

board of faith and life

statement on divorce and leadership ministry

A. Affirmations

1. Marriage was instituted and sanctified by God as part of His creative design for men and women. Marriage is a covenant relationship that involves a lifelong commitment between a husband and wife. The marriage covenant reflects the relationship between Christ and the church. Healthy marriages are characterized by love and respect, and the constant effort to become one in spirit, purpose and body.
2. The church plays an important role in building healthy marriages. Each local church body bears some responsibility to encourage and support marriage relationships through prayer, support, affirmation, mentoring and counselling as required.
3. The marriage relationship is a sacred covenant which can be broken by sinful acts, such as marital unfaithfulness and abuse, which in turn can lead to divorce. The disunity that can lead to an unhealthy or broken marriage covenant is a sin that reaches deep into families and extended families and the church community. All efforts should be made to bring reconciliation wherever possible.
4. Divorce is a forgivable sin. Christ invites sinners to find forgiveness through repentance. When there is genuine repentance for sin(s) that led to and resulted in divorce, the repentant sinner will find forgiveness. As a church we have responsibility to help facilitate forgiveness and restoration to full fellowship and service in a variety of ministries.
5. The qualifications for leadership ministry, such as pastors, elders and instructors in our theological institutions, is set higher than it is for others (James 3:1; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:6; 1 Peter 5:3).

B. The reality of divorce

1. We recognize that divorce is a growing problem within the Christian community. Divorce within the church threatens the unity of the body of Christ and therefore our witness before the watching world.
2. The Christian community must work at building strong marriages. However, when a marriage fails, the Christian community must help those who have gone through a divorce experience to find restoration and healing in all their relationships.

C. Divorce and leadership ministry guidelines

1. An individual who has experienced a breakdown and/or divorce in

his/her pre-Christian state, shall be eligible for all leadership ministries (see 1985 General Conference Yearbook p.7).

2. When ministry leaders have experienced a breakdown in their marriage relationship while active in ministry, it is expected that they would resign from their position.
3. Even though one cannot ultimately judge the causes of marital breakdown, only when a ministry leader's marriage ends in divorce clearly because of desertion or unfaithfulness of the spouse, entry or re-entry into leadership ministry may be considered. We believe this is consistent with the spirit of grace expressed in the exceptions referred to by Jesus in Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-9 and by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:15.
4. For adequate emotional and spiritual healing to take place, there must be a period of time, between the divorce and re-entry into ministry. Specific growth goals should be identified and monitored. With evidence of significant progress, restoration could occur.
5. To help the divorced individual in the healing process he/she must become part of an accountability group appointed by the local church. This group will provide prayer support and encouragement, and will help the individual to discern his/her emotional and spiritual readiness to enter or return to leadership ministry.
6. During the restoration process of a leader, the appropriate MB Conference Board of Faith and Life or equivalent board/commission will become involved with the local congregation. Where there is support and affirmation for the individual's entry or return to leadership ministry the Board of Faith and Life will work with the local congregation and with the individual to bring the process to completion.
7. A new appointment or reappointment to leadership ministry will take place only if the local congregation is aware of the basic history of the divorce, healing and restoration process, and feels comfortable in affirming him/her for ministry in that church.

D. Remarriage

1. We believe the "exception clause" of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 applies not only to divorce, but also to remarriage.
2. Likewise, Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:15 regarding desertion also gives the freedom to remarry in such instances. The "bondage" in this text appears to refer to the "bond" of marriage.
3. Therefore, the issue of remarriage as it pertains to leadership ministry is identical to that which has been stated in reference to divorce. As per C.1. and C.3. above, remarriage is allowable for entry or reentry into leadership if it occurred in the pre-Christian state, or subsequent to the sexual unfaithfulness of, or desertion by, the spouse.