

MBA GUIDELINES ON DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE OF CLERGY

Foundational Truths

- God created marriage to be between one man and one woman for life. (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6)
- God allowed divorce in some circumstances because of the hardness of hearts. (Exodus 21:7-11; Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 19:8)
- Christ emphasized that even when one's actions are allowable it does not mean that one's heart is without need of scrutiny and care. (Matthew 5:27-28, 31-32)
- The local church is autonomous, but yields a degree of autonomy to the local association and conference to which it belongs. The parts yielded have to do with adherence to the agreed-upon doctrinal stance, accountability for biblical practices, and credentialing of pastors. While the Scriptures speak to the issue of divorce as well as to qualifications for church leaders, they do not specifically speak to the issue of a divorced or a divorced and remarried person serving as a pastor. There is some disagreement among churches, pastors, and biblical scholars concerning the interpretation of specific passages. (i.e. 1 Timothy 3:2)
- Because reputation, godly family life, and integrity are critical qualifications for a church leader, if a pastor in a marriage crisis wishes to continue to be assessed as ministering from a life of integrity, he or she needs to allow church leaders the kind of role that would enable them to minister to and assess issues of integrity within the marriage. (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Galatians 6:1-5)

Suggested Course of Action

1. Vigilance through local church leadership, pastors cluster groups, and Regional Minister to stay alert to potential marital problems among our clergy and provide resources and opportunities for clergy to maintain healthy, loving marriages.
2. When marriage problems arise:
 - a. Local Church – always consider the health of clergy marriages in decision making; contact the Regional Minister if a problem needing care arises.
 - b. Pastor's cluster - encourage the pastor, wife, and any children to get professional help.
 - c. Cluster leader – if warranted, with the knowledge of the pastor, inform the Regional Minister that the pastor and his family may require assistance.
 - d. Regional Minister – if warranted, make a formal contact to assess the situation and further recommend counseling help, if necessary.
 - e. Regional Minister – if warranted, accompany pastor and wife to a meeting with local church leaders to communicate their need.
 - f. Local church - encourage, pray, give time off, and funding if needed for counseling.
 - g. Local church – approach Association for funding if needed.
 - h. If the behavior within the marriage cannot be rectified while continuing in ministry, the pastor should be strongly advised to take a leave of absence. It is strongly suggested that each church already have in place a policy making this leave of absence mandatory. Depending on the giftedness and availability of the church members, the church at which he is employed should consider an interim pastor for the time the pastor is on leave. Church leadership can then continue to assess whether it is advisable for the marriage *and* the ministry that the pastor return to active service, the marriage being the priority. This should be determined by the local church leaders in consultation with the Regional Minister, the pastor's cluster group, and involved counselors.
 - i. If at any point in this process the pastor
 - i) breaks with cooperating with church leadership
 - ii) attempts to leave to pastor another church
 - iii) resigns from his ministryhis credentials will be revoked by the MBA Credentials Committee.

3. If the marriage remains intact:
 - a. An assessment of the present health of the marriage and the readiness of the pastor for ministry should be made by the local church leaders in consultation with the Regional Minister, the pastor's cluster group, and involved counselors before restoring to active service.
 - i. The Regional Minister will provide direction to this process.
 - b. If restored, the pastor should be welcomed without reservation to the local church and association ministries.
 - c. If not restored, his credentials will be revoked by the MBA Credentials Committee.
4. If an apparently permanent separation or divorce occurs:
 - a. An assessment of the pastor as to readiness for ministry should be made by the local church leaders in consultation with the Regional Minister, the pastor's cluster group, involved counselors, and the Credentials Committee before restoring to active service. Even if circumstances allow the pastor to be restored to ministry, the pastor may still be advised to step aside for a time of recovery from personal loss and adjustment. The local church may want to already have in place a policy making this mandatory.
 - i. The Regional Minister will provide direction to this process.
 - b. If restored, the pastor should be welcomed without reservation to the local church and association ministries.
 - c. If not restored, his credentials will be revoked by the MBA Credentials Committee.
5. If a pastor resigns from or is not restored to ministry because of marital problems or divorce:
 - a. The local church, in cooperation with the Association, should fund a time period necessary for the pastor to become re-established financially (i.e. – another job). This should include parsonage or housing allowance.
6. When remarriage after divorce happens:
 - a. When a pastor considers remarriage, he should submit his intentions to the church leaders, the Credentials Committee, and the Regional Minister. They should:
 - i. Review the circumstances and plans with the couple.
 - ii. Receive a written assessment of the relationship from an approved marriage counselor
 - iii. Recommend whether the pastor's well-being and behavior are consistent with retaining the ministry position and credentials.
 - b. All such marriages of pastors should be well publicized and Association pastors informed that the recommended process has been completed.
 - c. Two pastoral couples should be assigned by the Regional Minister in consultation with the couple to meet regularly with the pastor and wife in an accountability and nurturing relationship for the first year or longer if deemed necessary. The Regional Minister will continue to provide support to this group
7. Regarding possible disagreement between MBA churches about divorce and remarriage of clergy:
 - a. The NAB Conference has left it up to the local association to determine specifics regarding this issue. Once these guidelines are tested for a year or two, reviewed by MBA Pastors and church boards, and then finally approved at an AGM, it is the standard of the association. The association is to proceed according to the guideline with a restored pastor with no limitations or reservations. The association is to proceed with a pastor who refuses to comply with them according to the guideline.

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