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CHAPTER 3

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE⁸⁶

I. PREVENTION OF MARITAL PROBLEMS

A. Statement of prevention rationale

The proper nurturing of the couple in the life of the congregation before and during marriage is a part of supporting biblical faithfulness in marriage. The prevention of divorce is not only possible, but probable when the problems which lead to divorce are addressed and resolved in a biblical manner at early stages of development. Since it is the developed problem that does severe damage to the marriage, prevention of problem development is essential. Putting out the spark before it becomes a forest fire is both achievable and wise. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the church to do all it can to

⁸⁶ The Committee encourages a Biblical approach to counseling. The following listing of resources is not intended to be an endorsement by the PCA. Certain of the resources may have statements of doctrine which are not in conformity with the Reformed position. These resources are provided, however, as aids in ministry (i.e., not as doctrinal treatises or positions). The reader should apply Biblical discernment and evaluation while using them. Also, the Committee affirms that no one person's method of counseling is being promoted through these guidelines and resources.

nurture marriages. For this purpose, we are providing the following guidelines and resources.

B. Guidelines for prevention

This list of guidelines is not exhaustive, but is intended simply to remind us of ways we can encourage and build up marriages and help prevent divorces from occurring.

1. Pastors may pursue continuing education in pre-marital and marital counseling.
2. Pastors and officers should seek assessment and enrichment of their own marriage and family.
3. Pastors and their wives are encouraged to establish a relationship with another, preferably older, pastor or elder (and his wife) who has a healthy marriage and is a man of wisdom.
4. Churches should provide pre-marital counseling for couples whether previously married or not (minimum of six sessions).
5. Pastors are urged to train other mature couples with strong marriages to do pre-marital counseling.
6. Churches should expand their educational programs to include classes for marriage enhancement and marital preparation.
7. Churches should promote books, conferences and seminars on biblical marriage and family development for the congregation.
8. Pastors are encouraged to preach sermons on topics which will strengthen families in the church.
9. The church leadership should train small group leaders in the detecting and handling of a couple's troubled marriage.
10. Pastors should train Ruling Elders in proper church discipline which seeks to restore those who have been caught in a sin.

C. Suggested outline for pre-marital counseling

This outline, provided by an experienced pastoral counselor, will help us reflect on the depth and breadth of our present efforts at pre-marital counseling. It is not meant to be definitive.

1. SESSION 1: Gathering general information
 - a. Determining their spiritual condition
 - 1) If Christian, have each given his testimony 2) If non-Christian, present the gospel
 - b. Learning their background
 - 1) How they met
 - 2) Their interests and habits
 - 3) Their immediate families
 - 4) Their church experiences and personal beliefs
 - c. Determining their eligibility for marriage
 - 1) Would they be equally or unequally yoked?
 - 2) Are they presently living together or sexually involved?
 - 3) Are there detrimental health conditions?

- 4) Inform them if there are reasons you cannot marry them.

NOTE: Much of the data can be gathered in a Data-Intake Form developed by the pastor in a Pre-Marital Inventory, a copy of which can be found in the A.P.P.L.E. (Active People Preparing to Love and Encourage) Training Manual referred to in the Resource section.)

