

Fellowship, relationship and sexuality:

Policy document on relationship ethics
The Norwegian Mission Society 2008

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Preface

During discussions concerning the Board's three-year report to the General Assembly in Trondheim in 2005, a question arose about NMS' handling of the homosexuality issue. The General Assembly passed a motion asking the Board to present an assessment of the organization's understanding and handling of the questions surrounding relationship issues for the next General Assembly, in Bergen in 2008.

Against this background, the Board established a working group that was tasked with presenting a suggested new policy document on relationship ethics for NMS (LS-45/05, and AU-119/06).

The Board established a working group consisting of Kjetil Aano (chair), Anne Karin Kristensen, Bård Mæland, Sølvi Rødsand and Bjarte Thorsen.

The group has met seven times. The group has interpreted its mandate fairly broadly, and has chosen to present a document on relationship ethics in which a number of important questions are touched on.

The Board's administrative committee (*Arbeidsutvalget*) set out the following procedure for treatment of this document at their meeting on April 18, this year (AU-17/07):

1. The Board's administrative committee presents its suggested procedure to the Board in June 2007. At that point the Board decides on the final version of the document to be presented to the Council Meeting (*Rådsmøtet*).
2. The Council Meeting treats the document as an item on its agenda and may advise the Board.
3. The Board approves the policy document on relationship ethics in December (2007).
4. The document is addressed in the Board's three-year report, and is attached to it as an appendix.

(The Board may obviously decide on a different procedure for treatment in their meeting in June 2007.)

This suggested procedure means that the task of the General Assembly in Bergen in 2008 will be to discuss whether or not the Assembly endorses the document. Decisions may obviously be made concerning changes, but the procedure does not assume that the General Assembly will discuss individual phrases or wording in the text.

In their meeting on March 24, 2007, the Board of NMS stated that:

From time to time, all organizations need to have a thorough discussion around their standpoints, and what the organizational consequences of those standpoints are. At the upcoming General Assembly in Bergen in 2008 we will have several important items for discussion. One of these is the organizational policy on relationship ethics, which also includes the issue of homosexual relationships.

This is the task that the working group has sought to carry out to the best of its ability. It has been an exciting and good process, and the group hopes that this document may contribute to removing unnecessary questioning of what NMS' standpoints are and how NMS will carry out its standpoints in practice, while at the same time contributing to carrying forward a sound, transparent profile, which has always been one of the characteristic features of NMS.

Stavanger, May 29, 2007,

Kjetil Aano,
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Chapter 1: An important question

Background

The entire Christian church is currently engaged in a conversation about sexuality. The issue that more than any other has triggered this conversation, is the question of how to think about and relate to homosexuality.

Sexuality is an important question, independently of this debate. A human being is a sexual being, and as Christians we believe that our sexuality is a divine gift. It is our duty as human beings to employ this gift in a good and responsible way. Our ways of relating to and speaking about sexuality have, however, varied strongly throughout the history of the church. At times the sexual urge has almost been viewed as a cardinal sin. This was often coupled with a certain degree of taboo surrounding the subject. Today there is little of this taboo left – the situation is rather the opposite, many would claim – and the understanding of what is right and wrong in our dealing with our sexuality has changed considerably.

In a worldwide perspective, the open conversation that to some degree characterises our Nordic tradition is still an exception. In many societies and in many churches sexuality is still a taboo theme that is hardly talked about. On the surface, many societies and cultures seem significantly less sex-fixated than our current Western societies. On closer inspection of the subject matter, however, one often discovers a somewhat different picture.

The Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) wishes to be seen as an ethically aware organization that acts both responsibly and consistently in questions surrounding relationships and sexuality, and that has clear expectations of its staff. It is therefore important for us to put forward our understanding of those challenges that we, in our fellowship and as an organization, are faced with today. This understanding needs, essentially, to be expressed as part of three relations:

- In relation to individuals, employees, and elected representatives in NMS.
- In relation to the church: locally in relation to the Church of Norway and our other partner churches in Norway, and globally in relation to all those churches and organizations that we work with.
- In relation to the society that we are a part of, locally and globally. In this document the global perspective is significant. It is significant both because of a general ethical awareness that we live in a global world, and because of the fact that NMS will have to relate to churches that on the whole have a very restricted approach to currently debated issues.

