**Agreed Statement on Marriage**

**between the Evangelical Lutheran Church**

**and the Roman Catholic Church**

**in Papua New Guinea**

We make the commitment together to follow the teaching of Christ on marriage.

**We Confess Together:**

1. that human sexuality embraces all of what we are – our bodily and our spiritual being, our feelings and our choices. It is meant to support the gift of self to others and to allow human persons to cooperate with God in creating new life.
2. that the goodness of sexual activity is diminished and tends to become destructive when it is isolated from the vision of the full humanity to which God calls us. Thus we recognise the need to integrate sexuality within a person in a way that will nurture someone’s relationships both with other persons and with God.
3. that such integration calls for the exercise of the virtue of chastity which emphasizes the spiritual significance of our bodily existence (cf. *1 Thess 4:1-8; Gal 5:23; 1 Cor 6:9, 12-20*). Chastity refers to a responsible attitude toward sexual behaviour for both married and unmarried people. It promotes a self-control that sets a person free to be fully human. It is part of living the new life in Christ that calls for a radical break with the sin of sexual self-centeredness which inevitably leads to individual and social disintegration.

4. that fidelity in marriage and abstinence outside of marriage are humanly good and fulfilling ways to live.

5. that marriage is a vocation to holiness. Single people are also called to be holy. But marriage is a special call to come to God together as husband and wife. When God calls a woman and man to the married state and supports them in it, his love for them is creative, redemptive and sanctifying.

6. that marriage is a divine institution. It is a gift of God from creation. God said “it is not good for man to be alone” (*Genesis 2:18*) and so he created male and female human beings. “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one **flesh**” (*Genesis 2:24;* see *Matthew 19:6*). The two accounts of creation point to the two related purposes of marriage: giving life (to be fruitful, in *Genesis chapter 1*) and sharing love (to overcome loneliness, in *Genesis chapter 2*). When baptised Christians commit themselves to each other in marriage their relationship is a symbol of God’s relationship with us in Christ and of the love of Christ for his Church (*Eph. 5, 25*).

7. that the sexual activity of a married couple is a special expression of the fact that they have become “**two in one flesh**.” Sexual activity in marriage is holy. Through it married people are given the ability to cooperate with God in creating new life. It is in their openness to the procreation and nurturing of children that a man and a woman together share in the life-giving generosity of God (cf. *Gen 1:27-29*).

8. that it is the man and woman themselves who bring the marriage into being by formally accepting each other with an enduring, exclusive love and mutual self-giving. It is not enough to express a hope that the marriage will work out. The couple must have achieved a mutual consent to live as husband and wife until **the death of one or the other**. However unless there is a special exemption, both Churches require of their members that this act of accepting each other be witnessed by an official minister of the respective Church.

9. that married love is only possible between one man and one woman. Polygamy has been traditionally practiced for various reasons: to provide economic security for many women or to have children if a first wife is infertile. However polygamy and same-sex unions are clearly contrary to the teachings of Christ. “Every man should have his own wife and every woman should have her own husband” (*1 Cor 7:2*).

10. that a marriage commitment points to the love of Christ who bound himself in an irrevocable covenant to his Church and that therefore it is meant to be permanent and faithful. Jesus said that in the past married couples could divorce but that this is not the way it should be (*Mt 19:1-12*). In the beginning God took a man and a woman and made the “two become one flesh.” Man cannot break what God has united (*Mt 19:6*).

11. that God calls married couples to "responsible parenthood" that begins with the decision to accept parenthood and goes on to include the education, support and guidance of children: Children need to be loved especially by the parents who brought them to life. Parents need to be ready to make sacrifices to care for their children. They especially need to take responsibility for raising their children in the Christian faith.

**We Need to Discuss Further:**

our understanding of marriage as a divinely instituted means of grace, the morality of contraception, appropriate ways to respond to the HIV-AIDS pandemic, divorce, annulment and remarriage, factors such as consanguinity of a certain degree that invalidate a marriage, required permissions to have a Lutheran/Catholic mixed marriage, as well as the baptism of children of polygamous or broken marriages or of couples living together without marriage.

**We Declare Together:**

1. to give importance to a serious preparation for marriage clearly explaining its meaning, the duties of spouses to each other, the responsibilities of parents and, if relevant, the positive values and challenges of a mixed marriage. In the case of a marriage between a Lutheran and a Catholic, when possible, this preparation could be provided jointly by **a Catholic priest and a Lutheran pastor**. It should be made clear that marriage between baptized persons is much more than merely a “blessing” of little significance for through it their vows are changed into an expression of Christ’s love for the Church and strengthened to endure;