2. SESSION 2: Dealing with finances (could use Larry Burkett tapes)
 - a. Looking at their financial history
 - 1) Their families' financial attitude; note patterns
 - 2) Whether they are in debt or debt free
 - 3) The dangers of credit card living
 - b. Helping them draw up a budget for common household expenses
 - 1) Include house, insurance (life and health), automobile, food, savings, medical needs, etc.
 - 2) Include tithes and other contributions
 - 3) Consider where the money will be coming from, and how it is shared
 - c. Discussing a new will
3. SESSION 3: Discussing the family
 - a. Reviewing their family histories
 - 1) Whether traditional or single parent households have affected family beliefs
 - 2) Whether major unresolved family problems or estranged relationships exist
 - 3) Whether attitudes toward prospective in-laws are detrimental
 - 4) Whether there was a history of family violence or child abuse (emotional, physical, sexual) and how these issues were resolved.
 - b. Discussing Biblical concepts of the family
 - 1) The Biblical foundation of marriage
 - 2) Sexual intimacy
 - 3) The role of the husband as the head of the marriage
 - 4) The role of the wife as his helper
 - 5) The role of parenting children
 - c. Considering their future family
 - 1) Discussing their ideas of family size
 - 2) Discussing their ideas of contraceptives; discussion of various means, and referring to a physician if appropriate
 - 4) Discussing generally any sexual inhibitions or misconceptions
 - d. Exploring past sexual activity, if any
 - 1) Whether immorality needs to be confessed
 - 2) Whether repentance needs to be demonstrated
 - 3) Whether forgiveness needs to be extended
 - 4) Whether there was any previous victimization of sexual abuse towards them in the past and how this issue was resolved (professional counseling, etc.)

4. SESSION 4: Dealing with sexual intimacy (could use Ed Wheat tapes)
 - a. What were their parental husband/wife models?
 - 1) Were there warm or cold relationships?
 - 2) Were they dominating or subjugating?
 - b. What is the Biblical model?
 - 1) The husband: loving leader, protector, provider
 - 2) The wife: loving helpmate, companion, under his leadership
 - c. Are there any sexual fears?
 - 1) Possibly having physical pain
 - 2) Physically satisfying each other
 - 3) Communicating likes and dislikes
 - 4) Holding strictly to fidelity
 - 5) Issues surrounding previous victimization that should be dealt with professionally

5. SESSION 5: Looking at common interests
 - a. Their friends
 - b. Their hobbies and recreation
 - c. Their educational backgrounds
 - d. And how disinterests may affect their relationships

NOTE: The pastor or counselor may want to give personality and temperament tests to the couple in order to help them understand each other and better minister to each other as future husband and wife.

6. SESSION 6: Wrapping up the sessions
 - a. Discussing perspectives that have been discovered
 - b. Discussing behavior they have discovered about themselves and each other during the course of the counseling
 - c. Discussing implementation of necessary changes in perspectives and behavior discovered during the course of the counseling
 - d. Discussing wedding arrangements; it would probably be helpful to set aside a separate time to go through the entire wedding service
 - e. Setting up a future session three to six months after the wedding to deal with challenges faced by the couple and specifically with communication and conflict resolution.

7. POST-WEDDING SESSIONS
 - a. Having check-ups at three months, six months, and a year
 - b. Asking whether any issues have arisen
 - c. Discussing progress on necessary changes which were identified in pre-marital counseling sessions
 - d. Dealing specifically with conflict resolution and communication techniques; blending family backgrounds and roles over lifetime.
 - e. Encouraging them to make themselves available to marriage and family seminars

D. Resources

1. Personnel

For the personal growth and assessment of pastors and Christian leaders

- a. Other pastors or local counselors
- b. PCA conferences
- c. World Harvest Mission, PO Box 2175, Jenkintown, PA., 19046.
- d. (CCEF) Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, 1790 East Willow Grove Ave., Laverock, PA., 19118
- e. Wes Roberts, *Life Enrichment for Christian Leaders*, Christian Marriage Enrichment, 8000 East Girard, Suite 601, Denver, CO., 80231.
- f. Diane Langberg, Ph. D., Psychologist and counselor for pastors and wives, 8206 High School Road, Elkins Park, PA., 19117.
- g. Louis McBurney, M.D., Marble Retreat, 139 Bannock Burn, Marble, CO., 81623, 303-963-2499.
- h. Joseph Wolstencroft, Ph.D., Counselor for pastors, pastor's wives, and Christian workers; Christian inpatient adult program; OASIS Christian Treatment Programs, Suite 201, 964 Georgia Avenue, Macon, Georgia, 31201 (800-926-2747).