During the past few decades, different aspects of relationship ethics have been discussed both in society and in the church. A couple of decades ago, questions around divorce and remarriage were voiced most frequently. But during the past few years the debate has become dominated by the issue of homosexuality. In this document we wish to address these questions and at the same time to express our stance on a range of other questions that are pertinent to our work.

Many of the questions are relevant both to Norwegian church life and to our partner churches. Two subjects – challenges surrounding the encounters with polygamy and HIV/AIDS – are certainly especially relevant in relation to our partner churches, but they also have relevance for us in Norway. Therefore they are included in this document.

About this document

There may be reason to emphasise that reflection and guidance on relationship ethics is not one of the main duties of our organization. Nevertheless this area touches on key questions, both in principle and in practice. It is therefore important for NMS, through this document, to show how our organization will navigate in these matters, and to give unambiguous and clear signals.

As we in NMS engage with these questions, we do so in order to build a basis for what is our primary focus: To be a global mission organization.

This document therefore has the following three aims:

1. To *present* what we perceive to be a foundational and trustworthy Christian reflection on relationships and sexuality, against the backdrop of the challenges that we face both at home and globally.
2. To *comment* on specific questions that are pertinent today, and in which an organizational standpoint is called for. This occurs chiefly along two fronts:
 - a. Firstly, in our work in Norway, when we give ethical guidance, when we teach at our institutions, and when we recruit people for a variety of duties in our organization.
 - b. And secondly, in relation to our partner churches and organizations and their practice.
3. To give some *guidelines* that will steer the practice that NMS will choose to follow in the matters in question.

Chapter 2: Christian faith, human worth and sexuality

Based on Scripture and confessional principles, and in communication with culture and context

The Bible and the confessional texts of the Church of Norway form the basis for NMS' ethical thinking. This is in line with our organizational constitution, which states that "The Norwegian Mission Society is held answerable to the Holy Scriptures and the confessional texts of the Church of Norway" (present constitution, §4).

On this basis, further ethical reflection will have to occur in close contact with people and groups of people within a specific social, political or cultural context. Both in our own country and in our partner churches, our teaching, our standpoints and our practice develop as the word and message of the Bible are confronted with living culture in a local context. In this dialectic between the text and the context, we still believe that the Holy Spirit leads us in our efforts to find a right way to shape a genuinely Christian responsibility when it comes to ethical matters.

Human worth and sexuality

The Bible is clear in its depiction of human beings as gendered beings. Sexuality is a part of the human constitution, and thus has both integral worth and worth related to certain purposes: The creation accounts make it evident that it is in line with the will of the creator for the created to multiply and fill the earth. Sexuality and sexual acts are therefore in line with the creator's intention regarding his creation.

The idea of human worth runs deep in the Christian faith, and entails that all human beings have an integral worth that gives each individual human an infinitely high value, and equal value, regardless of other striking differences. In many cultures, marriage and fertility are elevated to become the meaning of life itself, and human worth is practically fulfilled through marriage and descendants. The Bible does not draw this kind of picture. The words and example of both Paul and Jesus show clearly that the worth of a human being is independent of whether the person lives in marriage or as single, whether the person has descendants or not.

It is equally critical to underline that human beings are gendered beings independent of what type of family situation they are living in. Sexuality is a part of being human, and gender is therefore a powerful aspect of human existence that gives meaning and shapes identity.

Security and vulnerability

Security and vulnerability are fundamental features of human life. These features also provide a background for the ethical guidance of the Bible when it comes to sexuality.

