

Proposed Specific Guidance for Evangelical Presbyterian Church Chaplains Regarding Ministry to Same-Sex Couples

Under the guiding authority of their endorsing body, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC):

- 1) No EPC chaplain will provide pre-marital/marital counseling, or officiate, participate in, or provide official witness to any event or ceremony which may reasonably be construed to condone, ratify, or promote relationships or equivalents to marriage between persons of the same sex.
- 2) EPC chaplains may continue to be involved in couples retreats, or any other related type of event (such as Strong Bonds or CREDO in the military) unless such a program no longer provides faith-based curriculum, or that involvement would be in contradiction to point #1 above and be contrary to the policy of the EPC regarding Same-Sex Couples.

The principles guiding our thinking and practice are:

- EPC chaplains receive authority from, and are guided by the Bible, which affirms that marriage is designed by God to be between one man and one woman.
- The EPC acknowledges that federal and state governments, along with several courts, have redefined marriage to include same-sex couples. Our denomination, however, holds to biblical standards of marriage.
- Evangelical Christians treat all people with dignity and respect, including those in relationships outside biblical teachings.

Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender (LGBT) Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Coast Guardsmen and Marines have long been coming to their chaplains seeking ministry. EPC Chaplains always treat each person as one whom Christ loves and for whom He died. We will continue to provide this ministry with truth and grace. However, our biblical convictions tell us that marrying same-sex couples is not “ministry” and we consider such relationships as outside the bounds of and contrary to God’s biblical institution of marriage. This is a matter of both denominational polity and policy for any and all EPC Chaplains.

Leaders at all levels, both Institutional and Military, should understand that EPC chaplains must adhere to their own ordination vows and endorsement requirements and involve themselves only in activities or ministry that their endorsing body, the EPC, requires or allows.

Relationally, EPC chaplains will always provide cooperation without compromise. For example:

EPC chaplains will be swift to affirm what they can do, not just their restrictions, and seek ways to be gracious and engaging in their approach to ministry. Therefore, EPC chaplains

will make deliberate effort to direct same-sex couples to chaplains or other clergy who have no restriction in providing relationship support to those relationships. Such an approach provides support without compromise.

Therefore, EPC chaplains serving in any venue or capacity will continue to be consistent in their witness and counsel, following the guidelines and expectations laid out above. Tailoring the Gospel message and Call to Ministry in any way that appears to condone sinful behavior is not in keeping with EPC chaplain standards. EPC chaplains will seek to follow Christ's example, who always ministered "Truth in love."