

Marriage Declaration

A document about marriage, children and the Bible facing the gender-neutral ideology of our time.

The background for this declaration

- *Is marriage God's appointed design for man and woman?*
- *Does a child have the right to know its own mother and father?*
- *Is an erotic relationship between homosexuals in harmony with the will of God?*
- *Should Christian churches adapt to the gender-neutral ideology?*

DEBATE. The debate about intimate and sexual relationships, homosexuality and marriage has been intense over the last few years, also in Norway. After the Norwegian Parliament adopted a gender-neutral marriage law in 2008, the different fronts within the Church have become increasingly visible. So far the debate has primarily been going on within the Norwegian Lutheran Church, but in the future these issues may become prominent also in other denominations and Christian organizations.

COMPASSION. As Christians we are called to love our fellow human beings in words, attitude and deeds. Regardless of their views, we are urged to meet everyone with friendliness and amity. This includes, of course, people who have a different point of view than us when it comes to the ethics of intimate/sexual relationships. Some might have to confront themselves on this matter, and ask both God and other people for forgiveness. We all need to ask the Lord to give us more of His love.

IDEOLOGY. The question about same-sex marriage is often portrayed as a discussion for or against a homosexual intimate/sexual relationship. This is too narrow. Same-sex marriage is in fact only a tiny part of a comprehensive and radical gender ideology. If churches and congregations adapt to this ideology and redefine marriage, it will change their whole theology regarding sex and sexuality, parenthood and children, marriage and family.

DIFFERENCES. Despite the fact that Christian ethics in matters concerning sexual relationships raise many different questions, it is the sexual relationships between homosexuals that has received most attention over the recent years. In this connection it is important to be aware of the truth that people with homosexual feelings are not a uniform group.

Some fight actively to promote a homosexual political agenda in society, and they do not consider themselves Christians. Some are Christians, and they try to change the theology of marriage in their own Church. Others do not. Still others live as singles because they have chosen to follow the ethics and teachings given in the Bible concerning this matter. But they feel no need to "come out" as homosexuals. In other words: to speak about «the homosexuals» as a uniform group is to oversimplify.

TOLERANCE. Norway is a pluralistic society, where people with different ethics and convictions live side by side. Within the boundaries of Norwegian law, each citizen has the freedom to live as he or she chooses. A democratic society may pass laws and regulations that many Christians may be unable to support. As Christians we must, however, accept that everyone – including the national Parliament – will not agree with us in ethical questions. However, a democracy must, in all fairness, ensure a minority's right to assert their convictions. Tolerance must work both ways. Those with long-held and well-founded positions should not suddenly be met with condemnation, ostracism and sanctions.

The purpose of this marriage statement is to think through and explain the challenges of the gender-neutral ideology, and to provide support for a biblical understanding, guidance and preaching.

1 Jesus Christ is our role model and our authority

Christians are called to meet everybody with love, and with God's grace and truth.

CREATED AND LOVED. According to the Bible, every human being is created in God's image, loved by him and with an inherent and indelible dignity. At the same time we are all sinners. We are all in the same condition, with the same need for God's grace, forgiveness and salvation. As Christians, each of us has challenges in various areas of life in relation to God's will. The fact that we all fall short of the commandments of God, however, must be met with the gospel of His forgiveness, and not with a downplaying or rejection of the biblical commandments.

COMPASSION. Jesus is calling us and inspiring us to show compassion towards all people – in words, attitude and actions. This includes people with homosexual or bisexual feelings, transsexuals etc. To have Jesus as our role model means that we show Christian love, compassion and warmth, while we hold on to God's will and commandments. To adapt to demands and ideologies that violate biblical ethics, is not an expression of Christian charity.

GRACE AND TRUTH. The words “*grace and truth*” describe well how God meets us, and what a Christian attitude should be like towards other people. Read John 1:14,18. Paul expresses the same attitude when he writes that we are to “*speak the truth in love*”, Eph 4:15. Confronted with a woman who had broken God’s commandment, Jesus shows such an attitude in practice: “*Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.*” Joh 8:2-11.

LOVE FOR CHILDREN. Jesus challenges us in a radical way when he gives children a special role and place in the Kingdom of God. See for example Math 18:1-5. A theology which dissolves the importance of the relation between mother, father and child, violates Jesus’ deep respect and love towards children. Neither the father nor the mother is superfluous or unimportant in a child’s life. The child’s perspective should have a central place in Christian theology when it comes to marriage and family.

“FOLLOW ME!” Facing all kinds of different people Jesus confirms their dignity, forgives their sins and challenges them to a new life in imitation of him. “*Follow me!*” he says on many occasions. He praises those who “*come to me and hear my words and do them*” (see Luke 6:46-49).

THE IDEAL. The life and attitude of Jesus inspire, challenge and correct us. As Christians we must ask God, and also fellow human beings, for forgiveness and a new opportunity, when we fail to live up to the ideal that Jesus has given us. His example motivates us to love God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves (Mark 12:28-31).