Both the Bible and the church have always held forth that human beings, in their self-expression, must relate to certain frameworks – also when it comes to sexuality. This desire to regulate can be understood through a dual lens. On the one hand, it confirms that even a good gift from God needs to be regulated in order to be stimulated. Positive realization of the gift of sexuality requires what may be called supportive help from certain ideals and frameworks. This relates to an outer aspect (a framework), but also to an inner aspect in which overarching Christian ideals such as self-control, patience, respect, sacrifice and faithfulness must be held to be authoritative in order for a relationship to unfold and to be resilient, and for the sexual part to be experienced as good. The Bible's words on marriage and relationships can be read as confirmation of this.

The second perspective has to do with a realistic assessment of how good things can be used for the purposes of evil, and attention to exploitation and assault demand a heightened awareness, not least in an organization that wishes to stand by its high ideals concerning relationships and sexuality.

There are still many traditions that oppress women, which mean that women are not in control of their own bodies, or do not have rights and protection in encounters with male power. In this perspective the work against sexual exploitation of power becomes key, whether it has to do with outright assaults or with the abuse of a superior position in order to gain sexual favours. In a Christian organization that administers spiritual power and that in addition exists in a world where both economic and other goods are unevenly distributed, acute awareness around this issue is required. NMS will have clear-cut expectations when it comes to ethical responsibility, and has clear guidelines for how such cases are to be treated and procedures to prevent unnecessary damage (cf. “Sexual abuses: Preventative plan and guidelines for NMS”).

In other words, the church wishes to set clear boundaries around sexual expression in order to affirm and stimulate its positive function for the individual, the family and society, and at the same time to prevent what is good from being turned into its opposite. This responds clearly to the nature of being human, which is both secure and vulnerable.

Marriage

This duality can be applied to and articulated through marriage: to create security and protection for human sexuality in the relationship between a man and a woman. Marriage is God’s good arrangement, created so that the human need for security can be met through the ethical demands of faithfulness, honesty, obligation and altruism. At the same time, its purpose is to reduce the opportunities for misuse of sexuality.

Based on this perspective, the content of an ethically responsible marriage is just as important as the framework. A good arrangement such as marriage can also evolve into its opposite. What was intended to be a safe framework around two people’s striving to show love and to grow in mutual care and intimacy, can become a prison.

Sexuality and shame

Traditionally, sexuality has often been associated with shame, and therefore covered over and insufficiently talked about and discussed. This is hardly the case in our society today.

Nevertheless, sexuality is coupled with shame in our days too. Shame follows those who are not able to live up to the expectations of the church and/or of society, even though these expectations to some degree can pull one in very different directions. This can be the case when one falls short of the ideals of the church concerning both the content and the framework, but also when one does not live up to attitudes towards relationships and sexuality in which unbounded freedom and boundary-crossing expressions stand out as leading ideals.

In a mirror

Faced with questions surrounding relationships and sexuality – as in many other ethical matters – we are forced to engage in theological and ethical reflection. NMS works across different cultures. Our experience of encounters with cultures that are very different from our own has allowed us to recognise that there are other ways to arrange relationships, and that these ways can have other and important qualities. This shows that good solutions are often to be found at the interface between ideals and human reality.

In some cases the answers are simple and can be arrived at straightforwardly, but not always. Most of us have experienced divorce in our close family or social circle. Then one might very well be of the opinion that this ought not to happen, but what do we do when it actually does happen?

We are often forced to discuss these matters from different sides and perspectives, with a view to choosing between different options for action and ways forward. Such choices are difficult and demand empathy, care, decisiveness and wisdom. Sometimes we find that some of the roads are closed to us, and often we wonder what God's thoughts actually are concerning what is best for us humans. To be in the midst of this process of consideration demands both willingness to be faithful to the sources regarding righteous life and, at the same time, humility and wisdom in the encounter with a complex world.

(Bible citations...)

Chapter 3: Between ideals and reality

Relationship ideals and relationship reality in society

Our cultural context has changed significantly in a short period of time. There have been great transformations in people's understanding of themselves and their surroundings. This also applies to questions around relationships, what it means to be human, and sexuality. Some of this has already been mentioned above.

