

LCMS

Frequently Asked Questions

LCMS Views – Marriage/Human Sexuality

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Family/Marriage/Human Sexuality

Interfaith marriage

Q: *What is the LCMS policy regarding interdenominational or interfaith marriages? Is there anything that must be "promised" about children of these marriages?*

A: The LCMS has no official position or "policy" regarding interdenominational marriages, but entrusts to its pastors the responsibility of counseling couples regarding issues such as this. A pastor in this situation may well want to discuss the serious issue of the spiritual nurture of children in such a "mixed marriage" and the complications and challenges involved, but the LCMS as such does not require that a member make specific "promises" in this regard.

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Location of a wedding ceremony

Q: *I am wondering what the LCMS position is on pastors performing outdoor weddings off of church grounds, say at a beach or a park? Is this allowed?*

A: All legal marriages between one man and one woman are "honored" and recognized by the LCMS as valid and legitimate, regardless of the location under which the rite or ceremony took place. Location of the marriage ceremony performed by a pastor is the decision of your pastor in concert with your congregation. You'll want to check with the pastor about the congregation's views about performing a wedding off church grounds.

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Sex before marriage

Q: *If an engaged couple has sex before marriage, is the child conceived still considered a blessing? Is the sexual act, though the couple loves each other and are promised to each other, still a sin?*

A: In its report on [Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective](#), the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) says:

Sexual intercourse engaged in outside of the marriage relationship is forbidden by the Scriptures and must be condemned by the church (Gen. 2:24; 1 Thess. 4:2-5; cf. Gal. 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:16-20). . . . Even when the partners feel themselves united by a deep bond of love and intend to be married at some point in the future ("engagement"), the same judgment must be made.

The Bible also clearly teaches, of course, that there is full and free forgiveness for all who repent of their sins and put their trust in God's Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:1; 1 John 1:8-9).

While Scripture teaches, secondly, that all children born into this world (regardless of the circumstances of their conception) are by nature sinful and unclean (Psalm 51:5), God has provided a way (through Holy Baptism) for children to be cleansed from sin and forgiven. God also makes it clear in His Word that all children are precious and highly valued in His sight and are to be regarded as a blessing (Psalm 127; Matt. 19:14). Thus, the CTCR says in its report on *Human Sexuality*:

. . . . In the Christian tradition the child has been regarded as a blessing from God (Ps. 127:3-5; 128:3). . . . Christian parents have reason to look upon the birth of a child from their union as an occasion to have this child brought into the divine family and to nourish it as it grows to spiritual maturity. They have God's promise that He desires to have their child become an heir of eternal life and a member of His household through Holy Baptism. There is the high privilege of joining in the common work of raising a child up in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whose forgiveness enables us to live together in unselfish love toward each other.

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Two ministers from different denominations at a wedding (2 pages)

Q: *My fiancée and I want to get married in her Missouri Synod Lutheran church. I am a Methodist. We wanted to have my uncle, a Methodist minister, conduct the services. The pastor at the local Lutheran church says this is not allowed and that he will be "the Shepherd of the service"--basically running the whole thing. He did say that my uncle could do a reading or give a blessing but that would be about it. We have been to several weddings at other churches where there would be two ministers from different denominations. They would both take part in the ceremony normally with the minister of the church they were in opening the ceremony, then the other minister giving the short sermon and doing the vows. At the end they both bless the marriage. This is something we would have liked to do. We are all baffled at the fact that this is such an issue when we've seen it go so smoothly in other churches. I think many people are afraid they are going to hurt my feelings or something since it is my uncle we are talking about. That is certainly not the case. It hurts me more that no one can give us a clear explanation than it would if someone would just say "We don't believe you're uncle is a true man of God...being Methodist." It really makes me no difference; I respect other denominations and their rules and beliefs. I just want to know why.*

A: The LCMS does not permit its pastors to co-officiate in the worship services of non-LCMS churches, nor does it permit non-LCMS clergy to co-officiate in LCMS worship services. Though you may have seen co-officiating in other non-LCMS churches, you are asking to be married in an LCMS church. The rules of non-LCMS churches do not apply in LCMS churches.

The main reason we do not permit such exchange of ministers is because we are not in doctrinal agreement with other denominations, such as the Methodist Church. Thus, we cannot have any measure of confidence that a Methodist minister would preach and teach according to Lutheran doctrine. In fact, it would be unfair to expect him/her to do so. Furthermore, in our opinion, to have a Methodist minister co-officiate at an LCMS service is to give the public impression that the LCMS and the Methodist Church are in doctrinal agreement or that there are no significant doctrinal differences between us. We do not want to mislead anyone on this score, so we refrain from participating in such joint, public worship.

