror federal law, prohibiting discrimination based on religion and unchangeable characteristics such as race, color, and national origin. But an increasing number of states and municipalities also prohibit discrimination in employment based on unbiblical behavior related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Most state laws and municipal ordinances also provide some level of exemptions for religious organizations, but these exemptions vary widely. Regardless, the First Amendment, which trumps state and local law to the contrary, arguably should provide great protection for employment decisions made by religious entities.

Should an employment dispute arise, Christian organizations can best avail themselves of the First Amendment's protection if they create and faithfully enforce religious employment criteria for every employee.

2.1 Signed Statement of Belief

First, and at a minimum, the organization should require all employees and volunteers to sign a statement affirming that they will not act contrary to the organization's statement of belief and are willing to comply with the organization's standards of conduct as determined by the organization (if any) (See Statement of Belief, pg. 7; Code of Christian Conduct, pg. 27). Retain these signed statements as part of the individual's permanent record.

It is also good practice to note either on the signed statement, or in the employee/volunteer handbook, that acting contrary to the organization's statement of belief or violation of the organization's standards of conduct (if any) constitutes good cause to terminate employment or volunteer services.

2.2 Religious Job Descriptions

Second, the organization should create written descriptions for every employment and volunteer position. These job descriptions will be unique to each organization and position, but the descriptions should explain how the position furthers the organization's religious mission, what the responsibilities and duties of the position include, and what characteristics or skills are necessary for the position.

Although every position within a church or ministry furthers the organization's religious mission, the link between an employment or volunteer position and the organization's mission cannot be assumed.

Clearly articulate this link in writing.

When feasible, a religious organization should assign its employees and/or volunteers duties that involve ministerial, teaching, or other spiritual qualifications – duties that directly further the religious mission. For example, if a church receptionist answers the phone, the job description might detail how the receptionist is required to answer basic questions about the church's faith, provide religious resources, or pray with callers. Consider putting forth a statement of expectations that all employees and volunteers participate in devotional or prayer time when offered, or even lead these on occasion on an as-requested basis.

Employees and/or volunteers with some duties usually performed by (or associated with) clergy are more likely to be viewed as minister-like by the courts.⁸ Consequently, courts are more likely to apply the ministerial exception to employment law claims based on alleged discrimination.

As noted above, it is important to bear in mind that the term “minister” applies not only to the head of a religious congregation, such as a pastor or priest, but also to any employee charged with ministering, teaching, or communicating beliefs. In a recent case, the United States Supreme Court held that an LCMS rostered teacher (commissioned minister) met the definition of a minister.⁹

A church, Christian school, or Christian ministry that employs an individual regarded as a minister should make that distinction clear in the job title.¹⁰ Any religious educational qualifications, duties, responsibilities, or activities should be clear in the position description. Finally, remember that one need not have the title minister for the ministry to claim the ministerial exception: the exception applies to those charged with ministering, teaching, or communicating beliefs. Employee job descriptions should also include the religious grounds for limiting employment opportunities, especially if the limitations involve any categories protected by law (such as religion or sex). For example, if a church or Christian school believes that only men may hold certain positions, this criteria should be clearly stated in the job description with scriptural or ecclesiastical support.¹¹

Finally, Christian ministries must consistently apply their employment standards and handle similar cases alike. For example, organizations might be legally vulnerable if they terminate an unmarried, pregnant female employee on religious grounds, but do not terminate a male employee known to have engaged in extramarital sexual relations.

Consistency in employment decisions will make it more likely courts will find the organization acted properly and did not commit employment discrimination should a disgruntled former employee file suit.