Christian ethics is not meant to *adjust* to the thoughts of the times. But ethical thinking within the framework of the Christian faith must always communicate with and let itself be challenged by contemporary life. However, common sense and experience are neither infallible nor unambiguous. Christian ethics must therefore aspire to understand both the times and God's word.

In our times, various images and ideals concerning relationships fight for our endorsement. These images or 'ideals' live side by side, even though in many ways they are mutually exclusive. As members of our Western societies we are bombarded with impressions related to each of them, all the time. We can classify these images as follows:

Relationship as eternal frame or own construction? The dream about a good, lifelong relationship with the one you love and are loved by, almost seems to exist independently of time and place. While this dream previously represented something eternal and divinely ordained, people today see themselves as more active in relation to creating not just the content of the relationship, but also its framework. There is reason to see this area in our contemporary society as one where a lot of room is given to new interpretations of roles and frameworks, and experimentation. Not everyone perceives this trend, in which accountability for relationships and sexual borders becomes their own, as an expression of freedom or responsibility.

If this depiction is accurate, it entails a transition from an earlier collectivism, where frameworks and roles were defined by tradition and society, to an individualism where each individual is responsible for his or her own choices, attitudes and construction of his or her life and relationships. Rightly understood one might say that this notion has been a precondition for the entire Western ideal of love and marriage. The individual's freedom and demand to be able to choose his or her own framework for relationships, and to do things in his or her own way, here and now, seems to mean that the collected experience and wisdom of the past is being lost. Its insight regarding the significance of clear boundaries and cultural models is gone. This is not to say that everything was better before. But the current experimentation and fragmentation in relation to how to arrange relationships places a great responsibility on the individual, in addition to putting pressure on each person to make up their own model and their own way of living and relating.

Back to traditional values? While this last point is strongly prevalent in certain circles (though apparently across age groups), there has also been a certain return to traditional values such as commitment, faithfulness and perseverance. We see this both in the great weight that is placed on traditions surrounding entering into marriage, and in the development of co-habitation into a resemblance of marriage and almost into a preparation for marriage (cf. engagement). It will be important to recognize the morally upstanding will that people have to fidelity, honesty, commitment, sacrifice, etc., even though marriage is not fully established as the framework for the relationship until a while later. Such attitudes can serve as protection against an over-emphasis on individualism, and at the same time give space for sexuality within certain (albeit often indistinctly defined) boundaries.

Still, we must highlight that one cannot avoid also asking for frameworks for a relationship. Such good attitudes do not sufficiently take into account the potential for evil both in individual human beings and in the interaction between them. The leading question should be: What is the paramount good framework for those parts of life where we are perhaps most vulnerable? Having said that, it is also appropriate to say that many people, against the background of the pain of their parents' divorce, will be reluctant to invest too much themselves when arranging their own relationship. NMS also wishes to be a companion for people who have to go the extra distance in order to get close to entering into marriage.

Relationships and sexuality as consumerism? A focus on the content of a relationship can direct one towards marriage and fellowship. However, it can also introduce a third aspect of relationships, which our own times are certainly marked by: Relationships as *consumerism*. Here the trend of individualism has been pushed to its limits, and a relationship degenerates into a product of dysfunctional cultural tendencies. The loved one is not meant to be loved until death do us part, but until the news value has expired. This type of engagement with relationships and sexuality is destructive both for individual human beings and for society. Thus the conditions both for making one's own responsible decisions, and for taking responsibility for society, are rapidly lost.

A consumerist attitude toward relationships can manifest itself in different ways; ranging from relationships as shifting alliances for certain periods, to a pure mutual use of physical intimacy as a substitute for the fellowship and lasting intimacy that is missing. Again, this is tied to a considerable shift of emphasis in terms of both contents and framework. The framework no longer functions to prolong or support the relationship, and the content that is demanded in such a relationship becomes corruptive of the relation.

