

## **Further Clarification Concerning the Document “A Pastoral Perspective on Homosexuality”**

To all our colleagues in ministry and leadership:

Greetings in the powerful name of Christ Jesus our Lord!

Now that members and friends of the Church of the Nazarene have had opportunity to read our pastoral document, “A Pastoral Perspective on Homosexuality,” we offer these additional insights.

### ***WHY WAS THIS DOCUMENT WRITTEN?***

The Board of General Superintendents, proactively responding to the growing dialog presently engaged in popular culture concerning homosexuality, seeks to communicate its affirmation of scriptural and ecclesial perspectives regarding this issue.

### ***WHO WROTE THE DOCUMENT?***

The document was developed by a consortium of our educators and church leaders and submitted to our Board for review and approval.

### ***WHAT ARE THE BASIC ASSUMPTIONS FOUNDATIONAL TO THIS DOCUMENT?***

In any document prepared by or for the Board of General Superintendents we are guided by some very basic assumptions that are rooted in three areas:

- These assumptions are rooted in Scripture as we affirm both its inspiration and authority.
- They are rooted in the Wesleyan theological perspective of free grace, perfect love, and radical transformation.
- They are rooted in the received authority of our *Manual* as the governing principles forged in General Assembly participation under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

We ask everyone to read the pastoral documents of the Board of General Superintendents from these assumptions with the understanding that they are always subservient to Scripture, the *Manual*, and our Wesleyan-Holiness tradition.

### ***WHY THIS DOCUMENT OF FURTHER CLARIFICATION?***

This document has been well received by so many clergy; nonetheless, we believe it appropriate to respond to several questions that have arisen upon the reading of the document by some colleagues. It is important to keep the following in mind:

- This is not a ruling from the Board of General Superintendents.
- This is not an article of faith or an encyclical from the Board.
- The Board of General Superintendents does not speak *ex cathedra*.
- The intent of this response is to encourage all Nazarenes to develop a deeper faith in Christ's transformative power.

### ***WHAT QUESTIONS HAVE ARISEN SINCE ITS PUBLICATION?***

1. *Is this document faithful to the biblical premise regarding homosexuality?*

First, as your Board of General Superintendents, we want to assure you that our commitment to the scriptural message regarding human sexuality has not changed. Second, while this document may represent a different means of engaging a conversation that is increasingly becoming inescapable, our position has not changed.

As Wesleyans, we must begin any discussion of this topic by framing our responses and statements from the message of Scripture. We continue to believe that homosexual behavior is wrong, unscriptural, and has no place in the Church of the Nazarene. This is the tenor of thought throughout the scriptural record. Additionally, this document does not change our consensus.

2. *What is the difference between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior?*

As heirs of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, we must employ what has been called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral as we discuss complex, intricate, and difficult topics.

More specifically, we believe the issue of homosexuality can be examined from each of Wesley's designated perspectives:

- Scripture
- Reason
- Tradition
- Experience

Our commitment is to begin with Scripture but not to overlook the other prisms through which our views and perceptions might be enriched.

3. *What do we mean when we condemn the homosexual lifestyle but not the orientation?*

We believe the document presented on our website does indeed call for a decisive break with all sin. Additionally, the document must be read in the context of the larger gospel story. It addresses the issue of homosexuality from the broad perspective that includes the whole trajectory of sin—from its first occurrence that blighted the human race to the choices and decisions we make that are contrary to God’s law. Indeed, all the contributing writers definitively believe that the practice of *any* sin must not occur in the life of a Christian. On the other hand, the document does not attempt to answer or resolve every related element concerning the issue of homosexuality. We do not ask believers to repent of the fact that original sin mars, distorts, and even pollutes their hearts, resulting in the carnal mind. Instead, we exhort them to full surrender, complete consecration, and trusting faith in the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit through Christ.

Likewise, we acknowledge the same requirement of surrender and submission to the will and way of God that is incumbent upon the believer struggling with the temptation to act out in the context of the old orientation or desires.

4. *Does this document suggest that the Church of the Nazarene is now embracing homosexual practice?*

Nothing could be further from the truth. The “embrace of grace” has often been misconstrued as an acceptance of both the sin and the sinner. This is a caricature of the message of grace and has often been employed as a subterfuge to restrict any discussion of the tough issues engaging the attention of society.

