

Article 6.4 Governance: Managing Policies

Preamble

While each local church in its unique community and context may be known for certain things, it is first and foremost the Body of Christ, and a Christian community. It is therefore a community that is submitted to God, and the inherent teachings of the Bible that govern the lifestyle and practices of both committed followers of Jesus and the local church as a community of faith. The local church exists to reach lost people and to make disciples, equipping followers of Jesus to partner with God in His work wherever He may lead them. The local church is also a place of safety and refuge for the lost, hurting, confused, rejected and those seeking meaning, freedom and purpose in life. It is through a personal relationship with Jesus and within the community of faith of the local church that a life of faith is nurtured and life transformation flourishes.

The local church welcomes people from all backgrounds and walks of life. From the yet to believe, to the faithful follower of Jesus. Within the body of believers and the local church there is a great diversity of people and journeys. In a world and society that has been fractured and distorted by sin many people have yet to know God's truth, grace and mercy and may seek out our local churches to find it. How believers and the local church welcome those who have yet to believe in Jesus and have not yet found freedom and restoration through God's redeeming power is important. We are God's representatives to the lost.

In our current cultural dynamics, there is great upheaval and confusion about identity, including gender and sexuality. Christ followers and the local church are not immune to the confusion and challenges as we seek to embrace people where they are and lead them to Jesus to experience His transformative power. As a local church it is imperative that you are clear in your communication and presentation of what you believe and how people can be a part of community.

Disclaimer

This policy conversation is intended to provide you with suggestions for establishing your own church policies. This is not intended to convey legal advice. It is advisable to seek legal advice related to laws and regulations for your geographical area.

Recommendations

Review the "Pastoral Guidance and Practice" section of the *PAOC Statement of Affirmation on Biblical Sexuality, Marriage, and Gender*, available through the *PAOC Credentials Portal* or by [clicking here](#).

Policies and Conversations

Before beginning a review of your policies, make certain that you have fully developed your governance documents as they relate to personnel management, those who are paid and unpaid. These documents provide clarity about expectations for those serving at every level of leadership to have embraced a life of surrender to Jesus and walk in alignment with our shared Biblically based values, convictions and our Statement of Essential Truths, and Positions and Practices.

Remember that a policy document is not the place to teach about your biblically based positions. Policies are statements about expectations for how different matters are managed in the organization. Be clear, concise, considerate, and kind in your wording.

When reviewing your policies and practises focus on the need for consistency so as not to discriminate against or bring undue focus to specific issues such as gender identity and related challenges.

Clarity in your policies and practices will give you a foundation from which to develop the practical and pastoral approaches needed to provide care for those dealing with gender identity and same sex attraction challenges.

Most of the policies required to address gender and same-sex attraction issues can be included with already established policies. Otherwise, we elevate or isolate same-sex attraction as a “greater sin” and do a disservice to Scripture. Do not inadvertently make it a greater issue in your policies and practices.

Policies and Practices to Consider

1. Community Expectations

Often there are unwritten but communally understood expectations for any group of people in relationship, especially a local church. Expectations are often expected to be caught, rather than taught or explained and can create confusion and barriers to acceptance and inclusion.

Being clear and upfront about community expectations in the local church allows people to understand your beliefs and values and gives them an opportunity to decide whether or not they want to be a part of your community. This is important for long time attendees as well as newcomers who may or may not yet be believers.

Creating a strategic pathway that welcomes and orients new people into your community and introduces them to the church’s values and convictions gives them the power of choice and commitment. Part of the journey should include an introduction to a community values statement, newcomer class, membership class, introduction to volunteer/ministry worker opportunities, process for applying to serve and expectations, lifestyle covenant and other best practices that your local church has in place to ensure safety and care in your local church community. This is where you should exercise sensitivity in how you welcome those who do not yet know Jesus into community while helping them on the journey towards redemption. Remember to communicate that the church does not have a position on sexual orientation alone. The church has a position on sexual sin and a position on healthy biblical sexuality.

