WATER OF LIFE COMMUNITY CHURCH

STATEMENT ON SEXUALITY

The issue of sexuality is a challenging topic for most people in our culture today. Historically we have struggled with fear and shame when it came to our sexual journey, because many have experienced deep wounding due to others violating them sexually or because of personal struggles they may be facing with their sexual identity. It is therefore crucial for us to state, everyone who follows Jesus has been where you are, looking for faithful love and lasting truth. So first and foremost, no matter what your views are regarding your sexuality or that of others, you are loved by the Lord. The pain, trauma, and injustices you may have experienced around sexuality matter to Him and to us.

Sexuality is at the core of our identity and how we relate to others. Throughout history when children were born the first thing spoken over us had to do with our sexuality. "It is a girl" or "It is a boy" began to define each of us very early in life. Our identity and our personhood are built around our sexuality; thus, we understand that conversations about sexuality can easily be misunderstood leading to shame, condemnation, and fear.

Throughout time and history, the church held positions on sexuality different from the surrounding culture. We believe clarity is kindness. Therefore, we believe that we must make a clear and concise statement about sexuality.

SCRIPTURE CONTAINS THE MEANING OF LIFE

The Bible is an identity book. It tells us who God is, who we are, and what our purpose is. We believe that the God of the Bible is a good and loving Father who wants the very best for humanity. As His sons and daughters, we are created to live in a deeply satisfying and loving connection with God and others. At the beginning, humanity rebelled against Him and became both victims and perpetrators of sin; no one was safe from each other, and we couldn't stop the ongoing destruction that was triggered by our rebellion. But God had a plan to heal creation through His sacrificial love. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him," (John 3:16-17, NIV).

We are saved by God's grace, through His unearned and undeserved love for us and that same grace has the power to transform us. As we put our trust in Jesus, we die to self and become alive in Christ (Romans 6:4). We become a new creation in Christ, as 2

Corinthians 5:17 tells us we are a new person with a new identity, on a journey of becoming more and more like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18). By definition, a Christian is someone who has been rescued from sin and its consequences by being washed (cleansed from sin and shame), sanctified (set apart *from* sin *to* the Lord), and justified (declared righteous by God)—all through Christ's death and resurrection and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Knowing and being known by God in Christ is the meaning of life.

MALE AND FEMALE ARE FUNDAMENTAL AND ESSENTIAL DISTINCTIONS

From the very beginning God has provided a blueprint, teaching us who we are, what our role is, and how to be just and good like Him. When He created the ancient society of the Jewish people, He gave them essential moral obligations concerning how to treat Him and each other—a foundation that would teach them to protect and thereby empower one another to thrive. Jesus interpreted and clarified the teachings of the Old Testament, and His instruction went beyond our actions to the very posture of our hearts. He taught us how to love God, ourselves, our neighbors, our bodies, and even our enemies. We seek to ground our standards and view of humanity and sexuality in the nature of God, the teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the clarity of Scripture.

God, who according to Scripture is not a sexual being, revealed that He intentionally created humanity "in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis1:27 NIV). The different, yet necessary and complementary natures of masculinity and femininity were necessary to reveal the diversity of God's nature and character.

Though the bodies of men and women are highly similar in their various biological systems (like nervous, circulatory, digestive, etc.), men and women are also very different. There are trillions of cells in the human body that contain either a male or female sex chromosome set. Amazingly, every system of the male and female body functions perfectly and effectively independent of the other—except for our reproductive systems. A man and a woman are essential in order to have children. Our "gender"—derived from the root "gen," like the words *generate*, *progeny*, and *genitals*—points to our procreative organs. Male and female bodies have been created in such a way that future generations depend upon how they complement each other. We therefore do not look to our desires,

attractions, experiences, or inner world to find identity as male or female as a starting point; we look at biology. One may not like the starting point, or may wish it was different, but our chromosomal reality and anatomy at birth—which are not merely assigned, but observable scientifically, provable and defining.

As an example, with the exception of intersex anomalies (disorders of sexual development), one's inborn biology is the place every proposed reassignment surgery begins as it moves toward the desired result. No matter how many definitions are added to human identity, they are all variants, responses, or reactions to the two sexes. To articulate reality in other ways does not change this fundamental truth. Subjective viewpoints on gender fracture our ability to connect and communicate with one another and distort how we socialize our children. We believe that God knew exactly what He was doing when He created our sexuality and called it good. We seek to live in full agreement with His original design.

SCRIPTURE TELLS US HOW TO THINK AND BEHAVE AS SEXUAL BEINGS

Sex and sin are not synonymous. God made us sexual beings before sin was a factor. This was the blessing that He called "very good" (Genesis 1:31 NIV) and He has given us boundaries about how to express ourselves sexually. The Bible consistently addresses the complexity of our sexuality as a result of our sin. God knows that the development of our sexuality is dependent on our family, community, and culture. Human sexuality has few natural limitations. One may act sexually with anyone or anything and in any setting if we are not taught clearly about what is healthy and expected. Knowing this, God has taught us His values.

As a model for all of humanity, God instructed Israel in the proper and healthy expression of sex. Just as any other pleasure in life, like rest, work, eating, or alcohol, sex can be wonderful or destructive. He had to teach Israel that sex with one's parents or children wasn't acceptable, nor was sex with someone else's spouse, sex with the same gender, sex for sale, sex in ritual worship, sex outside of marriage, sex with animals, sex in a group, and forcing sex on another—all were unacceptable to God, no matter how tempting or desirable. Humans didn't invent these guidelines in an evolutionary process or by imagining their ideal experience; rather they came from divine revelation. God taught us how to love one another and steward the gift of sex to create healthy people and societies.