By none of this do we intend to say that your uncle, as a Methodist minister, is not a "man of God." The Lutheran Church recognizes Methodist pastors as legitimate pastors of the Christian Church. However, we can say that, on a number of points, what the Methodist Church teaches is contrary to the Scriptures, and we do not want that erroneous teaching present in LCMS churches, nor do we want to give the impression that those doctrinal differences don't matter. Thus, we do not invite Methodist ministers to officiate at LCMS worship services.

In the end, what is more important than what happens on your wedding day is your marriage and your future life together as Christians. Have you taken the Adult Information Course at the Lutheran church so that you know something about your fiancée's faith? Has she taken that course at your church? Where will you attend church once you are married? In which faith do you plan to raise your children? These are all questions that seem unimportant when planning a wedding, but they are crucial to real life together, after the wedding day. It is definitely to your advantage to work on these things now, and your pastors are there to help you do just that.

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"Wedding March" from Richard Wagner's opera "Lohengrin" (2 pages)

Q: *I want to have the "Wedding March" from Richard Wagner's opera "Lohengrin" played at my wedding in an LCMS church but was told by the pastor that this was not allowed. I've researched the opera in question and can't seem to find any questionable context. What is the church's reasoning for this decision?*

A: First of all, let me suggest that you ask the pastor for his rationale on this. He's the one who has made the decision, and so your questions should first be addressed to him. Having said that, let me try to provide a little background on Wagner's operas and the history behind the ban of his music from some Lutheran parishes.

A hundred years ago or so (prior to WWI), our Synod was still predominately German in language and culture. Wagner's operas were big then, and there were basically two mitigating factors against using his music: 1) his operas depict pagan stories and themes; 2) our Synod was against going to theater of any sort because of the perceivably unwholesome associations with actors and the "night life." Today, however, if you asked the average LCMS pew-sitter where that piece of music came from and what it means, he or she likely wouldn't have a clue. Most would probably associate it with the children's jingle, "Here comes the bride, big, fat and wide!" (which would be another good reason not to use it!).

Having said all that, let me suggest that you not use Wagner's "Bridal March" anyway, for a couple of reasons. First of all, you want to have a happy wedding ceremony and get along with the pastor. Contrary to popular perception, weddings are not at the top of many pastors' "like to do list." They frequently involve a number of parties who have their exclusive wants and concerns, stress is usually running high because of the preparations and the desire for "the perfect wedding," and as a result, the key players are often not disposed to working on things together and by consensus. It needs to be understood at the outset, however, that the pastor is in charge of what goes into the service. He should have final say on everything, but it should be in mutual consultation with the bride and groom. You need to work together with him on all of the arrangements, and the "Wedding March" may not be "the hill to die on."

Secondly, your marriage itself is infinitely more important than your wedding day. Married couples frequently link the success of their future marriage with the success of their wedding day. That's understandable, but realize that this is only one day of many, many days of holy matrimony to follow. And those days will count infinitely more than the first!

And finally, the weightiest reason not to use Wagner's "Bridal March," is that there is so much better music out there to be used at weddings than this vastly overused piece. If you want your wedding to be unique, pick something different from the standard bridal march. The organist should have a great selection to choose from.

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LCMS view of divorce

Q: *How is divorce viewed in the LCMS?*

A: The LCMS believes that divorce is contrary to God's original design and intention for marriage. While divorce can be justified scripturally in certain situations (adultery or desertion), it is always preferable for couples to forgive and work toward healing and strengthening their marriage. Because no two situations are alike, LCMS pastors deal on a case-by-case basis with members (or potential members) who are wrestling with the issue of (past or present) divorce.

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the LCMS has prepared a report called [Divorce and Remarriage](#) which discusses the Bible passages and theological principles underlying the Synod's perspective on this issue.

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Same-sex marriage

Q: In light of all the recent publicity about same-sex marriage, where does the LCMS stand on the issue?

A: God gave marriage as a picture of the relationship between Christ and His bride the Church (Eph.5:32). Homosexual behavior is prohibited in the Old and New Testaments (Lev. 18:22, 24; 20:13; 1 Cor.6:9–20; 1 Tim. 1:10) as contrary to the Creator’s design (Rom. 1:26–27). The LCMS affirms that such behavior is "intrinsically sinful" and that, "on the basis of Scripture, marriage [is] the lifelong union of one man and one woman (Gen. 2:2-24; Matt. 19:5-6)" (2004 Res. 3-05A). It has also urged its members "to give a public witness from Scripture against the social acceptance and legal recognition of homosexual 'marriage'" (2004 Res. 3-05A). At the same time, the Synod firmly believes that "the redeeming love of Christ, which rescues humanity from sin, death, and the power of Satan, is offered to all through repentance and faith in Christ, regardless of the nature of their sinfulness" (1992 Res. 3-12A). The Synod developed a Law/Gospel ministry plan for use in ministry to those who are troubled by homosexual desires, [Ministry to Homosexuals and Their Families](#).

The Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations has prepared a report titled [Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective](#) that discusses the issue of homosexuality on pages 32-36. Another resource addressing the matter of same-sex relationships available online is the document [Theological Implications of the 2009 ELCA Decisions](#).

There is additional information found in the Frequently Asked Questions on Homosexuality.

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What is the LCMS response to homosexuality? (2 pages)

Q: *What is the Missouri Synod's response to homosexuality?*

A: The Missouri Synod believes that the Bible teaches that homosexual behavior is contrary to God's Word and will, and seeks to minister to those who are struggling with homosexual inclinations. In 1992, the LCMS adopted Res. 3-12A [To Develop a Plan for Ministry to Homosexuals and Their Families](#). This resolution reads as follows:

Whereas, Many voices in our society as well as in various church bodies are expressing the view today that homophile behavior is acceptable alternative lifestyle; and

Whereas, The Word of God clearly condemns homophile behavior in Lev. 18:22, Rom. 1:26-27, and 1 Cor. 6:9; and

Whereas, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in convention in 1973 stated: "That the Synod recognizes homophile behavior as intrinsically sinful"; and

Whereas, The Commission on Theology and Church Relations document on [Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective](#), states, "Whatever the causes of such a condition may be, . . . homosexual orientation is profoundly 'unnatural' without implying that such a person's sexual orientation is a matter of conscious, deliberate choice. However, this fact cannot be used by the homosexual as an excuse to justify homosexual behavior. As a sinful human being, the homosexual is accountable to God for homosexual thoughts, words and deeds." (Human Sexuality, A Theological Perspective, p. 35); and

Whereas, The redeeming love of Christ, which rescues humanity from sin, death, and the power of Satan, is offered to all through repentance and faith in Christ, regardless of the natures of their sinfulness; and

Whereas, The need exists to make available a carefully developed Law/Gospel ministry plan to congregations and other institutions in order to minister to those who are troubled by their homosexuality; and

Whereas, It is necessary for the church to expose and resist the sexual idolatry of our society; therefore be it

Resolved, That The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, in convention, reaffirm the position it stated in 1973, "That the Synod recognizes homophile behavior as intrinsically sinful"; and be it further

Resolved, That the President of the Synod direct the appropriate boards and commissions to develop a plan for ministry usable by congregations, campus ministries, institutions, and agencies in the Synod, for the purpose of providing biblical and Gospel-oriented ministry to persons troubled by being homophile in their sexual orientations and to their families; and be it finally

Resolved, That the goals to be pursued by such a plan for ministry be

1. to offer to our world biblically alternative models of sexual celibacy outside of a committed, permanent heterosexual marriage and same-gender social, but not genitally sexual, deep friendships;
2. to confront the individual with his/her sinfulness, and call him/her to repentance;

3. to help the individual recognize that God can rescue individuals from homosexual orientation and practice;
4. to assure him/her of forgiveness in Christ, contingent upon sincere repentance and faith in Christ, and to assure him/her of the love and acceptance of the church;
5. to assist the individual to rely on Christ's love and strength to abstain from homophile behavior;
6. to help the individual to bear his/her burden without fear of recrimination and rejections by his/her sisters and brothers in Christ;
7. to find ways of ministering to families which include persons of homophile orientation;
8. to do all this patiently, persistently, and compassionately in the love and Spirit of Christ, who says, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

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Can practicing homosexuals serve in church?

Q: *Is homosexuality accepted in the LCMS and can a practicing homosexual serve in any position in your church?*

A: The position of the LCMS, repeatedly affirmed, is that homophile behavior is intrinsically sinful, expressly condemned as immoral by the Scriptures. For policy regarding homosexuality and service in public offices of the Synod, we refer you to guidelines adopted by the Council of Presidents for addressing instances of homosexuality in the lives of professional church workers, in which procedures are outlined for dealing with various cases. (See another [FAQ on homosexuality](#) and the Commission on Theology and Church Relation's 1983 report on [Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective.](#))

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Masturbation

Q: *What is the Synod's view on masturbation? Are there any references to self-pleasement in the Bible? I was asked this question and I did not know how to respond other than, "I know it cannot be right in God's eyes." However, I do not have any theological proof. Can you help out?*

