

SOUTHWOOD POLICY STATEMENTS

What is a Policy Statement?

"Policy Statements" means any Policy Statements adopted as part of the Church Constitution from time to time concerning practical applications of Biblical principles, doctrinal considerations, philosophy of ministry and Christian conduct.

In consideration of the ongoing need for the Church to provide guidelines and directions to its Ministry Partners on practical applications of Biblical teachings, doctrinal considerations and Christian conduct, the Church may adopt Policy Statements on such matters as are deemed necessary from time to time by the Elders Council and such statements upon adoption as set out below shall be deemed to be a part of the Constitution.

A Policy Statement may be proposed or amended by either the Lead Pastor, Staff Pastor or the Elders Council, but shall not become operative until first approved by an eighty (80%) vote of the Elders Council at a meeting lawfully called for that purpose. (*Southwood General Operating Bylaw Number 1*).

On Christian Marriage

At Southwood, we believe marriage is a great institution, divinely given by God to people. It is an institution that forms the basis of societal structure and is to be entered into only with great forethought and consideration. We define Christian marriage as *a divinely ordained monogamous and lifelong covenant between one man and one woman*. In this sense, marriage is distinct from casual friendships, dating relationships, and engagements. Although we do recognize most civil marriages, we believe that Christian marriage has the added element of being a divinely recognized relationship. For this reason, our view of marriage is ultimately based on biblical principles rather than societal philosophies. We therefore ask all those seeking marriage at Southwood to adhere to the following policies when it comes to marriage.

a. Our Policy on Faith Issues

At Southwood, it is our policy to publicly endorse/facilitate only marriage ceremonies between a man and a woman who both possess personal faith in Jesus. At his discretion, the officiating pastor may also opt to perform marriage ceremonies for a man and woman who are not followers of Christ, but the church will not facilitate such ceremonies. Christian marriage ceremonies will not be performed for couples of mixed faith. The only possible exception to this policy is in instances where couples of mixed faith have already borne children together. In such cases marriages will be considered at the discretion of the officiating pastor.

b. Our Policy Towards Co-habiting Couples & Personal Morality

At Southwood it is our policy to perform church marriage ceremonies for couples that are seeking to live consistent Christian lives. We encourage couples to ensure that they each have a strong relationship with Jesus Christ before they enter into the covenant of marriage. Therefore, the following points are to be regarded.

Couples are to be residing in separate residences and living in moral purity, prior to consideration for Christian marriage.

Cohabiting couples will not be considered for marriage ceremonies.

It is our policy to perform and recognize marriages between one man and one woman only, in keeping with the historic Christian faith.

c. Our Policy for Marriage Preparation Classes

Couples wishing to be married at Southwood must complete a series of premarital counselling sessions with a pastor, to better prepare them for marriage. The couple seeking marriage will incur the costs for related resources.

d. Our Policy towards Banns Forms & Licenses

In keeping with Ontario laws, the publication of banns is permitted in instances where both parties are regular attendees of Southwood and have never been married before. In all other cases a marriage license is required.

e. Our Policy towards Divorce & Remarriage

Although divorce is far from God's ideal, we believe there are legitimate instances when remarriage is permissible. We also will consider performing marriage ceremonies in the following situations. First, in instances where the divorce has happened prior to salvation, consideration will be given to remarriage. Second, in cases where a person was abandoned by a former spouse, resulting in divorce. And third, in situations where a person's former spouse has committed adultery, resulting in divorce. *(Approved April 16, 2003).*

On Gender Roles in Ministry

Southwood Community Church values the worth and dignity of all persons without distinction as created in God's image. We affirm the priesthood of all believers and the responsibility of every Christian woman and man to take an active role in edifying the church. For that purpose, the Holy Spirit distributes ministry gifts to believers without distinction of any kind. That reality imposes the responsibility on every believer to fulfill ministry consistent with God's grace.

Southwood distinguishes between ministry function and church office. While upholding the necessity of mutual respect and affirmation as those subject to the Word of God, Southwood understands that the biblical office of elder/pastor in the early church was gender specific. Therefore it maintains that it is consistent with that understanding of Scripture that the church office or elder/pastor should be limited to the qualified male. The biblical office of deacon or deaconess is open to the qualified male or female. *(Approved April 28, 2004)*

On Sign Gifts of the Holy Spirit & Spirit Baptism

Southwood Community Church maintains that there is one baptism of the Holy Spirit that occurs at the time a person is born again, placing that one into the body of Christ. The events of Acts took place during a transitional period in the establishment of the church and from then onward; all believers experience Spirit Baptism upon conversion. Southwood also distinguishes between spiritual gifts distributed to believers to equip them for ministry and the "sign gifts" which are understood to have been manifestations of the Holy Spirit to authenticate the messenger and the gospel message during the foundational period of the church. Therefore, Southwood holds that "sign gifts" are not normative for the church today. While this official church position is not and must not be a test of fellowship with those whose traditions or theological positions differ, ministry partners of this community will not propagate practices at variance with Southwood's position.

As an evangelical fellowship we welcome all who know Jesus Christ as their Savior and all who are seeking Him. Those who claim to possess the gift of tongues (languages) and other sign gifts are welcome to worship and fellowship with us, and to become ministry partners, if they are willing to be a source of unity rather than division within our church body. We believe that the Christian life is supernatural and that the Lord continues to perform miracles. We also believe that current displays of the gift of tongues distract from the main task of the local church, which is to glorify God through the fulfillment of our corporate mission. We do not believe that speaking in tongues is a necessary nor primary evidence of the manifestation of the Spirit's work in a person's life, or an indication of the filling of the Spirit. Southwood Community Church seeks to prevent the propagation of doctrines that would cause divisions within our local church community. Therefore, ministry partners and adherents of Southwood Community Church are not to propagate the teachings and emphases of the current charismatic movement. Although we do not control personal, individual interactions with the Lord, the expression of tongues and other sign gifts are not to be overtly expressed at meetings that are under the organization and authority of Southwood Community Church.
(Approved April 28, 2004)

On Open God Theism

Open God Theism, also known as Free Will Theism or Openness Theology, is the teaching that God does not know all things, especially with regard to the future. That is, He does not know some of the choices that people will make in the future because God either chooses not to know or because the future isn't knowable. At Southwood Community Church we reject the concept of Open God Theism as unbiblical and unorthodox. We believe that God is sovereign, eternal, and unconstrained by the boundaries of time. He perfectly knows all things, past, present and future. God is all-present and all-knowing. We do not permit the propagation of open theism at Southwood Community Church.

(Approved April 28, 2004)

©SOUTHWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH INC.