The refusal to acknowledge and honor God leads to disconnection from reality. The lie that He doesn't exist, can't be known, has no rightful demands on us, and/or that we are not accountable to God creates a web of untruth in society as we invent new meanings for life and vie for power and pleasure. Our thoughts, emotions, and wills become distorted and unreliable guides in such a way that we worship created things rather than worshipping the Creator (Romans 1:25).

God deeply values freedom and free will because it is part of being made in His image and is necessary if we are to truly love and become like Christ. Worshipping things other than God eventually leads to lust—the enshrinement of desire as the focus of life—and it is idolatry. Eventually, lust enslaves people as they define themselves predominantly by their desires rather than God's heart and purpose. Instead of consistently intervening, He will allow individuals and societies to stubbornly experience sin's damaging effects—even to the point where it distorts their humanity (Romans 1:24). God takes the gifts of free will and love very seriously and will not coerce devotion.

The multitude of possible gender identities and the normalization of same-sex sexual behavior points to a society that has abandoned the desire to accurately define and live in the boundaries that God has set for humanity, as a reflection of God's image. God created humanity as male and female, alike but different, who produce offspring of like kind (Genesis 1:26-28). But society has distorted something built into the fabric of creation, and this is neither healthy nor life giving (Romans 1:21-23).

JESUS ON SEX, GENDER, SINGLENESS, AND MARRIAGE

Jesus teaches His followers a sexual ethic that is fundamentally different from modern society—that we are more than our desires, questioning, or attractions. In Matthew 19:4-6 NIV, He reaffirmed the Genesis 1 and 2 view of sex, gender, and marriage:

"Haven't you read," He replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Twice Jesus added "two" to His quote of Genesis 2:24, emphasizing the truth that marriage was always intended to be a lifetime covenant between one man and one woman, and the only context in which sexual behavior is blessed. (He was actually

arguing against divorce and remarriage in the passage.) The only other path Jesus advocated was to remain single and celibate (Matthew 19:10-12). Jesus believed this to be a calling, knowing that most would marry. Paul speaks of a gift (a grace from God) to be married or single.

Even more profoundly, Jesus expected His followers to not cultivate lust (Matthew 5:28)—to not treat themselves and others as less than human or mere objects of sexual gratification. We monetize and normalize lust; He forbade it. Desire is normal and healthy; lust is self-medicating and destructive. Lust's manifestations—human trafficking, porn, the "hook-up" culture, and more—destroy respect, intimacy, and bonding. Other people are seen as something to be collected, possessed, consumed, and discarded. But Jesus is creating an extended family of nobility and safety, where people resist sexualizing each other, where they protect each other, and where sex is a part of life but not the meaning or the center of it. Current culture—built on self, money, and power—may not embrace this, but believers who follow Jesus choose every day to trust and follow Him as He changes us and the world one person at a time.

We acknowledge that we and the greater global Church have often failed to live up to this standard and followed the heart and teaching of Jesus in creating safe and life-giving communities. The Church has often behaved hypocritically or acted as though none of us fail or struggle in these areas, and we seek forgiveness and grace to grow and embrace the standard Christ has called us to.

FREEDOM WITH JESUS

Jesus consistently saw the beauty and worth in people. His words instilled an awareness of personal dignity and self-worth that caused people to marvel over who God is and who they were to Him. He modeled perfect love and unflinching truth. To the humble He was kind, to the proud He was fierce; He did whatever love demanded to move the human heart to think like God does. His compassion, truth, death, and resurrection changed the world. No one was more loving and kind than Jesus. He had people in process around Him and from all walks of society and wasn't intimidated by their histories or ongoing struggles. He never required people to have it all together in order to follow Him, and He knew that His followers would take time to grow and become more like Him along the way. His grace draws us into a new way of living, sometimes all at once and other times, step-by-step.

As Christians, we learn to surrender and grow, prioritizing connection to Him. Even though we face challenges and temptations, God promises to help us overcome if we will trust and keep following Him (1 Corinthians10:13).

CONCLUSION

God desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, (1 Timothy 2:5). As each person acknowledges and surrenders to God's saving grace, He creates in us a new creation, (2 Corinthians 5:17). Unfortunately today the prevailing view is that if you disagree with someone's lifestyle, choices, or beliefs, you do not accept them. At Water of Life, we aim to model Jesus' life of acceptance without conforming to the moral or ethical standards of our culture. In the New Testament, Jesus dined and fellowshipped with prostitutes, adulterers and sinners, people whose ways of life and beliefs contradicted His teachings, yet they were drawn to Him, nonetheless. Similarly, we welcome everyone to Water of Life with open hearts, arms, and doors, regardless of their backgrounds and experiences. Though we are committed to following Jesus' Biblical teachings on all matters including sexuality, our acceptance is unconditional. We encourage you to join us in following Jesus' model of gracious acceptance. He is compassionate and merciful, full of grace and truth. Our desire is to reflect Jesus' love rather than criticize our culture. We teach and live from a Biblical sexual ethic, while supporting and caring for those who struggle to share our beliefs. We are committed to seek and to understand the deep heart issues of identity and experiences of those who do not hold to our same standard of sexuality. We are keenly aware that God loves and accepts all people as they are when they come to Him and invites them to experience the wonder of His Kingdom and the extravagance of His transforming love.