1. to actively encourage couples to be married in Church according to the Lutheran or Catholic rite. We need to help people realize that “living together in a sexual relationship” is not the same as “being married” in the full Christian sense. People sometimes delay a Church marriage in order to remain “free” to break a commitment or until after a child is born. We need to help people realize that the commitment of marriage is enriching and that infertile couples can express their married love and openness to life in creative and fulfilling ways. We should avoid encouraging marriage in Church before a couple has achieved a meaningful and mutual consent to marry.
2. to mutually recognize and respect each other’s rite of marriage as contained in the Lutheran and the Roman Catholic marriage rite as the form required for the validity of marriage.
3. that, in the case of mixed marriages as part of a preparation program for marriage, we encourage couples to discuss in which Church their marriage will be celebrated and reach an agreement about this with appropriate permissions and advice.
4. **that** we need to help people realize that marrying someone outside one’s Church is not the same as marrying someone outside one’s **clan**. Social affiliation with a particular culture or tribe is not the same as religious affiliation with a particular Church. In marriage cultural as well as religious differences can challenge a couple to respect one another. Lutherans and Catholics do not demand that a spouse convert to their Church; but, while committed to the truth of their faith, they respect the freedom of people to seek the truth, and especially religious truth, without compulsion;
5. **that** we recognize many factors that **have a bearing upon the validity of** a marriage, some from nature, some from civil law and some from Church law – for example, that the man and woman be of a certain age, that they not be closely related by blood, that they make their promises freely, that they intend to be faithful and have children and that they are free of various impediments. Baptism of **both** spouses is required for the validity of a Lutheran or Catholic marriage. Ordinarily a Catholic marriage must be in the presence of an ordained minister to be valid.
6. **that** since **Lutherans and Catholics** are asked, in cases of mixed marriages, to promise sincerely to do all in his or her power to see that the children of the marriage be baptized in their respective Churches, they be invited and encouraged to discuss the baptism and education of the children they will have, and where possible, come to an agreement on this question before marriage;
7. **that** permission of the Bishop of the Catholic partner is to be sought if the marriage will be done in the Lutheran Church. Similarly permission of the pastor of the Lutheran partner is to be sought if the marriage will be done in the Catholic Church;
8. **that** in communities where bride price is required Church marriage will normally be celebrated only after reasonable customary requirements are agreed upon, if not fulfilled, by both parties. The original intention of bride price as a mutual exchange to express and insure the stability of a marriage is often lost and leads to an abuse of this tradition. In some places the Church marriage itself is understood to do what bride price had done in the tradition – to strengthen the marriage bond;
9. **that** to emphasis the unity of marriage it is not permitted to have two separate religious services in which the exchange of consent would be expressed twice or even one service which would celebrate two such exchanges of consent jointly by having the Lutheran and Catholic ministers together asking for the consent or successively one after the other;
10. **that** with the previous authorisation of their respective authorities a Catholic priest or deacon may participate in a mixed marriage in the Lutheran rite, similarly a Lutheran minister or pastor may participate in a mixed marriage in the Catholic rite. In this case there is to be only one ceremony in which the presiding minister receives the marriage vows. At the invitation of the celebrant the minister of the other Church may offer appropriate prayers, read from the Scriptures, give a brief exhortation and bless the couple;
11. **that** some of our ministers, Catholic and Lutheran, are to be registered with the government as authorized celebrants of marriage so that couples can choose, if they want, to have their marriages celebrated in a way that is civilly recognized. Such statutory marriages provide additional rights to both husband and wife. However, Papua New Guinea law recognizes as lawful marriages performed according to the prevailing customs of one or both of the parties to the marriage and requires that husbands of these marriages who abandon their wives and children pay maintenance. Couples should be instructed about the legal implications of the form of marriage they choose.
12. **that** marriages witnessed by our respective ministers are to be duly **recorded** in the proper registry books, and certificates of marriage delivered to all who have been married. The presentation of the said certificate of marriage shall be deemed sufficient evidence of the fact and validity of marriage. We agree, in cases of real doubt to consult each other in these matters.
13. **that** although a mixed marriage may present difficulties to the couples themselves, pastoral care and help is to be extended to them emphasizing the positive aspects of what the couples share together as Christians in the life of grace, in faith, hope and love, along with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit.
14. **that** prudence is required to balance a respect for culture with a readiness to challenge traditions when appropriate. In particular we need to proclaim that faithful monogamous marriage and an open and respectful family life are humanly enriching and divinely graced.
15. **that**, although certain conditions must be met for baptized **Lutherans and Catholics** to be validly married, a traditional or government marriage between unbaptized persons is considered a **valid** marriage **although it could be dissolved**. However when a couple is baptized the marriage bond takes on a new meaning as a sign of Christ’s love for his Church and is sanctified by the Word of God **in order to greatly facilitate** fidelity and mutual forgiveness. In a Catholic understanding, this means that when a couple is baptized and become validly married, their marriage bond is unbreakable**. When a baptized Catholic marries an unbaptized person, however, the marriage while valid is not sacramental and could be dissolved. In a Catholic understanding,** a Church marriage of persons baptized in other Christian Churches is **valid and sometimes unbreakable**.
16. **that** when a separation or annulment is required as a last resort and when one of the parties does not attempt a remarriage, he or she may continue to receive the Eucharist. People publicly living in a polygamous marriage or same sex union should not receive the Eucharist. However even when people are not permitted to receive the Eucharist they should be encouraged to continue to come to Church and to join the community in prayer. In particular those who have been divorced and remarried should be invited to continue to come to Church. For Catholics, when an apparent marriage is annulled and declared invalid, both partners are in fact unmarried and therefore are free to marry. However partners in a valid marriage who have separated are not free to marry.
17. **that** children of a polygamous marriage may be baptized. If a man with many wives reconfirms his marriage to one wife, abstains from sexual intercourse with the other wives while continuing to take responsibility for their maintenance, or if in fact all of his other wives have died, he could be baptized and receive the Eucharist.
18. **that** couples be encouraged to talk through their problems with the assistance of Church personnel (*cf Mt 18:15-17*). Qualified persons should be trained to provide marriage counselling in a Melanesian context in an effort to salvage troubled marriages and to eliminate domestic violence.

In testimony thereof, we affix our signatures this \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in the year of our Lord

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

For the Evangelical Lutheran Church in PNG

For the Roman Catholic Church in PNG