

## WHITE PAPER: **THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL AND POLICIES PERTAINING TO SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS**

Christian Schools International

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### **Policy Development: Enrollment of students whose parents are a same-sex couple**

In 2012 Christian schools are facing policy and practice decisions concerning the response of the school to legislative action, ballot proposals, and policy positions from national educational organizations. In 2005 Canada became the first North American country to approve same-sex marriage when the Civil Marriage Act became law. An increasing number of U.S. states including the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the state of Washington are recognizing marriage for same sex couples. Recently, the Board of the National Council of Independent Schools was wrestling with a recommendation to require non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation for NAIS membership. The NAIS Board has backed away slightly from full consideration of this recommendation, but the tabling is more likely temporary than it is permanent.

It is increasingly likely that Christian schools will face sexual orientation discrimination issues. Those issues will involve enrollment policies and procedures as well as employment policies and procedures. This paper is not intended to be definitive. This paper is intended to encourage Christian schools to develop policy, and to provide guidance and a framework for autonomous Christian schools that are seeking to formulate policy.

Christian schools have the right and the obligation to establish policies and practices that are rooted firmly in Scripture. The Christian school has the right to establish policy that is aligned with biblical interpretation as defined in the school's by-laws, be it doctrinal confessions, denominational positions, or in the case of independent schools, the local church's position. Christian schools rightly should struggle in a fallen world with the balance between non-negotiable biblical truth and the commands from Jesus to love God above all and to love our neighbor. Believers are called to be salt and light. Believers are called to reclaim his world and to be agents of renewal and restoration.

As those who stand for biblical truth and who also recognize that believers have freedom in Christ, leaders in Christian schools should consider that not everyone will be of one mind. There will be and should be room for dialogue and differences among us as we grapple with difficult subjects and seek to write and to implement clear policies.

The Christian school will not be able to avoid this issue. A proactive policy position will be essential. In the absence of policy and procedures, civil law will potentially take precedence. The Christian school that fails to address potential issues proactively and with clear policy risks opening the door to court systems to determine if the decisions and actions of the school are appropriate.

### **Position of the Church:**

As the Christian school considers and develops policy and establishes procedure, the school would be well-served and wise to consider the position of the church and particularly of the denomination or body (bodies) with which the school's statement of faith is most closely aligned.

For example, schools that are most closely aligned with churches in the Reformed tradition should consider establishing policies that reflect rather than conflict with confessional standards or denominational statements. This paper is not intended to provide an extensive review of the statements from the confessions or denominations, but to offer a sample.

As a school aligned closely with the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) and the Westminster Confession of Faith, Westminster Christian Academy in St. Louis, Missouri, offers the following example:

We have a statement in our application (you can access our application online at [www.wcastl.org](http://www.wcastl.org)): Are you personally in agreement with and committed to the basic tenets of historic Christianity, as listed below. One of the statements they must agree to is as follows: *Faithfully strive to model for your family and others the code of behavior defined in the infallible and authoritative Word of God and the Westminster Confession of Faith.*

The Westminster Confession of Faith is clear in its definition of marriage to include a man and a woman, leaving no room for same-sex marriage or homosexuality. The commitment parents must make to model the code of behavior in God's Word and the Westminster Confession excludes admission of students from same-sex parents. We find that keeping the Westminster Confession of Faith as the doctrinal standard for our school (we even include it in our mission statement) gives us the decision-making foundation that we need to deal with this issue.

Christian Schools that are closely aligned with the Christian Reformed Church in North America can find policy development guidance from a statement prepared by its synod in 2002-2003:

- Homosexual orientation is a result of humanity's fallen condition and not the result of sinful choice(s) made by those who have this orientation;
- Homosexual actions are sinful, and a person who persists in them is subject to church discipline;
- CRC members who have a homosexual orientation but do not engage in homosexual practices are eligible for church office, but those who engage in homosexual practices are not;
- CRC congregations must show full acceptance to all our brothers and sisters who have a homosexual orientation, lovingly enfold them in the fellowship of believers, and support them with pastoral care in living out God's will for their lives."  
(The *Banner*, March 2009: "What's to Discuss?" by Editor Bob DeMoore)

While the Christian school should consider the position of church bodies and align policies accordingly, it is not enough for a Christian school to simply default with a statement such as “we believe what the church believes.” The Christian school must include its own statement in its own policies.

In most cases, Christian schools that have policies that speak to the enrollment of children with parents who are in same-sex relationships state in some way that it is the participation in same-sex practices that is in conflict with biblical truth and Christian school standards. Most Christian schools seek grace in policy language that provides room for a believer who is celibate or non-practicing. Room is provided for the student already enrolled and for the student whose parents are no longer together and one may now be in a same-sex relationship while the other is not. A few sample statements follow:

At Ontario Christian School, parents sign to indicate agreement with the following policy (and other policies) in the new family application and in the annual Parent Pledge of Partnership. This policy is also found in the admissions section of the Board Policy Manual.

