



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VICTORIA

## **Statement on Sex, Gender and Marriage**

- modelled on the statement adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, 13 Sept 2019 (Min. 89.3)
- adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, 10 Oct 2019 (Min. 67.2)
- addendum added by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, 3 May 2022 (Min. 7.2)

### **1. Preamble**

1.1. The Presbyterian Church of Victoria seeks to be faithful to God by holding to the teaching of Scripture in faith and life. Our Subordinate Standard affirms the biblical teaching that God created us male and female (WCF 4.2) and that marriage is to be between one man and one woman (WCF 24.1). This statement presents the church's understanding of humanity in relation to sex, marriage and gender, based on the teaching of Scripture.

1.2. This statement uses the terminology of 'sex' and 'gender' while setting out a biblical understanding of their relationship.

1.3. In this statement the church:

- expresses its joy in God our Creator and his good order of creation;
- expresses its grief over the effects of our Fall into sin in distorting God's good order;
- expresses its faith in the Lord Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Saviour;
- expresses its hope in God's promise of a new creation in which righteousness dwells; and
- reaffirms its commitment to serving Christ, his church and his world in the area of sex, gender and marriage.

### **2. We rejoice in God our Creator and his good order of creation**

2.1. All people are made in God's image (Gen 1:26-27; Declaratory Statement S.4) and have a common dignity and worth. No one should be mocked, hated, or bullied.

2.2. God established a good order in his creation (WCF 5.1) in which humans were either male or female (Gen 1:27; 5:2; WCF 5.2), sharing a common humanity (Gen 2:23), but distinguished biologically through their capacity to conceive children together through sexual intercourse (Gen 2:24; 4:1). Men and women are equally created in God's image and are to express their gender in complementary relationships, especially in a loving marriage (Gen 2:18; Deut 22:5; 1Co 11:14-15; Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18-21; 1 Tim 2:12-14) and also within leadership in the household of God (1 Cor 14:29-35; 1 Tim 2:11-3:7; Titus 1:6-9).

2.3. In God's good order, gender identity was determined by one's biological sex (Gen 1:27; Matt 19:4).

2.4. Marriage is a union of a husband and a wife, to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life (WCF 24.1), which for the good order of society is established by a public commitment. It is a sign of the love that exists between Christ and his church (Eph 5:24–33). The purpose of marriage is lifelong love, intimacy and companionship, to provide the most favourable and stable environment to reproduce and nurture children, and to promote the health and stability of society (Gen 2:18; Ecc 4:9-11; Deut 6:1-7; Eph 6:1-4; Prov 14:1; Pss 127 & 128; WCF 24.2). In the unity and partnership of marriage, a husband is to love his wife as his own body and as her head, and a wife is to submit to her husband (Gen 2:18; Eph 5:22–30). Marriage is the only proper setting for sexual intercourse and is the divinely ordained environment for the raising and nurturing of children.

2.5. Married couples are commanded by God to be faithful. All sexual activity outside of marriage is prohibited (Ex 20:14; 22:19; Lev 19:29; Deut 5:18; 22:13-21; 1Co 6:9-10; Heb 13:4; Rev 21:8; 22:15), as is abuse and violence within marriage (1 Pet 3:7). Divorce is prohibited, except on proper grounds (Mal 2:15; Mt 19:4-8; Mk 10:6-9; 1Co 7:10-14; WCF 24.5-6).

### **3. We mourn the effects of the Fall and our own sin as they distort God's good order**

3.1. The fall of Adam rendered all humanity guilty and subject to God's eternal punishment (Rom 5:12-19). It corrupted us and the created order. 'Our first parents ... fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body', and 'the same death in sin and corrupted nature' was 'conveyed to all their posterity' (WCF 6.1-3). As a consequence, all humans turn away from God, refuse to obey him, and worship created things instead (Rom 1:25) — including marriage, sexual experiences, sexuality and gender. All humans face struggle, distress and distortion in our experiences of gender and sexuality and marriage.

3.2. From the Fall, human sin and God's curse have disordered and frustrated God's good creation pattern (Gen 3:14-19; Rom 8:19-21). Humans have sought to make sense of their world and establish their identities apart from God (Prov 1:7; 12:23; Rom 1:21-29; 7:5,14-18; Eph 4:22). Relationships between husband and wife are spoiled (Gen 3:7,12,16; 4:19,23); women are often mistreated and abused (Gen 34:7-31; Deut 22:28–29; Jdg 19:22-20:7; 2Sa 13:1-32; Zec 14:2; 1 Pet 3:7); men and women are tempted to, and participate in, sexual immorality (Gen 39:6-12; 2Sa 11:2-5; Mt 5:27-28; 1 Pet 4:3; 2 Pet 2:14-18) including homosexual sex (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:9-10); people transgress the boundaries of their sex (Deut 22:5; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Cor 11:4-5, 13-15).