2 We are committed to the Bible’s teachings about marriage

Marriage between one man and one woman is God’s design for sexual intimacy and family life, instituted by God and confirmed by Christ.

UNAMBIGUOUS MESSAGE. From the story of creation and the Ten Commandments (“You shall honour your father and your mother”) and to the message of Jesus and the teachings of the apostles, the Bible is clear: A marriage consists of one man and one woman. Jesus says it like this:

“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.” Matt 19:4-6.

THE COMMANDMENTS AND LOVE. In the debate about Christian ethics of sexual relationships God’s commandments are often presented as the opposite of “love”, using the concept of “love” to nullify some biblical commandments. This is biblically incorrect, because all of God’s commandments are expressions of his love. Jesus says: “*If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.*” John 15:10.

The relationship between love and God’s commandments is described in this way by the apostle John: “*By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.*” 1 John 5:2.

SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS. The will of God is good, and marriage between one man and one woman is God’s design for sexual relationships. To protect this relation the Bible gives many warnings against sexual sin between man and woman. More than 30 times, for example, adultery – sexual relations before and outside marriage – is described as sin in the New Testament. When it comes to sexual relationships between two of the same sex, the Bible says that women “*exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature*”, and that “*men committed shameless acts with men*”, Rom 1:25-27. According to the unanimous teachings of the Bible, homosexual behaviour violates God’s commandments and will. See also 1 Cor 6:9-11 and 1 Tim 1:8-11.

DEEP-ROOTED CAUSES. When denominations and congregations claim that they have the right to redefine marriage contrary to the Bible’s clear teachings, this is often a result of deeper causes. It may concern fundamental issues like the view of the Bible as God’s word, the authority of Jesus and the apostles, the understanding of the gospel, the theology of sin and grace, the teaching about salvation, the theology of revelation, and the vision of the Church.

3 We share the common Christian theology of marriage

Throughout church history woman and man have been the constant factor of marriage.

GLOBALLY. Up to our time all Christian denominations have had the same understanding of marriage: It is an institution for woman and man, instituted by God at the creation. Marriage is not a social construction, a human invention. On the contrary, it is an institution that pre-dates any organized society, and which neither politicians nor church leaders have the authority to redefine.

It is only the traditional Lutheran Churches of Scandinavia and a few churches in Europe and America that have changed their marriage theology over the last years. About 2 percent of the world’s Christians are members of these denominations. 98 percent belong to churches that hold on to the classical understanding of marriage. (Source: The Norwegian newspaper *Vårt Land*, 13.11.2015.)

NATIONALLY. The changes in the theology of sexual relationships have occurred quickly in the Norwegian Lutheran Church. A 30 page report on sexual relationships and marriage, written by three bishops in 1997, had this conclusion: “*To equate heterosexual marriage with homosexual relationships is contrary to fundamental ethical principles of the Bible and must be considered as a schismatic heresy.*” In 2005 a unanimous episcopal meeting stated that marriage is for one man and one woman. In 2006 and 2007 an overwhelming majority of a Norwegian Lutheran Church Doctrinal Commission and of the Synod expressed the same. A majority of the Leadership of the Norwegian Lutheran Church has now abandoned this understanding of marriage, despite the fact that nobody has presented new and convincing insights based on the Bible.

4 The relation between mother, father and child

Every human being has his or her origin from one mother and one father. Blood ties and biological kinship are of fundamental importance both for the individual and for society.

THE FUNDAMENTAL UNIT OF SOCIETY. Marriage has always been inextricably linked to conception and birth, children and upbringing. The relation between a man and a woman who have children together, has been the fundamental unit of society.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTHER AND FATHER. A family with a good mother and father is the optimal starting point for the growth and development of children. As woman and man the mother and the father are crucial as identification persons and role models in a child's life. In interaction with one another and with the child, both mum and dad give a unique contribution to the development of the identity, personality and self-image of the child.

UNs CHILD CONVENTION. As far as possible, the biological parents should also be the legal and social parents. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says: *"The child shall, as far as possible, have the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents. [...] Both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child"* (Article 7.1 and 18.1). In the Convention the natural reading of the word "parents" is the biological mother and father. Internationally, this is the dominant understanding. The Convention also, without exception, talks about two parents ("both"), not about one or several.

ADOPTION. When a child is in an emergency situation, adoption will often be best solution. Christian churches cannot, however, support ideologies and arrangements that actively contribute to *create* situations where the fundamental rights of children are violated.

FATHER AND "CO-MOTHER". As people of God we are called to *"obey God rather than men"* Acts 5:29. The Christian Church cannot adapt to an ideology that reduces the father to a "sperm" or a "donor". Instead, the Church has to protest and remind the politicians that the law is based on a lie when it declares (as the Norwegian law does) that a child who has got a "co-mother" does not have a father: *"A child cannot have both a father and a co-mother."* (The Children Act §4a.) When the Government legitimizes planned fatherlessness (and motherlessness) it goes against both the rights of children and against God's will for children and families.

EVERY CHILD IS LOVED BY GOD. Regardless of how a child is conceived, and regardless of its family situation, the child is precious and valuable and loved by God. As Christians we wish to meet *all* children with love and respect.

FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS. Churches and congregations that introduce same-sex marriages, dissolve the importance of gender – not only in adult relationships, but also in the family. Two mums or two dads unavoidably become a natural part of these churches' teachings about the family. The relation between mother, father and child is no longer in a special position, but becomes only one among many family variants considered equal.

The gender-neutral ideology challenges fundamental truths regarding man and God's will such as:

- The importance of gender
- The meaning and boundaries of sexuality
- The doctrine of woman and man, mother and father
- Propagation and parenthood
- The importance of the relation between mother, father and child
- A child's right to know its biological parents
- The understanding of family
- The importance of family ties and biological relations
- The definition and character of marriage

5 It is not discrimination to claim that marriage is for man and woman

To distinguish between sexual relationships made up of one gender and of two genders is a factual and well-founded differentiation. It means that biology, children, the UN's Child Convention and the Bible are all taken seriously.

FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES. Sexual relationships between woman and man, and between two people of the same gender are fundamentally different regarding the possibility to have children. We are talking about two different biological conditions.

Treating different conditions in different ways happen in all areas of society. This is not about discrimination, but about well-founded and objective differentiation. Sports is an illustrating example: Nobody talks about "discrimination" because men are not allowed to compete against women. Why? Because the starting point and the conditions regarding women and men are different. This is also the case when it comes to couples of different and of the same sex.

HUMAN RIGHTS. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has on several occasions over the last few years declared that it is not discriminatory to define marriage as a relationship and an institution between woman and man. In 2010, for example, the Court declared: *"The European Human Rights Convention does not impose any state to expand the right to marriage to include couples of the same gender."* In June 2016 the Court in Strasbourg vindicated this again in an similar, unanimous ruling (*Chapin ad Charpentier v. France*). In the UN Declaration of Human Rights, article 16, it is assumed that marriage is for man and woman, and it is declared that "the family is the natural and fundamental unit of society."

THE CHILD PERSPECTIVE IS REVEALING. By using the children's perspective we see that in reality it is the gender-neutral ideology that is discriminatory. **The children** are those who are being discriminated against. Furthermore they are deprived of fundamental *rights* and denied *equality* with other children, when marriage is made gender-neutral.

6 Possible consequences of the gender-neutral ideology

Some people think it is a sign of progress to redefine the basic structure of marriage. Many things, however, indicate that this instead will harm individuals, society and the Church.

SEXUAL ANARCHY. An important goal for the radical gender ideology is to do away with the “hetero-norm” (man/woman norm). Instead one wishes to introduce the “multi-norm”, where most forms of sexuality and intimate relationships are presented as equally valid and valuable variants. The result may turn out to be a sexual anarchy, where *no* sexual relationship stands in a unique position. Hetero, homo, bi, poly, pan, trans etc. – everything is defined equally natural, normal, right and good for children, for adults and for society. The traditional understanding of a family consisting of mother, father and child as the fundamental unit thereby becomes radically weakened. The biggest losers in this social experiment are the children.

CHILDREN AS A RIGHT. In the new ideology of sexual relationships children becomes a “right” for adults, while the children lose *their* right to their own mother or father. Over the last years an international and commercial child market has emerged. In this market the products are sperm and eggs, donors and surrogate mothers. As Christians we cannot put the stamp of approval on this business. A child is a gift, not a right or a commodity. Planned fatherless and motherless children violate our understanding of a child’s divine and inherent right to know its own mother and father, as far as this is possible and justifiable.

DIFFICULT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH. In many Norwegian schools today children are being taught an understanding of sexuality and family where gender is irrelevant. Both directly and indirectly it is also communicated that it is positive and healthy to test different forms of sexuality, gender expression and gender identity. The same message is imparted in much of the youth culture of today. The new Norwegian law about changing of a person’s legal gender may turn out to be a very demanding challenge for many children and young people. Everyone is now free to define their gender based on feelings, and not on biology. If this understanding of gender gains entry in schools and kindergartens, it is likely that an ever increasing number of children and young people will experience confusion and uncertainty when it comes to gender and sexuality, relations, identity and self-image.

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE. If the gender-neutral ideology becomes more and more dominating, it might be a serious threat to the freedom of conscience for teachers and others who are forced to convey this ideology. The same challenge concerns parents who are skeptical to the gender-neutral ideology. It is not evident that they will be met with respect and understanding if they raise their children according to their own conviction, when it comes to marriage, family and children.

CONFLICTS. A theology that violates the Bible’s teaching about marriage, family and children will cause difficulties and conflicts in the cooperation between different denominations. It may also cause internal divisions within congregations, organizations and denominations.

Our belief in the Triune God compels us to profess and defend the biblical message about marriage, family and children.

We declare:

- **YES to the Bible as the binding norm of faith, teaching and life.**
 - **YES to marriage as God’s design for one man and one woman.**
- **YES to the special position and unique significance of the relation between mother, father and child.**
 - **YES to a child’s divine right to know its own mother and father.**
- **YES to the child perspective in the theology and practice of the Church.**