2. Seminars, Videos

For aid in marital counseling

- a. Larry Crabb, Dan Allender, and Tom Varney IBC (Institute of Biblical Counseling), 16075 W. Belleview Avenue, Morrison, CO., 80465 Includes seminars such as *Basic Counseling, Sexual Abuse, Parenting Adolescents, Next Step Seminars*. Also includes videos on counseling.
- b. Wayne Mack (CCEF), a correspondence course entitled *Marriage and Family Counseling*, 1790 East Willow Grove Ave., Laverock, PA., 19118.
- c. Wes Roberts, of Life Enrichment (ministry to hurting pastors), 14581 E. Tufts Ave., Denver, CO., 80015.

For marriage enhancement

- a. Ed Wheat, Scriptural Counsel Inc., 130 North Spring St., Springdale, AR., 72764 *Love Life Seminar*.
- b. James Dobson, Focus on the Family, 4800 West Waco Drive, Waco, TX., 76796 Various series including *Turn Your Heart Toward Home, Communication in the Home, To Spark or Not To Spark, As For Me and My House, Busy Husbands, Lonely Wives, The Intimate Marriage, The Wife's and Husband's View of Submission*.
- c. Gary Smalley, Relationship Today Inc., Paoli Corporate Center, 16 Industrial Blvd., Paoli, PA., 19301, 800-232-3232. *Hidden Keys to Loving Relationships* (video with guide book), and *Love Is A Decision*.
- d. Howard Eyrich, 21203 Saddlemaker Dr., St. Charles, MO., 63303, 314-441-8821. *Family Life Seminar: Destroyers and Builders*.
- e. Bob and Rosemary Barnes, Sheridan House, Word Inc. - Videos. *Marriage: Making The Spark A Flame* (4 video series)

- f. Howard Hendricks, Dallas Theological Seminary, Attn. Distribution Center, 3909 Swiss Ave., Dallas, TX., 75204. *The Role and Responsibility of the Husband, The Role and Responsibility of the Wife.*
- g. Joseph Wolstencroft, The Institute for Family Strength (IFS), 682 Mulberry Street, Macon, GA 31201, 912-742-6940. *The Building Blocks of Family Strength Seminar.*

For help in pre-marital counseling

- a. Some of the video series above.
- b. Ed Wheat and Gloria Oaks Perkins, (address above) *Before the Wedding Night.*
- c. Larry Burkett, Evangelical Films Inc., 1750 NW Hwy., Suite 250, Garland, TX., 75041, 800-527-4014. *How To Manage Your Money (3 videos)*
- d. Howard Hendricks, (address above), *Preparing Young People for Marriage.*

3. Books

For the personal growth and assessment of pastors

Hybels, Bill, *Honest To God*, Zondervan.
Morley, Patrick, *Man in the Mirror*, Wolgemuth and Hyatt.

For aid in marital counseling

Rekers, George, *Counseling Families: Resources for Christian Counseling*, Word Books.

Stuart, Robert, *A.P.P.L.E. Training (Active People Preparing to Love and Encourage)*, available by writing to Dr. Stuart, 7433 NW 4th St., Plantation, FL., 33317-2204.

Wheat, Ed, *Love Life for Every Marriage Couple*, Zondervan.

Worthington, Everett, *Marriage Counseling*, Intervarsity Press.

For marriage enhancement

Barnes, Robert and Rosemary, *Marriage: Keeping the Spark a Flame*, Banner.

Blitchington, W. Peter, *Sex Roles and the Christian Family*, Tyndale House.

Crabb, Larry, *The Marriage Builder*, and *Men and Women: Enjoying the Difference*, Zondervan.

Dad's Only, a magazine with creative ideas for dads, 15110 Ave. of Science, San Diego, CA., 92128, 619-487-7099.

Deal, William, *God's Answer for the Unequally Yoked*, Good News Publishers.