“At least one parent/guardian must have a clear testimony of personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, must be a member or regularly worshipping in a local Christian church, and must not be participating in practices that would be considered illegal or considered by the school as immoral or inconsistent with a positive Christian lifestyle, such as cohabitating without marriage or in a homosexual relationship.”

(Ontario Christian School, California)

Whitinsville Christian School does not offer admission to families of same-sex partners.

When families are admitted, one parent/guardian must be an active, church-attending Christian who can agree with the faith statement of the school, based on biblical truths. Whitinsville Christian School believes that parents, teachers, and pastors are guides and role models for our students. They model by what they say and how they act. For this reason, parents applying for admission to Whitinsville Christian School for their student must not advocate for or participate in homosexual relationships if their child is to be admitted.

If, after admission, the family unit changes to include a same-sex partner relationship, the child will be permitted to remain enrolled at WCS under certain conditions. A family that disregards biblical norms by advocating an immoral lifestyle will be dismissed from the school. Such a dismissal would occur only after some attempt was made to resolve the situation.

(Whitinsville Christian School, Massachusetts)

Illiana Christian High School maintains a covenantal and contractual relationship with parents for the education of their children in a manner consistent with biblical standards. Because of these biblical standards and the volatility of homosexuality as an issue in the Christian community of the school, it may be necessary to restrict the expression of a student claiming to be homosexual. This may be necessary to prevent disruption in the educational mission of the school and to ensure the wellbeing of the student or students. It may also become necessary to permanently remove a student from school if that student persists in renouncing or disregarding moral codes that the school believes to be consistent with biblical norms. Also, a family that disregards such norms by maintaining homosexual relationships, by co-habiting, or by in other

ways advocating an immoral lifestyle will be disenrolled from the school. Such a disenrollment would occur only after some attempt was made to resolve the situation.  
(Illiana Christian High School, Illinois)

### **Employment Policy**

- Most Christian schools have clear policies that state that the school does not employ individuals who are in practicing same-sex relationships.
- Most schools also have termination policies when it is learned that an employee is in a practicing same-sex relationship.

A case which was adjudicated in Canada several years ago could serve to indicate the importance of a clearly written policy position concerning employment. At King's College in Edmonton, an employee was released from a position as laboratory coordinator because the employee spoke out as a practicing homosexual. Of note was that the employee brought the issue to the court not directly against the college but against the government charter because the charter did not include sexual orientation in its prohibitions against discrimination.

The point of this example is not to comment on the Alberta case. Instead it is to point out the importance of clear policy for at least two reasons. In the absence of clear employment policy, the Christian school places itself at the mercy of court systems, which may or may not understand Christian schools, to determine the standards for appropriate discrimination based on biblical standards. If the Christian school does not clearly state in its policy what those standards are, then it is possible that the courts could determine what those standards are for the Christian school.

Secondly, in legal comment about the case, at least one commentator stated that he questioned the stance of the college because the teaching position was a laboratory position and not therefore one that was religious in nature. As Christian schools with a distinct Reformed worldview, this merits our close attention. Christian schools cannot presume that secular courts will understand a Reformed view of teaching, which proclaims that faith is imbedded in and integrated into every part of teaching and learning. In the absence of policy, the Christian school might be placed in a position of defending not only its biblical standards, but also its Reformed philosophy of education.

### **Sexual Orientation in Students**

This paper is not intended to address the issue of sexual orientation among students. For good work on the subject and as guidance for discussion in school communities, consider *Same Sex Gender Attraction: A Discussion among Our Christian School Communities*, a manual produced by the Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia. [www.scsbc.ca](http://www.scsbc.ca)

A sample position statement from Lynden Christian School, Washington, follows:

#### **Position Statement on Human Sexuality\***

Because human beings are created in the image of God their Creator, we affirm that all humans, male and female, homosexual and heterosexual, have inestimable value and must be treated with dignity and respect.

As a community that seeks to be an authentic biblical community, Lynden Christian School is committed to addressing all issues of human sexuality with grace and truth.

***We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14***

**In Truth** we affirm:

- A. The Creator's intent for human sexuality finds its fulfillment between a man and a woman within the bond of the marriage covenant. To experience the fullness of God's loving intent in human sexuality, sexual experience is intended to be celebrated between a man and a woman within that covenant union. (Genesis 2: 22-24; Proverbs 5:18-19; Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16)
- B. Same gender and heterosexual lust is a condition contrary to God's created order which reveals the brokenness of our sinful world and the effects of sin on God's perfect intent for human sexuality. (Matthew 5:28; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20; Ephesians 5:3)
- C. Heterosexual practice outside the covenant of marriage and all homosexual practice is incompatible with the will of God as revealed in Scripture and is sin demanding confession and repentance. (Leviticus 20:10; Proverbs 5; Hebrews 13:4, Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:26-27)
- D. Our sure and certain hope is that those guilty of violating God's perfect will for human sexuality, whether heterosexual or homosexual, can find grace, forgiveness, and restoration through Christ. (Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-10)
- E. Our commitment to communicate and uphold God's standards for human sexuality with grace, mercy, and equity. (Philippians 2:1-5, Ephesians 5:1,2)

**With Grace** we commit to:

- A. Exercising patient understanding of and compassion for all students with issues of sexuality and practices contrary to God's created order.
- B. Ensuring an environment that is free from discrimination.
  - a. No student, heterosexual or homosexual, will be forced to admit their sexual orientation.
  - b. No student will be expelled or excluded on the basis of their same gender attraction.
- C. Insisting upon an atmosphere that is a safe learning environment for all students.

