



<b>Title: Membership for those Living Together Without Marriage</b>
<b>Policy #: 16</b>
<b>EXPIRES: When Replaced</b>
<b>ISSUED BY: Church Council</b>
<b>SIGNED:</b>

## 1 History

VERSION	DATE APPROVED	UPDATED BY	PURPOSE FOR CREATION/UPDATE
1.0	4/99		STANDARD GUIDELINES ARE NEEDED FOR THOSE LIVING TOGETHER WITHOUT MARRIAGE WHO ARE SEEKING MEMBERSHIP
2.0	5/02		UPDATED

## 2 Scope

This policy is part of St. Paul Lutheran Church’s organizational policies. This policy applies to all congregation members, church staff and community members.

## 3 Policy

Temptation and sin are a fact of life for all Christians. The Bible makes it clear that we are at one and the same time both sinner and saint. Even though the Bible tells us that “The wages of sin is death...” it also tells us that Christians are considered by God as holy and cleansed of all of our sin through faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for us. By dying on a cross, Jesus chose to take our place in judgment under the curse of having been rescued from certain condemnation; we are called to a life of faithful obedience to God – not to earn God’s favor (we already have it) – but as our expression of thanks to God for the sacrifice of Jesus for us.

The Bible makes it clear that there are no “degrees of sin” in God’s eyes. Sin is sin, period. All of it has the potential of bringing a person down in condemnation through unbelief. Likewise all sin, in the case of believers, is paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus for us and is therefore forgiven. However, the apostle Paul says that there is something special about sexual sin. It is not more condemning, but it is sin against our own bodies which were created by God for fellowship with Him. Consider the following Bible passages:

*“...the body is not for sexual sin but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. God raised the Lord, and by his power God will also raise us. Don’t you realize that your bodies are parts of Christ’s body?...Stay away from sexual sins. Other*

*sins that people commit don't affect their bodies the same way sexual sins do. People who sin sexually sin against their own bodies. Don't you know that your body is a temple that belongs to the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit, whom you received from God, lives in you. You don't belong to yourselves. You were bought for a price. So bring glory to God in the way you use your body." 1 Corinthians 6:13b-19*

*"It is God's will that you keep away from sexual sin as a mark of your devotion to him. Each of you should know that finding a husband or wife for yourself should be done in a holy and honorable way, not in the passionate, lustful way of people who don't know God." 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5*

*"Now the effects of the corrupt nature are obvious: illicit sex, perversion, promiscuity...I've told you in the past and I'm telling you again that people who do these kinds of things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Galatians 5:19-21*

From these passages it becomes obvious that couples who choose to live together as husband and wife without being married are sinning against God and may even be placing their eternal well being in jeopardy. Paul makes it very clear that because the church cares about people who are living in sin, it has a responsibility to speak God's word of warning to these couples so that they will repent and turn to God for forgiveness.

When Jesus was dealing with a woman who was caught by the Jewish authorities in the act of adultery, He was merciful without compromising the integrity of obedience. Because it was apparent to Jesus that she was genuinely repentant of her sin, he told her, "...I don't condemn you either. Go! From now on don't sin." John 8:11. Here Jesus absolves the woman because of the humility of her heart, and then He immediately calls her back to the obedient life of faithfulness. This will be the real testimony to herself and others of the genuineness of her faith.

Because God's Word clearly teaches that it is sinful for couples to live together outside of the bonds of marriage, procedures have been developed at St. Paul Lutheran Church so that we may be compassionated and consistent in working with couples who are living together without marriage.

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## **4 Procedure**

Couples who apply for membership at St. Paul and are living together without marriage will be counseled by one of the pastors regarding their sinful situation. If they express repentance regarding their sin, they will be encouraged to either;

- A. Separate until they are married at a later date, or
- B. Apply for a marriage license and be married privately by the pastor or a justice of the peace as soon as is reasonably possibly.

Couples who reject this counsel of the pastor may not become members of St. Paul.

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## **5 Forms**

Form x111 Living Together Without Marriage Handout