Harley, Willard, *His Needs / Her Needs*, Fleming H. Revell Co.

Mack, Wayne, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.

Mason, Mike, *Mystery of Marriage*, Multnomah.

Palmer, B. M., and J. W. Alexander, *The Family*, Sprinkle.

Piper, John, and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, Crossway.

Sproul, R. C., *Discovering the Intimate Marriage*, Bethany House.

Wheat, Ed, *Love Life for Every Marriage Couple*, Zondervan.

Wright, H. Norman, *Understanding the Man in Your Life*, Word Incorporated.

For pre-marital counseling

Barnes, Bob and Rosemary, *Positive Parenting*, Banner.

Elliot, Elisabeth, *The Mark of a Man*, Fleming H. Revell Co.

Eyrich, Howard, *Three To Get Ready*, Baker.

Lewis, Kay Oliver, *The Christian Wedding Handbook*, Fleming H. Revell Co.

Mack, Wayne, *Preparing for Marriage God's Way*, Virgil W. Hensley, Inc. (6116 E. 32nd St., Tulsa, OK., 74315.

McDowell, Josh and Lewis, Paul, *Givers, Takers, and Other Kinds of Lovers*, Tyndale Publishers.

Wheat, Ed, *Intended for Pleasure*, and *Love Life for Every Married Couple*, Zondervan.

Smalley, Gary, *For Better, For Best* (for women), *If Only He Knew* (for men), *How To Become Your Husband's Best Friend*, Zondervan.

Sproul, R. C., *Discovering the Intimate Marriage*, Bethany House.

Wright, Norman, *Premarital Counseling*, Moody Press.

For an overview of marriage, divorce, and remarriage

Adams, Jay, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*, Baker.

Atkinson, David, *To Have and To Hold*, Eerdmans.

House, Wayne, ed., *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, IntersVarsity Press.

Hurley, James B., *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, Zondervan.

Murray, John, *Divorce*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.

H. PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSEL OF COUPLES WITH MARITAL DIFFICULTIES

A. Understanding the couple

1. Know the times

Marriage difficulties are a given. There is no way to escape them. Whenever two people (both having fallen natures) co-habit for any length of time, the negatives in each other's character will rise to the surface and cause conflict in the relationship. In fact, a primary factor in the decay of major civilizations has been the deterioration of the family unit. That deterioration starts with the couple. If left unchecked, divorce will occur at the rate of 50% in all marriages contracted in the United States.

2. Know the people

Most people marry for wrong reasons. They may think it to be God's will, but when the reasons are analyzed and compared with the biblical reasons for marriage,

selfishness normally surfaces. Most people marry not to glorify God or emulate the marriage of Christ to His Church, but to have their own needs met. A bride or groom do not normally look at marriage as a ministry to which they have been called by God. As a result, within two years of saying "I do", when the emotional and sexual part of love has waned, conflicts surface and character flaws are clearly seen.

If the conflicts are not recognized, confronted, and resolved, divorce becomes immanent. According to the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, the following are the major causes of divorce:

- a. Lack of communication
- b. Divergent personal growth patterns (i.e. selfishness)
- c. Sex, adultery, or lack of affection (i.e. sexual sin or failure to understand each other's sexuality)
- d. Money
- e. Lack of understanding

These and other issues must be addressed during marital counseling.

Complaints by husbands and wives against the other are universal. It doesn't matter whether the couples are from the north or the south, the east or the west. The complaints are common. When each sex is asked what grates them most about the opposite sex, the following complaints surface over and over again.