- a. Physical assault, harassment (snide remarks, jokes, innuendo, slogans, disparaging terms), or bullying on the basis of one's sexual orientation will not be tolerated.
  - b. "In your face" gay or anti-gay militancy is regarded as incompatible with Christian community and will therefore not be tolerated.
- D. Providing students whose sexuality does not align with God's perfect intent with:
- a. A humble, compassionate, understanding venue in which to engage in authentic dialogue regarding human sexuality.
  - b. School counselors who will offer biblical guidance, resources, and options for referral for counseling.
  - c. An assurance that the dignity of all students and families will be guarded.
- E. Acknowledging our own human frailty and dependence upon Christ for his humility, grace, and wisdom in our considerations of human sexuality, seeking always to love one another as he has loved us.

\* Lynden Christian School acknowledges with gratitude the influence of the following institutions upon the writing of this document

- Society of Christian Schools of British Columbia, *Same Gender Attraction: A Discussion among Our Christian School Communities*
- Seattle Pacific University, *Statement on Human Sexuality*
- Abbotsford Christian School (Abbotsford, British Columbia), *Same Gender Attraction Statement*
- Unity Christian School (Chilliwack, British Columbia), *Guidelines for Respecting Diversity*
- Christian Reformed Church of North America, *Committee to Study Homosexuality, Report 42, art. 53*
- Christian Reformed Church of North America, *Pastoral Care for Homosexual Members*

A sample position statement from Illiana Christian High School, Illinois, follows:

### **Homosexuality**

All students are to some extent struggling with their identity as sexual beings, struggling to determine how to express or fulfill their sexual desires within God's will for them. Illiana must be a place where students who struggle with their sexuality are protected from harassment, where uncertainty is met with compassion and understanding, and where insecurity is met with love.

### **Biblical Foundation**

Romans 1:27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and other passages from both the Old and New Testaments make it clear that having sexual relations with someone of the same gender is a sin. These Bible passages equate homosexual acts with adultery and sexual perversion. Human sexuality is a complex matter and the Christian community must be consistent in dealing with all sexually immoral practice. It is appropriate for Illiana to forbid students from engaging in

homosexual acts just as it also forbids engaging in other acts of sexual immorality. This includes advocating for or participating in homosexual relationships. While we believe that it is not a sin to struggle with temptation or to be confused about one's sexuality, nonetheless homosexual relationships are not what God wants for his children.

### **Help for the Struggling**

Students who have homosexual tendencies may be confused about their sexuality; they may be in a transitional or exploratory phase in their sexuality. They will, at least, find it stressful to function in the Illiana community. Because of these factors, it is appropriate for the school to urge students with homosexual interests to seek counseling. Teens dealing with homosexual interests will benefit from Christian counseling that acknowledges their sexual interests while also helping them to clarify God's will for how they will get along at Illiana and how they will live in community with other Christians.

### **Protection for the Struggling**

Students struggling with their sexuality have a right to be free from harassment about their sexuality. Harassment such as teasing, hazing, ridicule, shunning, and mockery are unacceptable for any Illiana student regardless of whatever basis might be expressed for the harassment. In addition, portraying homosexual stereotypes or "acting gay" can be considered harassment. All such harassment, whether specific or generic, is punishable up to and including expulsion from school.

### **Discipline**

Illiana maintains a covenantal and contractual relationship with parents for the education of their children in a manner consistent with biblical standards. Because of these biblical standards and the volatility of homosexuality as an issue in the Christian community of the school, it may be necessary to restrict the expression of a student claiming to be homosexual. This may be necessary to prevent disruption in the educational mission of the school and to ensure the wellbeing of the student or students. It may also become necessary to permanently remove a student from school if that student persists in renouncing or disregarding moral codes which the school believes to be consistent with Biblical norms. Also, a family which disregards such norms by maintaining homosexual relationships, by co-habiting, or by in other ways advocating an immoral lifestyle will be disenrolled from the school. Such a disenrollment would occur only after some attempt was made to resolve the situation.

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- Christian Reformed Church in North America
- Illiana Christian High School, Lansing, Illinois
- Lynden Christian School, Lynden, Washington
- Ontario Christian School, Ontario, California
- Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia
- Westminster Christian Academy, St Louis, Missouri

- Westminster Confession
- Whitinsville Christian School, Whitinsville, Massachusetts