

2019 Policy on Clergy and Divorce

Principles and procedures for processing pastoral candidates for licensing, ordination and colloquy applicants with divorce/remarriage in their history, or in the history of their spouses, or who experience divorce while in ministry, or a pastor who is considering marriage to one who has been previously divorced.

(Where this should be put in the MOG Handbook is yet to be determined. It could go in as one piece in a new section or perhaps it would go in two different places. Those procedures and policies that relate to pastoral candidates in one section and those procedures and policies that relate to those already in ministry in another place.)

Introduction

The CLB does not readily consider for license, ordination, colloquy, or restoration to ministry a person who has divorce in his history. In view of the significant portion of the work in the pastoral office that relates to teaching about the family, teaching of children and ministering to people in various kinds of personal and family crises, we find that the deep wounds of divorce are potential disqualifiers for professional ministry. However, because the range of reasons for divorce is significant, and because of the redemptive nature of our calling, consideration will be made for fitness for ministry for those desiring to apply.

Preamble

We as the CLB believe that “The Bible, including both Old and New Testaments as originally given, is the verbally and plenary inspired Word of God and is free from error in the whole and in the part, and is therefore the final authoritative guide for faith and conduct.” It is on the basis of this belief that we understand what marriage is and what we should believe and practice regarding divorce and remarriage.

We affirm that standards of sexual morality must be consistent with Biblical principles. We deny that unscriptural standards may be accepted by the church simply because they have been accepted by society. 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Romans 12:2

We affirm that God established marriage between one man and one woman. The Bible sanctions only heterosexual marriage. We deny that God intended sexual intimacy between members of the same sex. Genesis 2:20c-24; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 7:2

We affirm that Biblical morality restricts legitimate sexual activity to heterosexual marriage. Any extramarital sexual practice, whether homosexual or heterosexual, is outside of the limits of Biblical morality, and is sinful. We deny that sexual activity outside of marriage is morally neutral. Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 7:2; Ephesians 5:3

We affirm that one of the basic reasons for God’s creation of human beings as male and female is to propagate the human race and to provide a caring home for the nurture of children. We deny the assertions that the traditional Biblical concept of the home is passing, outmoded, and outdated. Genesis 1:27-28; Ephesians 6:1-4

We affirm that true love seeks the well-being of the person loved. When sex is the expression of married love, it seeks the mutual fulfillment and joy of both husband and wife. We deny that the chief purpose of sexual activity is self-gratification. 1 Corinthians 7:1-6

We affirm that marriage is a covenant bond between one man and one woman, created by God himself, characterized ideally by physical, spiritual, and emotional oneness and by permanence, regulated and recognized by the state. We deny that marriage can be redefined by the state.

Genesis 1:27, 28: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

Genesis 2:20 – 24: “So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, ‘this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.’ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

Matthew 19:4-6 “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Acts 5:29 Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!

Biblical summary on marriage:

1. Marriage presupposes maleness and femaleness. Genesis 1:27
2. Marriage is God’s idea. Genesis 2:18, 24a
3. Marriage is meant to be monogamous. Genesis 2:24a, 25; 1 Corinthians 7:2
4. Marriage is a commitment of love and faithfulness. Ephesians 5:21-33
5. Marriage is both union and communion. Matthew 19:5

We affirm that marriage is intended by God to be a life-long covenant bond, but it can be broken and put asunder and when it is, there is always guilt of hardness of heart and sin. We deny that marriage is indissoluble. Matthew 19:6-9

We affirm that when the marriage bond is put asunder those who have sinned are called to repentance and confession in full agreement with God’s law in relation to God and spouse. We deny that the putting asunder of one’s marriage is not to be treated as serious sin. 1 John 1:5-10; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

We affirm that on the basis of the finished work of Christ the repentant and believing sinner is forgiven, washed, sanctified and justified. We deny that the putting asunder of one’s marriage is the unpardonable sin and therefore not included on the cross. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Colossians 2:13-15

We affirm that repentance and forgiveness received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ express themselves in the way of seeking reconciliation and restoration with those sinned against. We deny that reconciliation and restoration is always possible. Matthew 5:23-24; Romans 14:19; Ephesians 4:30-31

We affirm that one to whom God has granted a repentant heart, a forgiving heart, and faith in the satisfaction for their sin which God has provided on the cross may consider remarriage. We deny that on the basis of being divorced a person may not consider remarriage. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Colossians 2:13-

(A more complete presentation of the above is given in the CLB exegetical study *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage: An Exegetical Approach* 1988, and the CLB Position Paper, *Divorce And Remarriage* 1989, 2010.)