- a. Women's gripes against men
 - (1) Lack of leadership
 - (2) No sensitivity
 - (3) No understanding of who we are
 - (4) Doesn't listen
 - (5) Takes me for granted
 - (6) Thinks he knows it all
 - (7) Not affectionate (only wants sex)
- b. Men's gripes against women
 - (1) Seeks to control relationship (manipulation)
 - (2) Nags
 - (3) No understanding of who we are
 - (4) Lack of respect
 - (5) Demands too much
 - (6) Doesn't like sex

If these concerns are left unresolved, they fester into greater conflicts resulting in a deeply strained relationship which in most cases leads to divorce. In comparing the gripes with the causes of divorce, one can easily see the similarities.

3. Know the ministry

In over 50% of the marriages which are experiencing marital problems, one or more of the spouses will approach his or her local clergyman. The pastor, therefore, has to be willing and able to help his congregants work through the issues or conflicts in the marriage. Since most couples seek help at a crisis point, it will be rare that the marriage

problems can be resolved in three or four sessions. The pastor must be prepared for three or four months of weekly counseling if both parties are sincerely trying to work through the difficulties. If one spouse is not genuinely concerned about resolving the problems, the time frame will be much longer.

The pastor will have to decide whether he can continue to counsel after four sessions, bring in a lay person to help, or refer to another counselor. Pastors do need to recognize their limitations so that counseling doesn't overwhelm their other pastoral responsibilities.

B. Guidelines for marital counseling.

1. Recognize the danger zones

Most pastors who fall into sexual sin become involved as a result of counseling a female member of the church. Take the following precautions:

- a. Never counsel a female alone.
Have someone nearby, in the outer office, or preferably in the session with you. If possible, have another female who will disciple, encourage, and hold the female counselee accountable during the week. Never counsel after hours or on weekends without your wife being present with you.
- b. Do not ride alone or eat in a restaurant with another female who is not a member of your family.
Gossip spreads rapidly and your reputation can be quickly ruined.
- c. In counseling with a female under proper circumstances beware of the emotional pull involved.
You may find yourself becoming emotionally attracted to the counselee. Or you may discover she is becoming emotionally attracted to you. This is a sign to break off counseling and refer her (or the couple) to another for continued counseling.
- d. Understand your own hurts
If you are struggling with emotional hurts or relational difficulties yourself, you are vulnerable to an emotional attachment which can lead to sinful activity.

2. Know when to refer

- a. Pastors have a primary responsibility to care for and counsel those whom the Lord has put under their charge.
- b. If both parties are cooperating, it still will take three or four months of intensive counseling to work through the issues.
- c. Decide after four sessions whether you will continue to counsel with the couple or whether to refer.
- d. Refer:
 - (1) If issues are beyond your capabilities, or
 - (2) If you are not able to do lengthy counseling with the couple.

3. Develop a referral list

- a. Meet with counselors in your community and determine if they are competent, biblical, and available for referrals.

- b. Determine the specialties or areas of interest of the counselors.
 - c. Gather information from other pastors regarding counselors in your area.
 - d. Train lay people to help counsel those struggling in marriages.
4. Have readily available a list of hotlines and crisis intervention centers.
- a. Know the procedures for involving the social service or abuse prevention people in your area.
 - b. Understand the state law for reporting domestic or child abuse cases.
5. In a crisis situation, if possible, bring another person with you when you attempt to minister.
6. Establish rules of the office
- a. Have regular times for counseling each week.
 - b. If counseling at night or on a weekend, have your wife with you.
 - c. Never counsel a female alone.
 - d. Develop data in-take forms.
 - (1) Have couples fill out this inventory
 - (2) Make it extensive enough to gather good information and to weed out people who are not really interested in counseling.
 - e. Supervise your lay counselors.
7. Involve your counselees in the church activities, especially a small group Bible study.