A swift analysis of our own times thus gives a multifaceted picture. The challenge for NMS is to promote attitudes, ideals and frameworks that can both support and secure individual sexuality, while at the same time helping to sustain relationships between people. Many of the frameworks and ideals will gain recognition and respect, many will not. This will not least be the case in discussions concerning frameworks for relationships (cf. co-habitation and homosexuality). Nevertheless, it will be the task of NMS to hold forth ideals and attitudes that are appropriate, regardless of the relationship status one chooses.

NMS and relationships: A place for growth

Sustainable relationships are therefore important to NMS. NMS wishes to be a place that strengthens and supports good relationships, and will promote initiatives and work to give opportunities for making responsible ethical decisions. In our interaction with staff, elected representatives, and partner churches, we wish to contribute towards strengthening ethically responsible relationships, in which high ideals come together with everyday reality, and where missteps do not lead to ruptures, but through acknowledgement, confession and support lead to restoration in the fellowship.

High ideals for relationships

We have taken a high ideal for relationships as our starting point. This springs out of God's goodness. Our ability to love is a partial mirror of God's love. To be created in the image of God is reflected, amongst other things, in love itself and in relationships of love. Therefore, love and sexuality are a deep part of our identity and our dreams, and they express a divinely ordained side of being human.

Relationships as risk projects: What can NMS contribute as an employer?

A relationship is always a risk project. In our communications we therefore seek to strengthen initiatives that are supportive of good relationship arrangements. In our recruitment practices and in our procedures for staff and volunteers, we will as an organization seek good and constructive arrangements that bolster people's ability to be in relationships. The organization will have a work climate where people experience that they are cared for, and where there is room for the expression and growth of everyone, regardless of which family situation they are in.

In NMS we wish to communicate clearly regarding frameworks and boundaries for acceptable behaviour, and we will be clear that breach of these boundaries may have consequences. Cases concerning the abuse of status, position or power are especially serious.

NMS wishes to be an organization that is unambiguous about the responsibilities of its staff, but that also takes on its responsibility as an employer. This also entails involvement in the domestic situation of our employees.

At the same time, NMS ought to be a place with room to express joy and despair, and we will have good procedures for follow-up of persons in strenuous relationship situations. We will give supportive guidance, and will support processes that foster healing.

Chapter 4: Some particular and current challenges

Polygamy

Polygamy has until recently not been a relevant problem in Norway. But lately the issue has become relevant also in our society. In addition, NMS works in a number of cultures where polygamy has been and is an established tradition.

NMS organized a comprehensive discussion of this question in 1982. The conclusion was that the Bible clearly points to monogamous marriage between a man and a woman as the ethically desirable. Therefore NMS has on the whole recommended that churches where this has been relevant should not accept that Christians enter into polygamous marriages.

This is our primary standpoint, while at the same time we are aware of the following circumstances: It takes a long time to change perceptions and long-established arrangements. And, in addition, rapid transformations of family structures can have vast, unintended consequences. In our dialogue with partner churches we need to be aware that no arrangements are solely personal, but always carry inter-personal and social consequences. There may be reason to use an approach based on cultural relativism in questions concerning arrangements.

At the same time we will always emphasise that lifelong, monogamous marriage is what expresses a Christian view of what it means to be human and a Christian ethical ideal. We are convinced that the communication of a Christian view of what it means to be human, which highlights the equality of both spouses, and social development, will in most places over time have the result of undermining the ground for polygamous marriages.

This perspective ought also to be taken as a guide in our society. We are of the opinion that there are no grounds for introducing legal polygamy in our society. Our society does not have the cultural, economic or historical conditions for introducing this.

Co-habitation

Co-habitation is an imprecise term that includes a range of relationship arrangements, from more random and short-lived relationship situations to an agreed and arranged relationship, sometimes also with a written contract.

We have commented above on the substance of more random co-habitation and brief affairs. A more arranged form of co-habitation is today coming to seem more and more like a type of engagement, which in many cases turns into marriage after a while. Many co-habitation relationships also last for a lifetime, and in other cases co-habitation is chosen against the background of a wrecked marriage. Co-habitation must, in other words, be given nuanced ethical consideration.