We affirm the need to address the situations of real persons considering ministry or in ministry who have experienced the reality and consequences of the real sins of divorce and sinfulness with the truth of God's Law and the truth of God's Gospel redemption as given in Jesus Christ. We deny that it is a concession to culture to address these situations redemptively but rather it stands in contrast to the way that culture responds to such realities.

We affirm that a man who is divorced and/or remarried, to whom God has granted a repentant heart, a forgiving heart, and faith in the satisfaction for their sin which God has provided on the cross may be considered for the pastoral calling. We deny that on the basis alone of being divorced and/or remarried a man may not be considered for the pastoral calling. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Colossians 2:13-15

We affirm all the qualifications set forth in the Bible for church leaders serving in the pastoral calling. We deny that these are culturally conditioned therefore not applicable for all times and places. (See paper "On the Scriptural Qualifications for *Overseers* in the Pastoral Epistles and their Contemporary Application") 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

The Principles

Two major principles:

1. Leaders in the church, including the clergy, like everyone else, are to be addressed with a Law and Gospel approach as to the issue of divorce and remarriage.
2. Leaders, including clergy, are to be examined as to their qualification for leadership. More is required of them. The Scriptures show that candidates for leadership must be judged, as to their leadership role, by two major principles:
 - a. Their standing in terms of their character qualifications. (Developed below)
 - b. Their ministry standing in grace. (Developed below)

1. Leadership: Law and Gospel and Divorce

It is important to recognize that the Law and Gospel approach is not one which excuses or tolerates divorce, or any other sin. Paul rightly rejects this approach to questions of sin and grace. "God forbid!" he says (Romans 6:1ff.). The teaching of the Law is not diminished in a true Law and Gospel approach. Sin remains sin.

When this strong Law teaching is matched with a clear Gospel presentation, a new power is made known. It is made known through the hearing of the Word; through the Holy Spirit's work awakening to sin, bringing one to repentance and faith resulting in justification and sanctification.

A comprehensive Law and Gospel approach recognizes God's verdict that all sin must be punished. This means that the solution to sin must be found in the cross or else the punishment will fall upon the sinner. Far from excusing the debt of sin, the Gospel proclaims that God has paid it. He grants the blessing of this provision to those He leads to repentance and faith.

Therefore, the remedy for sins associated with divorce is to be found in repentance and faith for candidates for leadership as well as for the other members of the body. In questions of divorce, this means the person recognizes the severity of the many sins that contributed to the divorce, repents of those

sins, trusts God’s work to forgive those sins, and the work of the Holy Spirit to live in daily repentance and faith with a clear conscience as God’s new creation in Christ.¹

2. Leadership: Character Qualifications

General Character Qualifications

In considering persons for leadership positions Paul sets forth basic qualifications for church leaders in the Pastoral Epistles. “These are qualities to consider when reflecting on a certain candidate.”² We can note “that most of these are not beyond the scope of what should be desired of all believers.”³ Nor should we conclude that these are the only qualifications to be considered for ordained positions as if these lists are exhaustive.⁴ “It may be observed that the general qualification of “above reproach” covers all of the other categories, and the rest are just expansions and examples of what that means.”⁵ These qualities are not black-and-white. “There is no absolute threshold for these qualities, but if something contrary to these qualities is present in a candidate, one needs to use their discernment before receiving them into one of these positions.”⁶ With particular relevance for the concerns of this document, the “faithfulness to wife” interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 does not in itself forbid remarried candidates for leadership positions.⁷ “This interpretation is not a lower standard than one that automatically disqualifies divorced-and-remarried persons”⁸ as the “husband of one wife” interpretation is applied by some interpreters. “It should be seen as a higher standard that applies to all married candidates as well. One might prove to be unfaithful in a variety of ways, yet not divorced (nor remarried). Thus, this interpretation becomes relevant for many more candidates, and places a higher demand on the quality of faithfulness they should demonstrate in their marriage relationships.”⁹

The following are the general character qualities that are to be considered for church leaders as set forth in the pastoral epistles.

Above reproach: 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6

Faithfulness to wife: 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6

Sober-minded: 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7

Self-controlled, Gentle: 1 Timothy 3:2, 3; Titus 1:8

Respectable: 1 Timothy 3:2

Hospitable: 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8

Able to teach: 1 Timothy 3:2

Manages his own household well: 1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6

Good reputation in the community: 1 Timothy 3:7

¹ See *Church of the Lutheran Brethren Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage*, 1989 for this approach to divorce and remarriage. The policies and procedures presented here build on this approach.