Sample Example of Community Expectations:

In an age of confusions and complexity, we endeavour to offer clarity about our community values as an expression of love and kindness. We are interested in loving and serving people and families in ways that are thoughtful, caring and Biblically faithful. We are a disciple making church where everyone is welcome and invited to participate on this journey of

learning and implementing the teachings of the Bible. Our church has a belief system which informs our convictions and practices. In this church, this includes alignment with our Statement of Essential Truths, and Positions and Practices. We welcome all to worship with us on their journey of faith. Those who have beliefs that diverge from or conflict with our stated values will notice exclusions in opportunity in leadership roles that require alignment with our stated values. We welcome those who are new to our community to investigate and better understand our community values. During this welcoming period, we invite you to attend: _____ (list small groups, classes, whatever step you have for new ppl to learn about Jesus and living out that faith step in your community).

Best Practice:

One of the best ways to engage new people in your church is to get them involved in some way. Please note that most insurance companies require that an individual attend a church for six months before being eligible to serve in an area of ministry that has direct contact with minors, vulnerable adults and seniors. To serve in these areas, an individual must have consistently attended the church for a minimum of six months, completed the background screening process which includes providing a current Criminal Record Check and Vulnerable Sector Search or an Enhanced Criminal Records Check, completed and submitted an application to serve as a volunteer ministry worker, including completing the full application process to acceptance and complete all training provided by the church, including abuse prevention training.

Note: Be sure to know and understand what your insurer requires.

Caution: Be consistent in the application of this practice and policy even when you are desperate for ministry workers/volunteers.

2. Joining a Ministry/Serve Team

Best Practice:

Adopt a Leadership Management Model ([click here](#) for sample) that defines the various leadership roles and which ones require alignment with the church's doctrinal, ethical and lifestyle values. This should include clarity about the steps for joining a team which should include at a minimum an application, background screening interview, signed agreement and training.

Policy Suggestion:

A policy should be created that states all roles of spiritual or leadership influence that require alignment with the church's biblically based doctrinal, ethical and lifestyle values. It should also be made clear that if it becomes known that an individual has in any way violated the signed agreement they may be asked to step down from their role of service.

3. Washrooms

Best Practice:

Every public building is expected/required to have an accessible washroom. Simply label this a “universal” washroom and it can be used by everyone.

Policy Suggestion:

Every church should already have a risk reduction or abuse prevention policy that includes a washroom supervision policy to protect minors, vulnerable adults, and at-seniors from predators. Washroom supervision is to be facilitated by screened adults who clear the washroom of non-screened adults before minors, vulnerable adults and at-risk seniors enter. Parents are responsible for accompanying children who are not remanded to the care of the church and its employees or volunteers. It is not necessary to establish additional policy to manage washrooms for use by transgender people.

Caution:

Please consider that washroom stalls would need to be used by any transgender person. This protects the privacy of all individuals. Avoid over-reacting.

4. Discrimination, anti-bullying, anti-harassment policy

Best Practice:

Establishing a policy focused solely on someone who embraces a non-biblical standard related to sexuality and gender is discriminatory. Instead, there needs to be an emphasis on the need to live out the biblical value of treating everyone with dignity and respect.

Policy Suggestion:

Risk reduction or abuse prevention policies should already contain a policy that commits the church community to treat everyone with respect and dignity. It could be labelled an anti-bullying, anti-harassment, or anti-discrimination policy. It might read like this:

We are committed to creating a safe environment for all individuals recognizing, however, that the Scriptures and our statement of beliefs do not support or condone all lifestyles. We condemn all forms of hatred, verbal or physical abuse and the victimization of all people specifically marginalized groups. To the best of our ability, we are committed to making _____ (church name) a place free of harassment and discrimination.

Your risk reduction policy should also contain a plan of action which guides the church's response to any accusation of hate.

5. Children and Youth Activities

Best Practice:

Games and activities that traditionally divide teams by gender can be changed to a different method of creating teams. Making this adjustment may avoid creating tension around gender issues. This is a simple way that we can make our communities welcoming without inviting scrutiny and compromising truth.

Overnight events are increasingly complex for many reasons. Our recommendation is to base sleeping arrangements on birth sex. Alternatively, a child or youth may be offered private accommodations or accommodations with a minimum of two leaders who are of the same birth sex. In some situations, children or youth could change privately into appropriate sleepwear, and sleep as a group in individual sleeping bags in one large room with appropriate adult supervision. Decisions concerning sleepover events should at the very least consider the needs of those involved as they journey towards Christlikeness.

