

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

Board of General Superintendents

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The essential nature of the Church of the Nazarene is to minister grace to all people, regardless of beliefs, behaviors, or status in life. This is who we are. Everyone is welcome to attend Nazarene churches. This does not mean we agree with all forms of behavior, but simply affirms that we are called to provide biblical teaching, support, ministry, counseling, and prayer that God can use to bring His redemptive love and grace to all who need and desire it.

Now, more than ever, Nazarene pastors are facing issues relative to same-sex relationships, especially in light of recent court decisions and state legislative efforts. Nevertheless, one thing remains clear: the Church of the Nazarene has not changed its view of biblical marriage as a lifelong relationship between one man and one woman.

Regarding same-sex marriage, the following *Manual* statements apply:

1. Paragraph 30.2 of the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene states: “They [ministers] shall only solemnize marriages of persons having the biblical basis for marriage. Biblical marriage only exists in a relationship involving one man and one woman (30-30.1, 32, 514.10, 536.16).
2. The *Manual* also instructs: “The institution of marriage was ordained by God in the time of man’s innocence, and is, according to apostolic authority, ‘honourable in all;’ it is the mutual union of one man and one woman for fellowship, helpfulness, and the propagation of our race” (Par. 30.0).

It is important to note that the Church of the Nazarene makes a distinction between same-sex attractions, inclinations, or feelings, and that of homosexual behavior. Again, the *Manual* is instructive: “We view all forms of sexual intimacy that occur outside the covenant of heterosexual marriage as sinful distortions of the holiness and beauty God intended for it” (Par. 32). However, we also affirm that same-sex temptations are not sin, any more than any other temptation is sin. We are all tempted in many ways. Therefore, we understand that homosexual temptation only becomes sin when a person acts on it through sexual lust or behavior.

We want to clarify these distinctions because we are committed to orthodox biblical instruction regarding marriage, family, and human sexuality, even when those values run counter to prevailing cultural norms. Although same-sex marriage is most pronounced because of the June 2015 decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the larger issue moving forward will be about religious freedom.

There is still much we do not know about the full implications of this Supreme Court ruling. However, the First Amendment of the United States Constitution offers protection to religions and their adherents to live and act in ways that are consistent with their beliefs. Even the 5–4 majority opinion in *Obergefell* specifically affirms these rights and protections.

In the meantime, we encourage every local Church of the Nazarene to consider adopting a Facility Use Policy, which clarifies that its buildings will only be used in a manner consistent with the religious beliefs of the Church of the Nazarene. Such an agreement will help you respond objectively to requests for use of your facilities, taking into account practices that the Church of the Nazarene would not endorse, such as gambling, alcohol use, same-sex weddings, etc. Your local church board should review your policy if you already have one, or promulgate a new policy if you do not, and officially affirm or adopt the policy into your church board minutes. This could greatly assist you and your staff in having clear and consistent guidelines as you consider requests for use of your facilities.

In dealing with inquiring persons and with the media, spokespersons for the local church should make sure that their statements are consistent with the teachings of the Church of the Nazarene. You should also determine whether your state statutes include opt-out language for churches and/or ministers in connection with same-sex marriages. Know your state law and be able to cite it, if possible. Your district office will be a good resource regarding state laws and guidelines if you need assistance. Remember, your example and spirit as a pastor speak volumes, so let us all be sure that the way we talk about such issues is filled with grace and love.

The Church of the Nazarene will not waver concerning our belief that marriage is a means of grace created by God between one man and one woman. The Church will also continue to be a prophetic and counter-cultural voice in all matters we deem opposed to the truth of God's Word. But let us also be careful that our tone remains consistent with our value of perfect love and insist that our hospitality toward everyone is generous and inviting.

Our USA/Canada Regional Office is prepared to help you if assistance is needed in these matters. As always, we are in this together, making Christlike disciples in the nations.

Sincerely,

The Board of General Superintendents



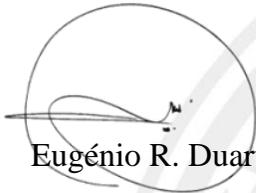
David W. Graves



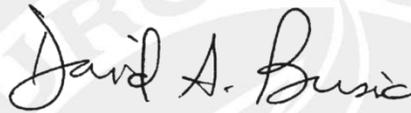
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