² “On the Scriptural Qualifications for *Overseers* in the Pastoral Epistles and their Contemporary Application” (CLB Theological Council, Fergus Falls, MN, 2018), 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ For the basis for this interpretation see the paper: “On the Scriptural Qualifications for *Overseers* in the Pastoral Epistles and their Contemporary Application”

⁸ “On the Scriptural Qualifications for *Overseers* in the Pastoral Epistles and their Contemporary Application” (CLB Theological Council, Fergus Falls, MN, 2018), 6

⁹ *Ibid.*

Loves what is good: Titus 1:8

Upright: Titus 1:8

Holy: Titus 1:8

Disciplined: Titus 1:8

Holds firm to the trustworthy word as taught, able to give instruction in sound doctrine and able to rebuke those who contradict it: Titus 1:9

Not a drunkard: 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7

Not violent: 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7

Not quarrelsome: 1 Timothy 3:3

Not a lover of money, Greedy for gain: 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7

Not a new convert: 1 Timothy 3:6

Not arrogant: Titus 1:7

Not quick-tempered: Titus 1:7

Character Qualifications Considered in the Context of a Divorce

Because of the high nature of the offices involved, qualifications must be set. Because of the far-reaching consequences of divorce for the immediate persons involved - for the children, for concerned families, for society, and for the church - the pastoral candidate, and to a lesser degree, other leaders, must be examined to determine whether they can be trusted with these offices if they have in the past been associated in some way with a broken marriage.

Among the considerations which must be made is an examination of the character faults which might have been revealed in a divorce situation. When calling a pastor, such character concerns are entirely appropriate. Therefore, while it may be true that a person is not necessarily automatically barred from ministry by the class of sins associated with divorce, it may also be true that the candidate will not be chosen for pastoral service because of general character faults revealed in the divorce history. "A divorce history often does reflect that one has not been faithful to their wife, has not managed their household well, or it may lead to a poor public reputation."¹⁰ Some specifics to consider are:

Character

1. Does the divorce history reveal a character issue that would disqualify the person from Pastoral ministry? Is there anything in the divorce history which leaves in question his qualifications to serve the church or the general public in his preaching, teaching and counselling ministries going forward? Has he demonstrated that he has processed issues related to his divorce history which might cause him to be weak on family and marriage issues? Is there anything in his divorce history which disqualifies him as to ministry to children or vulnerable adults?
2. Has this issue (s) been satisfactorily resolved?

Reputation

1. Is he considered to be above reproach and have a good reputation in the community?

¹⁰ Ibid.

2. Does the person's divorce and remarriage history indicate that this person is not characterized by 'faithfulness to one's wife' (*1 Timothy 3:2*)?
3. Does any case of previous infidelity loom large, with the result that people will be unable to view him/them as faithful?

Restoration (cases where discipline has been exercised)¹¹

1. Does his/their local congregation view him/them as faithful?
2. Does the community?
3. Does the CLB church family view this man as faithful?

Ministry Standing in Grace Considered

The Apostle Paul introduces a standard which must be considered in some settings in order to bear witness to God's redemptive purpose through grace.

1 Corinthians 15:8 "Last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect."

1 Timothy 1:12-17 "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that He considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Paul recognizes that he would not qualify as a leader of the church by the general criteria he established for others to use in choosing leaders. He remembers his past as a blasphemer, a persecutor of the church and as a violent man. How then can he be an apostle?

His answer is that he is what he is by the grace of God. Here we must understand all he teaches about his standing in grace because of the cross, plus the gracious design of God to use him despite his past. He was given strength to be in grace what he was not in personal history. Of course, he had been through some disciplines since becoming a believer. He had been hammered and shaped by God for this calling, and Paul had not wilted and run. In his trust of the Lord during hard times he

¹¹ See *Ministers of the Gospel Handbook* Section Two. D.

had allowed God to shape him for service (Romans 5:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 4). By grace he was someone new both in his relationship to God and in his character.

We need to remind ourselves that his past is not covered over as if it had never happened. He does not act as if he has always lived the exemplary Christian life. Undoubtedly his willingness to confess his sins, his open agreement with God about his unworthiness puts Paul on the side of the Law, agreeing with the Law against himself.