NMS' view is that marriage is the ethically most desirable and most justifiable expression of mutual love. From a theological perspective it can be claimed that marriage is, on the one hand, an expression of the couple's unreserved devotion and complete solidarity, and on the other hand, the expression of a social arrangement that has a public dimension and that involves both family and society.

We will therefore in our teaching and counselling point to marriage as God's good arrangement for the relationship between two people who love each other. While our approach to this issue will be based on a holistic assessment, this point will serve as a guideline for our recruitment practices and will be significant for our elected representatives.

Divorce and remarriage

In all societies and in all periods, relationship ruptures have occurred. Also the Bible bears witness that this is a common problem. The Old Testament contains detailed regulations for divorce. Jesus shows great insight and empathy regarding this question in his teaching.

The lifelong relationship between a woman and a man is both an intention for creation and an ethical ideal. Jesus reinforces this requirement in his teaching.

In NMS, we will through our practices emphasise that lifelong marriage between a woman and a man is the best framework for a relationship, and that this best expresses the will of the creator for how human beings ought to arrange their relationships. Concrete initiatives to strengthen the marriages of staff and co-workers are important.

Nevertheless we acknowledge that we do not live in an ideal world, and that relationship ruptures will occur. In our church practices and ethical guidance we therefore wish to use a holistic approach toward the question of divorce and remarriage. Those who are divorced can be hired in NMS, also if they are remarried. At the same time we wish, in situations where this is a relevant problem, to use the time necessary for a defensible process in which we have procedures that uphold the needs and rights of all the parties involved.

Homosexuality

Christian ethics has – both on the grounds of creational theology and on the basis of Paul’s warnings – maintained that it is the lifelong marriage between two persons of opposite gender that constitutes the framework for sexual life. This is a standpoint that NMS still holds. This has consequences for our guidance and teaching. It entails that for our positions both in Norway and as missionaries, whether for our own work or for work with other churches, we recruit people who live in line with our ethical ideal on this point, and who are loyal to NMS’ standpoint. This will also be a guideline for our elected representatives.

At the same time we distance ourselves from the stigmatisation of people who are homosexual, and we appreciate that homosexuals, on an equal level with everyone else, are equipped with both love’s longings and the ability to love. Without doubt we see many of the same qualities in homosexual relationships as in heterosexual ones, but we nevertheless feel ourselves confined by the boundaries for sexuality and relationships that we read of in Scripture.

Furthermore we acknowledge that in our society, in our church and among NMS staff and elected representatives, there are people with different views on the question of homosexual relationships. This creates an obvious tension. We seek to live with this by letting NMS as an organization stand for one view and by maintaining a consistent recruitment practice, at the same time as we openly invite people to participate in our work regardless of which standpoint they might hold in this matter.

HIV/AIDS as a challenge from an ethical perspective

HIV/AIDS is a disease. A discussion about HIV/AIDS belongs in this document because ultimately it has to do with *ethics* and with how the fellowship functions. HIV/AIDS has challenged our ways of thinking and speaking about sexuality.

In work on HIV/AIDS, three aspects need to be viewed together: Protection, attitudes and treatment. These all have strong ethical dimensions.

Protection: Since HIV/AIDS is a disease that is primarily transmitted sexually, advice regarding protection and the danger of infection is important. A strategy called ABC has been developed: A stands for ‘*Abstain*’. People who abstain sexually are not infected. B stands for ‘*Be*

faithful. When both partners are faithful to each other, they are not infected. C stands for 'Condomise' (use condoms).

In addition to this approach targeted at individuals, we also need to include a power analysis. The battle against HIV/AIDS cannot be won without a confrontation with and change in traditions that oppress women and that mean that many women are not in control of their own body, and therefore do not have the power to protect themselves. In addition there is the widespread use of sex as a means to coercion.

Here the churches are encouraged to speak explicitly both about the ethical recommendation, and about the next best solution. In light of the gravity of the situation, and not least in view of cultural factors tied to sexual practice, many churches have taken up this model, without experiencing that they are compromising their ethical conviction. NMS too supports this approach.