A. In its report on *Human Sexuality*, the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations says the following regarding masturbation: To view our sexuality in the context of a personal relationship of mutual love and commitment in marriage helps us to evaluate the practice of masturbation. Quite clearly, chronic masturbation falls short of the Creator's intention For our use of the gift of sexuality, namely, that our sexual drives should be oriented toward communion with another person in the mutual love and commitment of marriage. By its very nature, masturbation separates sexual satisfaction from the giving and receiving of sexual intercourse in the marital union and is symptomatic of the tendency of human beings to turn in upon themselves for the satisfaction of their desires. In childhood, masturbation may often be a form of temporary experimentation. However, children of God are warned against the voluntary indulgence of sexual fantasies as endangering faith and spiritual life. Such inordinate desires are clearly called sin by our Lord (Matt. 5:27). As the child grows and matures, youthful lusts and fantasies (2 Tim. 2:22) are left behind. For those who are troubled by guilt and who seek God's help in overcoming problems in this area, pastors and Christian counselors need to stand ready to offer Christ's forgiveness, remind them of the power of the Holy Spirit to help them lead "a chaste and decent life in word and deed," and hold before them the joys of remaining faithful to what God's Word teaches about His intention for the good gift of sexuality.

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Perform Marriage Ceremony with No Marriage License? (2 pages)

Q: *Should an LCMS pastor marry an older couple without a wedding license?*

A: The Synod does not have any published resources that we are aware of regarding the specific matter of older couples living together apart from marriage. The closest thing, resource wise, is the pamphlet prepared by Dr. Barry some years ago: [What About... Living Together Without Marriage?](#) It makes reference to older couples very briefly in its discussion of why living together apart from marriage is immoral. *“All of this is another way of stating the obvious: Men and women are not to live together as husband and wife, unless they actually are husband and wife. This is as true for 80-year-olds as it is for 18-year-olds.”*

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations is working on the many troubling and challenging issues that are facing Christian men and women in today’s culture, including the idea of older couples who are living together. While this is nothing official, here are a few thoughts.

1. Part of the issue in such cases is whether a couple is living “as husband and wife.” One can imagine a situation in which a male and female share a certain amount of living space—when one rents from another or they share expenses for a house—but they do not portray themselves in any way as married, are not considered so by others, and so forth. It still presents potential problems of perception, but one ought to acknowledge that such a circumstance is not the same as a couple that is simply avoiding legal marriage for the sake of financial gain.
2. Another issue arises when an older couple seeks to contract a “quasi-marriage” in which, for the sake of pension or Social Security benefits, they engage in the typical behaviors of a married couple *other than legal licensing*. This contradicts Christian teaching about godly living in several ways:
 - a. It is dishonest (8th commandment).
 - b. Its specific dishonesty is that it portrays itself as the institution of marriage when it is not (6th commandment). (*Obviously, if the couple is sexually active, living without marriage is not “chaste and decent.” Living together without marriage also involves some measure of failing to honor the other person or the relationship—seeking to live with a minimum of sacrifice rather than a willingness to accept the sacrifices marriage always entails.*)
 - c. It avoids the responsibility of marriage toward the wider society, which includes the state (4th commandment). (*Christians have a responsibility as citizens to support a well-ordered society, which includes obedience to the licensing or ordering of such activities as marriage. The alternative is more of the chaos that is currently troubling society.*)
 - d. It involves financial dishonesty (7th commandment) because places burdens on others in claiming benefits which were not designed (or funded) for such circumstances. (*When we pay into a pension or into Social Security, the costs are determined by assumptions about claims, e.g., that a widow should be able to claim her deceased husband’s benefit because she is maintaining a household alone, and that if she is able to share the costs in a new marriage, then she is only eligible to the benefits that she earned and is no longer eligible to receive the additional benefit that her deceased husband earned. When such “rules” are violated, the costs to the entire system go up and, eventually, others must pay more or others will lose benefits.*)
 - e. Above all, such arrangements reveal a desire to place ourselves and our perceived well-being above God and His gracious will for our lives (1st commandment).

All this, of course, is so much Law and the pastoral concern is never one which simply speaks the Law for its own sake. As you seek to minister, you are faced with the challenge of shepherding a dear child of God who is living amid one of many temptations in life. It seems to be very important to try to communicate several things in such situations. If a couple wants us to “bless a quasi-marriage,” then we cannot do so in good conscience. Yet, we do understand financial constraints, loneliness, and so forth and our Lord understands them even better (“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did” John 4:29). When He calls us to a higher life, He does so with compassion, forgiveness and the strength to sustain us in every way.

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