3.3. One consequence of the Fall is that some people are born with conditions in which their sex organs are not easily characterised as either male or female, or their sex organs are not consistent with their sex chromosomes (sometimes called intersex conditions or disorders of sex development). These are often physically uncomfortable and emotionally distressing conditions.

3.4. A further consequence of the Fall is that some people experience their gender to be different to their sex (sometimes called gender identity disorder or gender dysphoria). This is often a very distressing and confusing experience.

3.5. People who suffer from these conditions and experiences are equally made in God's image and share in the common dignity and worth of all human beings. However, these conditions do not constitute a third sex or gender, nor do they contradict the truth that in his originally good creation, God has established a binary sexual order for human beings. Binary biological sex remains the basis on which we understand these experiences.

3.6. All aspects of sexual life and gender are subject to temptations to turn from God's good order and to break his commands. Temptation is not, in itself, sin; though for all fallen humans it appeals to sinful desires which are affected by our sinfulness and for which we are culpable. As a consequence, we are all prone to living out these sinful desires in thought, word and deed (Jam 1:13-15). Marital unfaithfulness through violence, desertion or sexual unfaithfulness is sin, as are all forms of sexual immorality.

3.7. Modern Western culture has developed in a framework in which God is not relevant to understanding the world or shaping ethics. This has promoted a culture which views each person as free to determine their own identity and moral framework; and assumes that diversity, including gender and sexual diversity, is a good in itself; and that pleasure and comfort are primary. This culture does not acknowledge the existence of God's good creational order and often celebrates changes which transgress that order. It also presents temptations through sexualised advertising, pornography and social pressures in friendships and in employment and educational contexts.

3.8. The church, in seeking to teach and apply the biblical view of sex, gender and marriage has often failed to acknowledge our own sin and has caused undue hurt. We have failed to adequately understand the struggles of others; and, in doing so, have prevented the gospel being heard by those who, like us, are in desperate need of salvation and secure identity in Christ. As a church we are accountable to the Lord Jesus for our treatment of others, especially those who are young in the faith (Matt 18:6; 1 Pet 4:17).

#### **4. We look to Christ for redemption, proclaim him as Lord and Saviour and seek to live for him in ways consistent with God's good order**

4.1. In his incarnation, God the Son took on human nature to redeem people from sin, to heal them from corruption and reconcile them to God, and to restore God's good order to creation. He achieved this by his life, death, resurrection and ascension (Jn 3:16-21; Eph 1:3-10; 1 Pet 1:1-9; WCF 8).

4.2. The gospel, which proclaims Christ as the Saviour for all who trust him, is offered to all people (Isa 57:19; Acts 2:39; Rom 1:5; 3:24; 1 Tim 2:4). Everyone who comes to Christ is welcomed by him and included in his salvation (John 6:37). In Christ, his people find their true humanity and a new identity, irrespective of their gender, sexuality, marital status, family background, social status or ethnicity. They are restored to the image of God in Christ and united with each other in him (Rom 10:12; 1Co 12:13; Gal 2:20; Eph 2:10, 15; 4:22-24; Col 3:10-11). Christ is the answer to the underlying problems for all people — including those facing sexual temptation, the consequences of sexual sin, broken and difficult marriages, loneliness, shame, and gender confusion.

4.3. By the gift of the Holy Spirit those in Christ are restored to God and are able to live for him (Rom 8:3-9; WCF 10.1, 13.1).

4.4. God does not promise to heal all broken bodies or human relationships nor to end temptation, nor remove homosexual attraction, gender confusion or other burdens in this life. He promises that, because we are his chosen, redeemed and sanctified children, his grace will be sufficient in all our trials (2 Cor 12:9). He also promises that on the return of Christ all his people will receive resurrected and restored bodies and enjoy full communion with him in a world of righteousness freed from curse and frustration (Rom 8:20-24; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-5).

4.5. Christ calls all people, though lost in sin, to come to him to be reconciled to God and to discover their true humanity in his service. Sinners come to God as he works by his Spirit to lead them to love him, and he reorders their desires and behaviour to conform to Christ. By the Spirit, believers are enabled to grieve for and hate their sins and to commit and strive to live as God commands. All believers struggle with sin and must constantly turn to Christ and put to death the sinful nature with its particular sins.

4.6. An unmarried person who is a follower of Jesus Christ is called to live faithfully for him in chastity. Singleness is a proper and honourable Christian calling, since it was the calling of the Lord Jesus himself (Matt 19:12; 1 Cor. 7:32–35; 1 Tim 5:5).