Be assured that all statements in any document offered as helpful material for the church at large are finally subservient to the statements offered in our *Manual*. In reference to “A Pastoral Perspective on Homosexuality,” all statements regarding homosexuality are subservient to what is stated in the *Manual* section on Human Sexuality.

Additionally, we are aware that even the finest editorial scrutiny of any content designed for multiple outlets may overlook or miss a train of thought that might lead readers to differing conclusions than the one intended by the document’s authors and our Board. Clearly, it is the desire of our Board to communicate our firm, unwavering support of the scriptural position regarding the issue of homosexuality, and to affirm our strongest allegiance to those relevant statements in our *Manual*.

5. *Explain what the document means when it states: “The reoriented or celibate single homosexual will be invited to full participation in the life and ministry of the church, leading ministries, serving on boards, and singing in choirs.”*

It is important to recognize the operative terms in this statement: “reoriented,” “celibate,” and “single.” These three terms offer clarification that must not be overlooked. It should not be interpreted that the Church of the Nazarene is relaxing its traditional standard concerning participation in the life, ministry, and governance of the local church. Without clear

compliance of these three very important clarifiers, those individuals wanting to express participation in the life of the church would be barred.

Heterosexual believers must also abide by similar standards, living a life oriented toward Christ, and if married, expressing their sexuality within the commitment and confines of marriage. Heterosexual singles are expected to adhere to the scriptural standards of behavior as expressed in the *Manual's* Covenant of Christian Conduct.

### ***WHAT ARE THE TAKE-AWAYS FROM THIS DOCUMENT?***

It is the anticipation of the Board of General Superintendents that each reader will form opinions based on the content of this and other future Pastoral Perspectives. It is our prayerful concern that you will discover the following ideas as intrinsic and foundational convictions that can translate into beneficial take-aways:

- We urge our clergy to remain faithful to the authority of Scripture. In these challenging times, the message of Christ is subject to enormous pressures from many sources. We must not allow the culture to shape the values of our proclamation or our practice. We remain committed to proclaiming the biblical message faithfully.
- We urge our clergy to preach a message of hope for deliverance and transformation. Without the transformative message of redemption and sanctification, our preaching leaves listeners with little more than a moralistic ideal.
- We urge our clergy to be redemptive without compromise. It should be clear from this document that your Board of General Superintendents has courageously engaged a dialogue that is complex as well as complicated. We anticipate that our readers will extend grace where it is so desperately needed while simultaneously adhering to and proclaiming the ethic of scriptural holiness.

### ***Conclusion***

The Board of General Superintendents expresses its appreciation to our colleagues in pastoral ministry as well as to those in various other leadership roles for their strong defense of the faith. We reverently and thankfully acknowledge the allegiance of our clergy corps to this faith that has been entrusted to the saints. Together we pray that God will enable the transformational character of the gospel to be heralded everywhere, for we remain convinced, “Where sin did abound, grace has abounded much more!”

The tone of the booklet acknowledges our clear position on the issue of sin, the possibility of transformation, and the sanctifying grace that can be experienced. The booklet, with humility, recognizes the challenges that some individuals face. In the spirit of the God who extends prevenient grace to everyone, it also extends the grace of community to those who are choosing

to acknowledge Christ's lordship and are exercising the disciplines of obedience in the power of the Spirit—living at the foot of the cross in the power of the resurrection.

Without Christ, humankind is both depraved and deprived. It is important, however, to keep in mind the fact that evidence of the distorted presence of the Imago Dei is present even in the unjustified. Wesley believed that the work of sanctification was associated with the restoration of the image of God in humankind.

What is not absolutely clear is where to draw the line between what are the residual effects of humankind's experiencing the distortion of the Imago Dei and plain old, garden-variety carnality that rebels against the very law and light of God. Saint Paul was clear in his description of the rebellion of humankind against the law of God. The distortions wreaked upon the human race by the fall have created havoc with both our moral compass and our physiological complex. Redemption is holistic, but it is not always completed in one fell swoop! We are to "lift up our heads, our redemption draweth near."

It is in this spirit, then, that the Board of General Superintendents urges our churches everywhere to extend grace—embracing the lost and broken individual, while admonishing all to pursue scriptural holiness of heart and life.