

Statement on Family and Marriage: Guidelines for Ministry and Practical Care

(A companion to the Statement on Family and Marriage)

A Guideline of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada

Pastors and leaders have an immense responsibility and privilege with regard to shepherding persons toward healthy and God honouring relational experiences within their families. The following is the outworking of the Statement on Family and Marriage of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada.

1. Singleness

As a body of believers, the church is formed by a group of diverse people who each have a unique and important role in the body of Christ. Pastors and leaders are privileged to ensure that churches affirm single persons as complete in Christ, offering witness to the sufficiency of God's love. These leaders have a possibility to intentionally care for, pastor, and empower, single persons to succeed and flourish as they grow in Christ and in relationship with those around them. As the family of Christ, the church is an important place for single persons to be received with love, nurtured, disciplined, and equipped for ministry.

2. Struggling Marriages

As Pastors and leaders our intention is the preservation of marriage as a loving, lifelong, sacred, intimate, and exclusive covenant. They lovingly hold out the hope of forgiveness and reconciliation while at the same time working with the disputing partners with respect and grace. Neither of the disputing and hurting partners should be neglected, but should be nurtured towards Christlike holiness, as they pursue spiritual, emotional, and relational health both personally and in relation to their spouse.

3. Abuse

Abuse of any kind is a complicated power dynamic in families and requires specialized training to fully understand and properly intervene. It is important for pastors and leaders to know the limits of their understanding and training in handling situations of domestic violence of any kind. They should make themselves aware of federal and provincial laws pertaining to domestic violence, including violence against children, fully complying with these laws. They should also be careful to help those under their spiritual care seek the professional expertise necessary for each person's well-being in cases of familial abuse, first and foremost facilitating the safety of victims. Compliance with laws and consultation with professionals is of utmost importance. Ensuring the safety of victims in cases of familial abuse should be a priority for pastors. Victims who choose to separate from the abuser would greatly benefit from support from their pastor.

4. Separation

Pastors and leaders should sensitively care for those who have entered into any process of separation. Separation is not entered into lightly. It can be an intentional intervention designed to give fresh perspective and help both parties take personal responsibility in working toward reconciliation, restoration, and relational wholeness. The support and communal discernment of a church community is essential.

5. Divorce

Pastors and leaders must exercise great care and love in shepherding divorced persons in the church. They need to demonstrate the love and grace of Christ as they walk with the divorced person in the following areas:

- **Seeking God.** Every believer's first responsibility is to grow and maintain an intimate relationship with Christ. A pastor or leader's responsibility is to encourage a divorced person to seek spiritual health and wholeness, and embrace the healing and restorative grace of God.
- **Accountability.** A pastor or leader's responsibility is to walk with divorced persons as they seek the help of counsellors and fellow believers to avoid repeating any destructive attitudes or actions in future relationships.
- **Care for the Whole Family.** The impact of separation and divorce is far reaching in families. Wise and compassionate pastoral care of families experiencing divorce should include a focus on the holistic care of both the adults and children involved. This may include providing families with counselling, access to resources and referrals to divorce care programs in their community. In the call to love and support families, pastors and leaders can provide a safe and supportive environment for children affected by divorce, ensuring they feel welcome as part of the church family.
- **Exercising Caution.** Pastors and leaders should counsel divorced believers in wise development of new relationships. This may include: steps to find fresh healing and grace, examining and identifying any attitudes or actions that may have contributed to previous relational breakdown, and entering into a context of Godly support and accountability.

6. Local Church Fellowship and Membership

A person who was divorced or remarried on Scriptural grounds is entitled to the full privileges of fellowship and membership in the church. This person should not be disqualified from places of leadership in the local church on this basis.

A person who was divorced or remarried on other than Scriptural grounds, may be entitled to the full privileges of fellowship and membership in the church¹, by following the process outlined in the Restoration portion of the Statement on Marriage and Family. These individuals may be able to participate in leadership in the local church on this basis.

7. Amendments

This guideline may be amended by a majority vote of General Assembly, with written notice having been given prior to General Assembly.

Adopted – General Assembly 2022

¹ Membership in the local church would still require the individual to meet the standards of membership as outlined in the Local Church Constitution.