4.7. Married couples who follow Jesus Christ are called to live together faithfully as husband and wife, loving and serving one another. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and wives are to submit to their husbands (Col 3:18–19; Eph 5:22–33; Tit 2:4-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7). Parents are to love their children and raise them in the training and instruction of the Lord (Gen 18:19; Deut 6:7; Col 3:21; Eph 6:4). Children are to honour and obey their parents (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16; Pr 6:20; Col 3:20; Eph 6:1-2).

4.8. An intersex person who is a follower of Jesus Christ should embrace their biological sex insofar as it may be known. Surgical treatment to enable this may be appropriate, though it is not morally necessary.

4.9. A person who experiences gender dysphoria and who is a follower of Jesus Christ should accept their body as inherent to their personhood, given to them by God, and seek to reconcile their understanding and presentation of their gender according to this fundamental truth. Learning to live consistently with this may be an on-going and difficult process, yet, as with all Christians, their union with Christ through his Spirit will lead them to grow in grace.

4.10. Faithful proclamation of the gospel requires the church to give a clear public witness in word and action to the righteousness of God, the nature and consequences of human sin, including its impact on the curse and frustration of the fallen creation, and God's free offer of grace in the Lord Jesus (Jn 16:8; Acts 2:23, 17:16-17, 30-31; Rom 1:18-3:20). The church presents God's good order and his moral law to the wider society, in part for the sake of the common good which is promoted by a recognition of the moral law. The church is not called to provide moral discipline for society (1 Cor 5:9–10), nor to seek moral reformation of society apart from gospel ministry. The priority of its mission is to proclaim Christ and to call people to salvation in him.

## **5. We live in eager expectation of God's new creation**

5.1. The Lord has promised at his return a new creation where righteousness will dwell, and his people will enjoy glorious freedom in his presence, and he will wipe away all their tears (Rom 8:21; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-5; WCF 33.2). So, we live in hope, longing for and praying for the day when we shall be fully conformed to Christ and the created order will be gloriously transformed, healed of all disorder and corruption. In the presence of the Triune God, God's people will be given the fullness of their new identity in Christ (1 Cor 13:12; 1 John 3:2; Rev 22:4-5).

5.2. In the new creation, marriage and sexuality will reach their fulfillment in the marriage of Christ the lamb to his people (Rev 19:7; 21:2). Jesus declares there will be no marriage at the resurrection, which means that marriage is temporal, and not an 'ultimate' relationship for humanity, but one that points to this ultimate fulfillment (Matt 22:30). We do not know the details of how bodies will be transformed and how that will reflect sex or intersex conditions. The bodies of God's people will be glorified and made to be like Christ (1 Cor 15:35–53; Phil 3:20-21; 1 Jn 3:2).

5.3. Only then will God's people be freed from temptation and able to love him perfectly and freely.

## **6. We commit ourselves to serving Christ, his church and his world in the area of sex, marriage and gender**

6.1. As the church addresses issues of sex, gender and marriage in its teaching and pastoral ministry it should teach and act in consistency with the understanding set out in this statement.

6.2. It is important to differentiate between cultural trends and movements, and the situation of individuals. The church should identify for its members, and for the society, false views about marriage, sex and gender. It should do so in a way that is gracious, compassionate and engaging, and which offers life lived for Christ as a genuine alternative. It should treat those who are influenced by these movements as victims in need of compassion and, like all people, sinners in need of repentance. The church should remain sensitive to congregation members who may silently struggle with gender or sexuality issues.

6.3. The deeply personal nature of sex, gender and marriage makes teaching about these areas, and the provision of pastoral care, particularly complex. We should seek to be informed as well as possible, to welcome advice from those with relevant personal and professional experience and constantly to seek wisdom from the Lord.

6.4. Good pastoral care will involve determining with those concerned, in light of the teaching of Scripture, how they can live faithfully in Christ. It will involve supporting them in this and, in love, holding them accountable for their actions. It may involve helping them access the services of appropriate professionals who should share a view of sex, gender and marriage consistent with this statement.

6.5. We should seek to build churches in which people of all ages grow together in the gospel, and which share the gospel of God's love in Christ. Our churches should aim to reinforce, enrich and model identity in Christ in contrast to the idolatrous identities of the world. Churches should seek to model faithfulness in marriage and singleness, and to support single people, couples moving toward marriage and

married couples to live godly lives and to serve Christ together. The church should be a community in which people can be honest about their temptations and pain and receive compassionate support from fellow believers as they seek to live faithfully.

6.6. The church should teach that God opposes abuse and violence in marriage and in the family. He particularly warns husbands to be considerate to their wives and treat them with respect (Eph 5:28–30; 1 Pet 3:7). Acts of domestic violence and abuse are heinous sins. In providing pastoral care, church leaders should be alert for signs of domestic and family violence, and teaching in churches should address these issues. Domestic violence may be a valid ground for divorce, along with adultery and desertion (WCF 24:6).