Knowing his own bleak history, Paul acknowledges that his lack of fitness for his present calling is moderated by ignorance. Certainly, he does not assert that if he were to return to his former blasphemous life that he would still be acceptable as an apostle. God's mercy sees his ignorance, God's grace removes his guilt.

What is more, his former life is turned into an opportunity to reveal the unlimited patience and grace of God as an encouragement to other undeserving people who would follow Paul in the Kingdom of God. The wonder of it all causes Paul to break out into benediction.

The Process

By pastoral candidate we mean an applicant who has graduated from Lutheran Brethren Seminary or a non-ordained person who is otherwise a candidate for licensing or ordination. By colloquy applicant we mean a person who is a graduate of a seminary other than Lutheran Brethren Seminary and is seeking licensing or ordination; or one previously ordained by another church body and is seeking recognition of ordination.

- A. A pastoral candidate or colloquy applicant who has been divorced and is single or has remarried. If such a person gives evidence of a right relationship with God, that is, demonstrates genuine repentance and living faith which includes contrition for the sins involved in the divorce, he shall not be disqualified because of the divorce history alone. However, the nature of the divorce shall be considered, as would other character concerns, in the general qualifications of the candidate. He shall be examined according to the principles as set forth in this document.

The divorced pastoral candidate or colloquy applicant who is single at the time of his approval by the examining committee shall be free, as that freedom is understood in the position paper of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren on divorce and remarriage, to remarry in the Lord. We would apply the same criteria used to consider any divorced person(s) approaching a pastor/elder board with a request for marriage.¹²

- B. A pastoral candidate or colloquy applicant whose wife has been divorced previous to their marriage. If such a person gives evidence of living in a right relationship with God, that is, demonstrates genuine repentance and living faith, and his wife demonstrates genuine repentance, which includes contrition for the sins involved in the divorce, and living faith, he shall not be disqualified because of the divorce history of his wife and her remarriage alone.

¹² See *Church of the Lutheran Brethren Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage*, 1989, and *Ministerial Acts* E8-E10.

C. Lutheran Brethren pastors who become involved in divorce proceedings.

“Should a pastor and his wife experience marital problems, they must seek counsel in an effort to resolve their differences. If they are unable to resolve their differences and if it leads to a filing for divorce, he shall immediately take a leave of absence from his ministry. The Office of President will work with the congregation to determine if and how he will be compensated during this leave of absence. The Pastoral Care and Discipline Committee shall assure that he has available to him appropriate spiritual counsel and care. The Theological Council shall determine if he may remain on the Ministers of the Gospel roster and if he may return to his ministry.”¹³

As stated in the *Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage*:

“The qualifications established for service and the degree of restoration to service should be determined by the nature of the church or place of ministry to which a restored person may be called. Where there is a strong redemptive ministry, restored people bearing witness to grace may be among the best witnesses to the cross of Christ. Where the ministry is primarily either prophetic witness or nurture, exemplary character history may be of central importance.”¹⁴

The principles according to which the Theological Council shall determine if he may remain on the Ministers of the Gospel roster and if he may return to his ministry are set forth in this document.

D. Lutheran Brethren pastors who, having been divorced, seek to remarry.

In order to retain his status as a pastor in the CLB any Lutheran Brethren pastor who becomes divorced and seeks to remarry must secure the consent of The Theological Council. He shall remarry only within the guidelines stipulated in the position paper of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren on divorce and remarriage. We would apply the same criteria used to consider any divorced person(s) approaching a pastor/elder board with a request for marriage.¹⁵ Failure to comply with these guidelines shall result in the revocation of his ordination.

E. Lutheran Brethren pastors who seek to marry a woman who has previously been divorced.

Any Lutheran Brethren pastor who seeks to marry a divorced woman must secure the consent of The Theological Council in order to marry. They shall marry only within the guidelines stipulated in the position paper of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren on divorce and remarriage. We would apply the same criteria used to consider any divorced person(s) approaching a pastor/elder board with a request for marriage.¹⁶ Failure to comply with these guidelines shall result in the revocation of his ordination.

¹³ *Ministers of the Gospel Handbook*. Approved by the Church of the Lutheran Brethren Council of Directors, March 15, 2018, 18.

¹⁴ *Church of the Lutheran Brethren Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage*, 1989, 8.

¹⁵ See *Church of the Lutheran Brethren Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage*, and *Ministerial Acts* E8-E10.

¹⁶ See *Church of the Lutheran Brethren Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage*, 1989, and *Ministerial Acts* E8-E10.