

## Living Together Without Marriage Policies



### St. Paul Lutheran Church – Sheboygan Falls, WI

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, the following policies have been developed at St. Paul Lutheran Church so that we may be compassionate and consistent in working with couples who are living together without marriage.

### **Policy on Conducting Weddings for Couples Who Are Living Together Without Marriage**

Before a wedding date for any couple is placed on the church's calendar, they must visit with one of the pastors of St. Paul. During this initial meeting the couple will be asked if they are living together or have plans to move in together prior to their desired wedding date. If they are living together or plan to before the wedding, the pastor will share with them what the Bible says about their situation (both Law & Gospel) calling them to repentance. If repentance is expressed, they will then be asked to consider choosing one of the following two approaches which have the goal of demonstrating the couple's repentance by changing the sinful living situation:

- A. They may choose to separate and live apart until the wedding.
- B. They can apply for a marriage license and be married privately by a justice of the peace or the pastor as soon as is reasonably possible. They then can plan to have a public celebration of their wedding vows at church with their family and friends at a later date of their choosing.

Because having a sexual relationship during dating has become so commonplace in our culture today, the Bible passages referred to above will be shared by the pastor during the initial meeting with any couple that comes to him for marriage. All couples will be encouraged to make every effort to refrain from a sexual relationship until they have legally become husband and wife.

### **Policy Regarding Couples Who Are Living Together Without Marriage Who Wish to Become a Member of St. Paul**

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.