C. Practical considerations

1. Monitor your own marriage
- a. Continue dating your wife.
 - b. Spend time in meaningful communication.
 - c. Take overnight trips together.
 - d. Receive criticism and change your negative habits.
 - e. Seek counseling if wife says it is needed.
2. Develop a lay counseling program.
- a. Have interested people watch and discuss videos, i.e., on encouragement, sharing, etc.
 - b. Offer a counseling class each year.
 - c. Occasionally offer seminars that deal with helping those hurting marriage.
 - d. Have men disciple men and women disciple women.
3. Follow up those you have counseled or referred with cards, phone calls, visits, or consultations.
- a. Once a church member has been referred, the church's ministry to that person does not cease.
 - b. There needs to be continuing contact by the pastor, one or two elders, and some supportive lay people.

POSITION PAPERS

4. Start formal discipline when appropriate
 - a. First write to the uncooperative spouse and express disappointment for not counseling and request him or her to become involved in the counseling process.
 - b. If one spouse remains uncooperative or refuses to counsel, have the cooperating spouse in writing request Session intervention.
 - c. Have the Session appoint a commission of two or three elders to meet with the parties, to strongly recommend counseling, and to order counseling if the parties are members of the church. If a spouse refuses and continues with contumacious and unrepentant behavior, then the commission is to commence with formal discipline according to the *Book of Church Order*.

5. Institute family ministries.
 - a. Have yearly couples' retreats.
 - b. Have family retreats and campouts.
 - c. Sponsor family seminars and marriage workshops.
 - d. Have Sunday school class on marriage and the roles of husband wife.
 - e. Develop a pre-marital counseling program.

D. Resources

1. Personnel
 - a. Local counselors
 - b. Experts to help train the pastor and lay people to do counseling
 - c. Wes Roberts of Life Enrichment (ministry to hurting pastors), 14581 East Tufts Avenue, Denver, CO 80015.

2. Seminars
 - a. IBC (Institute of Biblical Counseling)
Dr. Larry Crabb and Dr. Dan Allender
16075 W. Belleview Avenue Morrison, CO 80465
(303) 697-5425
 - b. A.P.P.L.E. (Active People Preparing to Love and Encourage)
Dr. Robert D. Stuart
7433 NW Fourth Street
Plantation, FL 33317-2204 (305)
581-5910
 - c. Love is a Decision
Gary Smalley and Dr. John Trent
Today's Family
Box 22111 Phoenix, AZ 85028

- d. Family Life Conference, A Weekend to Remember
A Ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ International
Family Ministry
P.O. Box 23840
Little Rock, AR 72221-3840
(501) 223-8663
- e. IFS (Institute for Family Strength)
Building Blocks of Family Strength Conference
Breaking Free: Principles of Life Management
Dr. Joseph Wolstencroft
682 Mulberry Street, Macon, Georgia, 31201
(912) 742-6940
- f. DVP Learning Center, Inc.
P.O. Box 31227
Aurora, CO 80041-1227

3. Books

To have a better understanding of biblical anthropology.

- Adams, Jay, *Theology of Counseling*, Zondervan.
Crabb, Lawrence, *Understanding People*, Ministry Resource Library, a division of Zondervan Publishing House.
Crabb, Lawrence, *Inside Out*, Nav Press.
McGee, Robert H., *The Search for Significance*, Rapha.
Piper, John, and Grudem, Wayne, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, Crossway.
Seamands, David, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, Victor Books.

To build a biblical marriage.

- Crabb, Lawrence, *The Marriage Builder*, Zondervan.
Dobson, James C, *Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives*, Word Books.
Groom, Nancy, *Married Without Masks*, Nav Press.
Smalley, Gary, *If Only He Knew*, Zondervan.
Wilson, P. B., *Liberated Through Submission: The Ultimate Paradox*, Harvest House.
Wheat, Ed, *Love Life for Every Married Couple*, Zondervan.
Wright, H. Norman, *Communication: Keys to Your Marriage*, Regal Books.
Mayhall, Jack and Carole, *Opposites Attack*, Nav Press.

To understand one's sexuality.

