

World Vision on the 'Same-Sex Unions' Controversy

Below is a letter from World Vision to *Charisma* Executive Editor Troy Anderson, explaining the reasons the organization reverted its recent policy of accepting employees in same-sex marriages.

Dear Troy,

Thanks for this opportunity to share a few thoughts as you prepare this article for *Charisma* readers on World Vision's experiences over the last year.

First, let me briefly share with you about the policy change World Vision originally made. Like nearly every other church and ministry, World Vision faced the question of how to respond to the rapidly changing landscape within the law and the broader church with regard to the issue of same-sex unions. As a multidenominational Christian organization that has employees from many denominations, we sought to find a place of unity beyond the terrible divisiveness of this issue. We therefore changed our employee conduct policy, which forbids sexual conduct outside of marriage for all employees, so that an employee who affirmed our statement of faith in Jesus Christ and had entered into a same-sex union sanctioned by their church, would not be disqualified from employment. At the same time we clearly stated that we, as an organization, believed biblical marriage to be the union of one man and one woman and that we were in no way endorsing same sex unions.

Clearly, we made a mistake. Not only did we fail to create unity, we actually created further division and sent a confusing message to our partners and supporters about our identity as a Christian ministry. We were grieved to see the

reaction we had provoked. Yet we are thankful for many of our closest partners—churches, ministries, pastors, and donors—who lovingly pointed out to us how we had made a mistake. We had endorsed a conduct policy that was inconsistent with our beliefs. Within 48 hours of the controversy, our board met and voted to reverse the policy, asking forgiveness for the mistake we had made.

Going forward, we have already made numerous changes to further affirm our Christian identity and ensure that future mistakes will be avoided. We have added new board members, including Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, and Jerry White, president emeritus of the Navigators International. Every board member has affirmed in writing that marriage is a biblical covenant between a man and a woman. And we have new board and management decision-making processes designed to prevent such mistakes in the future.

I have formed a Ministry Advisory Council to allow me and my board to lean on the wisdom of other Christian leaders. That board includes pastors like John Ortberg (Menlo Park Presbyterian), John Jenkins (First Baptist Glenarden), Gary Walter (president of the Evangelical Covenant Church), and Jo Anne Lyon (general superintendent of the Wesleyan Church). In addition, I have formed a peer advisory council, with people like Jim Daly of Focus on the Family and Alec Hill of InterVarsity.

Over the last several months, I have had nearly a dozen meetings with groups of pastors in cities across the country to discuss this issue but also to lift up the crucial kingdom work of World Vision in our increasingly troubled world. I am thankful that many of their private responses reflect the thoughts shared publicly by other Christian leaders. As George Wood of the Assemblies of God said, “The controversy with World Vision has been resolved. Let us, therefore, move forward together in service to the last, the lost, and the

least who are loved by Jesus Christ!" And Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, who said at a marriage conference: "The World Vision controversy showed us some really commendable things about World Vision ... They handled it exactly the way you would hope that anyone would handle controversy."

At the end of the day, I've learned this: Every ministry needs to clearly define its mission and values so that the public can decide who they want to support. In our attempt to seek unity we allowed others outside of World Vision to define us instead of clearly defining ourselves. It was a mistake. We have learned a painful lesson but are moving forward believing that the Lord has entrusted us with a critical and strategic kingdom mission and confident that he will equip us to accomplish it.

Sincerely,

Richard Stearns