Policy Suggestion:

In keeping with your implemented abuse prevention policy, clearly state that overnight accommodations and sleeping arrangements will be determined based on birth sex. Requests for private accommodations can be made, but depending on the overnight venue may not be possible. Clearly outline accommodation options in event information and registration forms as well as how adult supervision will work.

6. Pronouns and names:

Best Practice:

A Christian may use another individual's preferred pronoun even when they do not believe that the other individual's gender expression is honouring to God. It is possible to separate gender ethics from language ethics, without approving of transgender expression. Calling someone by a different pronoun or name than they were given at birth can be viewed as the same as using a nickname. If the use of a pronoun breaches one's personal convictions, then address an individual by their name. We don't necessarily have to make names and pronouns an issue. Concessions of this nature could be seen as a way of showing love in a confused and complicated situation.

It may feel more complicated when the person attempting to transition their gender has been part of the church community and is already known by a different name and gender. Remember there are likely other people or groups of people who are also wrestling with this decision and new perceived reality. We need to walk with truth, grace and wisdom and as much as possible treat all people with kindness and respect.

Policy Suggestion:

Laws regarding the name change of minors vary regionally and is important for you to understand should a minor request to be called by a different name who is already a part of

your community or newer to your community. It is important to know where laws only allow parents or legal guardians to approve name changes. For minors who are new to your local church and present themselves with a name that is not their legal birth name, we have an opportunity to welcome them on their own terms. However, registration forms and waivers must list their legal name for indemnity reasons.

For adults who desire to be called something other than their legally given name, we can welcome and embrace them as an individual by honouring their request.

Caution:

Note that intentionally and persistently addressing a transgendered person by the wrong name or gender pronoun is now legally considered a form of harassment.

Be aware that there may be legislation in your province or territory that dictates the following:

- Individuals who identify as a gender other than their biological sex can request to be addressed by their preferred name and gender pronoun.
- Individuals can request to have documentation reflect their lived gender and preferred gender pronoun.
- It is recommended that a church request such individuals to confirm, in writing, the name(s) and pronoun(s) by which they prefer to be referred in external correspondence and communications (e.g. phone calls home, church bulletins, unofficial documentation, websites, online portals, related articles and promotional material, etcetera).

7. Gender-specific practices/policies:

There are a few matters related specifically to gender that should be addressed in our practices based on changes in legislation that may be in place in your province or territory at the time of the creation of this document. For example:

- No person shall be asked to prove their gender to participate in activities of the church.
- If an individual discloses that they are going through a transition process, this must be kept confidential until the individual makes the transition plan public. Disclosure to employees or volunteers on a “need to know” basis is permitted for the purpose of enabling a person to carry out his/her duties.

Best Practice:

Just as we would provide a grace-filled environment for anyone else struggling with sin and overcoming a practice that is not in alignment with a biblical Christian lifestyle, we too want to recognize an individual’s struggle with sexuality and gender. It is best to be upfront and honest with them about any limitations to involvement that may be applied to them. Keep the focus on the need and expectation that a follower of Jesus living a lifestyle patterned

after the teachings of the Bible and our shared statement of faith. Make clear that your practice is not discriminatory towards individuals struggling with sexual identity and gender.

Policy Suggestion:

Have clear communication with ministry leaders and ministry workers/volunteers about your practices and policy of welcome. While gender-specific events take place in many local church contexts, provide a clear statement in writing to those who plan and facilitate church-sponsored and facilitated events that all people are welcome.

8. Counselling/Convicting of Sin

Best Practice:

It is the mission of the church to make disciples for the Lord, Jesus Christ. We do this by offering the redemptive and life-changing message of the gospel. It is not the role of the church to force people to change. We trust the work of the Holy Spirit to start, continue and bring to completion His sanctifying work in each life. We do not have to forcibly correct someone who is experiencing confusion about their gender or sexuality. Our focus should be on teaching and encouraging everyone to become like Jesus, living a Bible-based lifestyle and creating environments and opportunities for people to encounter the living God and experience His transformational power.

Policy Suggestion:

Churches are not necessarily counselling centers; pastors are not necessarily counsellors. Therefore, referrals for counselling can be made to professionals. We recommend you conduct your own research on best practices for coaching or supporting individuals and families who are navigating the complexities caused by same-sex attraction or gender confusion. Our responses should be based on the Bible as our authority for convictions, beliefs and practices.

We encourage you to check with your local PAOC District Ministry for a list of recommended counsellors.