

Indiana Ministries Response to ChogAffirm.com

By Jeff Matas, State Pastor

On Friday, May 26, I was made aware of a website www.chogaffirm.com authored and driven by a group of people with ties to the Church of God (Anderson); most are lay people, but some are ordained pastors in our movement. They advocate for “ministers and lay people in the Church of God [to] have the freedom...to affirm gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer Christians in their lives, partnerships, and ministerial callings.” They call for the Church of God to confess and repent for the harm it has caused and continues to cause [within the LGBTQ community]. They call for “gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer Christians [to] be welcomed and recognized as full participants in the life and ministry of the Church of God at all levels.” The website has a signature page that states, “By our signatures, we affirm these beliefs and commit to positive action toward their fruition.” On the website’s “about” page, you will see a repudiation of the Church of God General Assembly resolutions that address homosexuality and same sex-marriage. There is also a stated opposition to the Indiana Ministries’ Code of Ethics (as it relates to the issue of LGBTQ) that every ordinand signs as well as every credentialed minister as part of the Periodic Ministry Update (PMU) that takes place every five years.

I am writing as a brother in Christ and as State Pastor of Indiana Ministries. **Indiana Ministries affirms the orthodox, historic teaching of Scripture regarding marriage, human sexuality, and sexual identity.**

First let’s talk about the biblical definition of marriage first declared in Genesis 1-2 and affirmed throughout Scripture.

Marriage is a one-flesh union between a male and a female (two sexually, biologically different persons). This is an essential part of the creation story. It is a union that is woven into the fabric of a much larger story of creation and redemption. According to N.T. Wright, Male/Female marriage “is a very profound reality at the heart of that whole story of God’s good creation.” Therefore, “the coming together of male plus female is itself a signpost pointing to the great complementarity of God’s whole creation, of heaven and earth belonging together.” To put it another way, biblical marriage is a load-bearing wall of the gospel and the church. If you pull it down, the entire house crumbles.

- Genesis 2:23, “Then the man said, ‘this at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’”
- Genesis 2:24, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

Jesus affirms the Genesis 1-2 definition of marriage that is designed by God exclusively for a man and a woman.

- Matthew 19:4, “At the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’ (Jesus quotes Gen 1:27)
- Matthew 19:5, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” (Jesus quotes Gen 2:24)

What does Scripture say about same sex relations? **It always condemns and prohibits them.**

- Leviticus 18:22, 20:13
- Romans 1:26-27
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-10
- 1 Timothy 1:9-10

Some progressive theologians assert that these passages don't apply to modern same-sex relationships and same-sex marriages, but they must contort themselves into an exegetical pretzel to make the attempt. *And they must hold that the vital sexual difference of male and female in marriage—as defined in Genesis 1-2 and affirmed by Jesus—is irrelevant.*

Whenever Scripture mentions same-sex relations, it always prohibits and condemns them. Always. It is the ethical issue of Scripture in which the Bible is very clear and consistent. As Christians from different viewpoints, denominations, and tribes, we might have a debate on divorce, whether a Christian serving their country in a time of war can kill, infant or adult baptism, election of the saints, women in ministry, spiritual gifts, end-times, but *this is one principle that for 2000 years Christians have agreed upon*. For over 2000 years there has been a global, multi-denominational agreement on the biblical definition of human sexuality and marriage. The Church through two millennia has fought and divided over a lot of issues (some mentioned above), but not this issue, until now. The agreement spanned denominations, movements, sects, geography, high church, low church, Western Church, Eastern Church, Roman Catholic Church, Charismatics, and Reformed.

Can we authentically love LGBTQ people and hold on to the truth of Scripture?

This is the question we should be wrestling with, and the answer is yes. Many affirming Christians believe the only way to truly love and honor the LGBTQ community and reach them with the gospel is to bend their theology to fit Western culture. In 2016, Andrew Marin published a book entitled, "Us Versus Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the LGBT People." Over a six-year period, he surveyed 1712 LGBT people. He included at least 21 individuals from every state (including Washington, D.C.), and asked them questions about their religious background. Within these surveys, there were over 20,000 individual qualitative results that were analyzed by an outside consulting firm led by Andrew Means of the University of Chicago. Since these issues are divisive and prone to bias, Marin invited two scholars from opposite ideologies to examine his methodology and results: Dr. J. Michael Bailly of Northwestern University (an atheist who is a proponent of LGBTQ issues and Dr. Mark Yarhouse of Regent University (a conservative Christian psychologist). To quote Marin, "They both stand behind me in the findings [of the study]."

Here's what Marin found:

- 83% of LGBT people were raised in the church
- 51% of LGBT people left their faith community after the age of 18
- **Only 3% said they left primarily because of the church's belief that same-sex marriage was wrong**

He also discovered that...

- 76% of LGBT people who left are open to returning to the church if the church makes some changes.
 - **What changes were they looking for?**
 - Feeling loved (12%)
 - Given time (9%)
 - No attempts to change their sexual orientation (6%)
 - Authenticity (5%)
 - Support of family and friends (4%)
- ***And only 8% said that the church would need to change their theology of marriage for them to return***

Marin concludes it is not the church's theology that has driven LGBT people away (by their own admission). It's been the church's failure to love and care for them.

It's been said that the Church of God movement places a high value on experience and that experience helps form our understanding of Scripture. But neither John Wesley nor D.S. Warner would argue that experience supersedes Scripture. If my experience contradicts Scripture, I don't reinterpret Scripture to fit my experience. Scripture is the lens through which I view and interpret my experience.

Along with experience, you will see the Holy Spirit referred to on ChogAffirm.com. The Holy Spirit is vital to the holiness tradition, but the Holy Spirit will never contradict God's Word. When the Holy Spirit leads, convicts, corrects, moves, teaches, the Spirit is always aligned with Scripture. Always. In fact, the Bible in 1 John 4:1 says "do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God." One of the primary tests is this: the Holy Spirit will never deny or contradict the Word of God. At the fall of man (Gen 3:1)—when Adam and Eve sin—the devil's original temptation was "Did God actually say...?" Test the spirits. Hold to the Word of God.

Indiana Ministries is a part of the Church of God movement. We are firmly in the holiness camp. I will say that again; we are a holiness people. Moving from the orthodox biblical definition of sexual identity and marriage is a line we will never cross. Never. To those in our movement that are embracing a different view and urging dialog, compromise, study, and an embrace of Western culture's view of sexual identity and marriage, I would remind you again—we are a holiness movement. For 2000 years the church of Jesus Christ has always been counter cultural. This is just another instance where we stand humbly and firmly holding to the truth of God's Word with the love of Christ. Yes, we are different than culture. We always have been and anytime we bend to fit culture, we cease to be the church and we become salt that loses its saltiness. We are good for nothing and are to be pitied.

To those ordained by Indiana Ministries who signed the ChogAffirm.com page indicating their support, your signature means that you embrace the Statement of Conviction that is front and center on ChogAffirm.com. It means that you reject the GA resolutions and the Code of Ethics

(that all ordained pastors are required to agree and sign). We need to have a conversation. Our Department of Ministries Services (DMS) is the group tasked by Indiana Ministries to do that, and the DMS will make the appropriate decisions following those conversations.