Attitudes: The second aspect is that HIV/AIDS in many ways appears to be the leprosy of our times. Those who are struck by this disease become stigmatised. This is both unethical and un-Biblical. NMS will play a part in combating the stigmatisation, and will consciously work with the aim that people who have been struck by such a life-threatening and serious disease, completely independently of the reason for the infection, should be met with respect and treated with dignity through the entire process of the illness.

Treatment: The right to medication at an affordable price, and the world's obligation to share goods in a different way so that AIDS patients in poor countries also get access to the treatments that actually exist, are, in addition to being economic and political issues, also ethical demands. The fight against HIV/AIDS is also about just systems and a better distribution.

If staff in NMS and/or our partner churches are struck by HIV/AIDS, they need both to be held ethically accountable for their decisions, at the same time as they need to receive treatment in line with the points mentioned above.

The AIDS epidemic pushes us to reflect ethically on fellowship, sexuality and relationships, and demonstrates that there are connections between our attitudes to the big ethical and relational questions and our attitudes and actions in encounter with people in a different life situation than ours.

Chapter 5: Outlook

In this document we have given an account of our understanding of relationships and relationship ethics. We have discussed how NMS as employer can lay the basis for furthering good attitudes and right actions. And we have stated clearly what NMS' stance and position is.

How disagreement in these matters ought to be handled within the Christian church is one among several big and difficult questions. In NMS we recognise that there is *in fact* disagreement, in society, in the church and also in our organization. This does not prevent us from putting forward clear guidelines and clear-cut convictions.

This is important in relation to our partner churches. We are constantly challenged about our standpoint. We give open accounts of it. At the same time, we challenge our partner churches on other points that also have to do with relationship ethics.

A further question concerns how we relate to people who publicly stand for a different view than NMS. The implication of this document is that we neither can nor will seek to avoid contact with people who hold different standpoints than us. In relation to the institutions of the Church of Norway, this is in line with the decision of the Board in 1996, in which it is underlined that NMS will cooperate with both Bishops and congregations regardless of their point of view in the homosexuality debate. This is a key standpoint that we wish to carry forward, as also confirmed by the decision of the Board on March 24, 2007, which states:

A premise for this work is that it is possible to live in the same church and to work for mission without having the exact same views on homosexuality.

However, this must simultaneously be balanced against the important clarification that the Board noted in the same decision:

It is nevertheless important to underline that there is a limit to what the fellowship can bear, and that it is possible to frame this question in such a way that it can take on the characteristics of an issue that may split the church.

It is within this field of tension that we as NMS seek to be true to our foundations and to our mission:

By being a builder of bridges in words and action, we will openly hold up the vision of a living, acting and missional church in all countries. We do this while we faithfully and defiantly hold on to our prayer that God must let his kingdom come.

Chapter 6: Implications

Against the background of the guidelines drawn up in this document, and in order to develop practices that are as similar as possible, we suggest the following procedure:

1. Those who apply for positions or are nominated to be elected representatives in the decision-making bodies of the organization, are made acquainted with NMS' principles in matters related to relationship ethics.
2. NMS requires that the job candidate or nominee for election themselves draw attention to any circumstances, against the background of this document, that NMS ought to know about.
3. If information is put forward that may carry implications for recruitment/election, this will be addressed as part of the normal administrative procedure by the person responsible for the unit in question.
4. In cases of doubt the General Secretary should be consulted before a final decision regarding recruitment/election is taken by the recruiting or responsible administrative body.
5. A different set of administrative procedures are used for the School of Mission and Theology and the Centre for Intercultural Communication (SIK).
6. Similar procedures are used if situations occur where doubt is raised about whether an employee or elected representative can continue in their service for NMS because of circumstances relating to their relationships.
7. If information is put forward regarding possible assault or sexual abuse of status or position, the procedures to be followed are detailed in the document: "Sexual abuses: Preventative plan and guidelines for NMS".