6.7. Biological or natal sex is the relevant basis on which the church makes decisions about qualifications for marriage, church membership and church office.

6.8. The church will not ordain any person who is involved in a sexual relationship outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. No church officer nor anyone in a position of leadership or responsibility within the church should be involved in such a relationship.

6.9. All schools, training colleges, aged care facilities, charitable organisations, and other ministries and institutions operated by, in connection with, or under the authority or control of the church are to operate in a manner, and for purposes, consistent with the understanding of sex, gender and marriage set out in this statement. Church property is only to be used in a manner and for purposes consistent with that understanding.

## **ADDENDUM**

### **Introduction**

This addendum is an explanatory document to provide additional clarity to the Presbyterian Church of Victoria's Statement on Sex, Gender and Marriage ('the Statement'), and is to be read in conjunction with it.

The Presbyterian Church of Victoria, in approving this addendum to the Statement affirms that the teachings of the church as set forth in the Statement are not new or merely shaped by contemporary departure from or opposition to these teachings. Rather, they are a declaration of the unchanged biblical, Christian and confessional position of the church in every age and which the Presbyterian Church of Victoria has held since its beginning.

#### **1. Sex, gender and marriage in the doctrinal standards of the PCV**

The subordinate (or secondary) standard of the church is the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), as amended from time to time by the General Assembly of Australia, read in the light of the Declaratory Statement contained in the Basis of Union (1901).

The supreme standard of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria is the Bible. **Regarding sex and gender**, the Westminster Confession of Faith teaches that God made 'man' (mankind, or humankind) 'male and female':

#### **IV Of Creation**

II. After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female ....<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical passages referenced in the Addendum employ the English Standard Version (Wheaton,

The Bible support cited for this teaching is:

Genesis 1:27: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

**Regarding marriage**, the Westminster Confession of Faith teaches that marriage is between one man and one woman:

#### **XXIV Of Marriage and Divorce**

- I. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman: neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at the same time.

The Bible support cited for this teaching is:

Genesis 2:24: Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Matthew 19:5-6: And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

## **2. Sex and gender in the Statement<sup>2</sup>**

**Sex** is a biological descriptor and that includes at least genitals, reproductive system, hormones and chromosomes.

The use of 'natal' [birth] sex in the Statement (6.7) is emphatic and intended to direct the action of church courts regarding qualifications for marriage, church membership and church office and is synonymous with 'sex' elsewhere in the Statement.

**Gender** is determined by biological sex. Biology remains determinative (4.8), but persons experiencing gender dysphoria or intersex persons may find it difficult to discern this fundamental truth (4.9).

Intersex people are to embrace their biological sex 'insofar as it may be known' (4.8).

## **3. Gender expression**

Gender expression, while not dealt with in the Statement, is relevant, especially given that in the wider community gender identity is often based on self-appraisal according to the traits most often associated with one sex or the other (gender traits). Such traits are influenced to some degree by cultural norms, so that gender is viewed as a social construct based on the norms, behaviours, and societal roles expected of individuals primarily on the basis of their sex.<sup>3</sup>

Biblically, gender expression depends upon both nature and nurture; the Bible teaches that 'men and women are created differently, for different purposes, with different strengths, and with different natural

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IL: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The understanding of sex and gender affirmed in the Statement contrasts with views of sex and gender widely held outside the PCV, where:

- **Sex** is often considered in terms of three categories: genotypic sex, phenotypic sex, and gender;
- **Genotypic sex** refers specifically to an individual's two sex chromosomes;
- **Phenotypic sex** refers to an individual's sex as determined by their internal and external genitalia, expression of secondary sex characteristics, and behaviour; and
- **Gender** refers more broadly to an individual's subjective perception of their sex and their sexual orientation.

<sup>3</sup> [What Is Sex? - Neuroscience - NCBI Bookshelf \(nih.gov\)](#)

orientations'<sup>4</sup>, while it is evident that there are significant differences in gender expression across cultures. Indeed, it is arguable that all cultures have ways in which men and women differentiate themselves from each other – and while these distinctions may be cultural, it is clear from the Bible that God regards them as important in distinguishing male from female and vice versa.<sup>5</sup>

Three relevant questions for Christians in any culture are:

- how do they understand themselves;
- how do they seek to present themselves to those around them; and
- how are they understood by those around them.

These should all align with biological sex and with the biblical and cultural norms that distinguish men from women, while allowing reasonable freedom in self-expression.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the teaching of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, where, notwithstanding any complexities in this passage, the text clearly requires that both men and women maintain the gender distinctions appropriate to the sexes.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Alistair Roberts <https://calvinistinternational.com/2016/09/13/natural-complementarians-men-women/>