- Dillow, Joseph C., *Solomon on Sex*, Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1977.
Dobson, James, *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women*, Tyndale House Publishers.
Hocking, David and Carole, *Romantic Lovers: The Intimate Marriage*, Harvest House Publishers.
Wheat, Ed, *Intended for Pleasure*, Fleming H. Revell Co.

Wheat, Ed, *Love Live for Every Married Couple*, Zondervan.
Unger, Ken, *True Sexuality*, Tyndale House Publisher.

III. DISCIPLINE AS IT PERTAINS TO COUPLES CONSIDERING DIVORCE

A. Guidelines for discipline issues

1. The local church's responsibility to become involved.

Maintaining the life-directing truth of Scripture is the church's responsibility to her members. In dealing with couples considering divorce or involved in the divorce process, the church must compassionately maintain the Bible's lifestyle standards. But elders must be careful not to regard discipline and compassion as competing truths of Scripture; they cannot exercise Biblical discipline apart from Biblical compassion.

The Westminster Confession states that the church must not leave persons considering divorce "to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case". Such a charge is startling to many in our society. "Mind your own business" is often the response to elders approaching a couple in trouble. Couples may call upon the church to marry them and baptize their children. But problems between a husband and wife are often viewed as a private matter and not the elders' concern.

Such a charge will less likely be laid at the feet of properly trained elders who have been shepherds to their flock. This should begin with education in new members classes. Teach prospective members that their vow to "submit ...to the government and discipline of the church" means that the elders will be active shepherds, caring for them, even to the point of embracing the fearful responsibility of stepping into problems between husband and wife. Often elders do not want to raise such issues in a new members class for fear of turning inquirers away, or giving them too much "hard doctrine". On the contrary, inquirers should know that they are considering membership in a church where the elders will love them enough to shepherd them in crisis. It is recommended that each church prepare a written membership covenant for new members describing, among other things, Biblical discipline as reflected in the *Book of Church Order*.

Biblical discipline, especially in matters of family strife, must be preceded by time spent with the family in "good" times, praying for them in their homes and sharing time and meals with them. An elder whose first visit to the family's home is to discuss marital strife will be severely hamstrung, if he is allowed to enter the home at all.

Active elder involvement with a family will also increase the likelihood of early elder involvement with problems. Too often the church faces a *fait accompli* by members who have made the decision to dissolve the marriage. Arriving late, the elder must try to get the member to reconsider his or her decision, rather than discussing the problems of the marriage.

Understanding that discipline in the narrow sense of seeking restoration of the marriage must be based upon discipline in the broad sense of compassionate involvement with members' lives, we are now prepared to consider what the church can do when a couple has such marital strife.

2. How does the local church become involved?

How does the couple, or one of them, come to the Session with their marriage problem? Perhaps both spouses will come to an elder and ask for help. If only one spouse comes to the church for help, ask the one seeking help to encourage their spouse to come for help also. But often only one spouse is willing to come to an elder. In such a case, the elder should ask the one seeking help to write a letter to the Session to request pastoral care and that the elders become involved in the attempts at reconciliation. The Session may then meet with the spouse or spouses willing to meet. Or, the Session may choose to appoint a commission of a teaching elder and one or two ruling elders to work with the family and report to the Session, rather than leaving the shepherding to one elder. But, the spouses should not be left to their own wills. If an elder becomes aware that a couple is having marital problems, it is that elder's responsibility to use appropriate, loving means to help the couple.

3. What if both spouses will talk with an elder?

This is, of course, the best case scenario. If both members are willing to discuss their problems with a teaching or ruling elder, the church can appeal to each with the Word of God. It is not likely, however, that a few meetings with an elder will effectively deal with problems in the relationship. If Elders should refer people to another counselor, they are obliged to insure that a Biblical faith is inextricably woven into his or her counseling practices. Elders, especially teaching elders, should become familiar with local counselors and spend time with them to understand their approach to dealing with marital problems.

The elder should instruct the couple that, excepting sexual immorality, divorce is not an option for two people professing Christ. While Scripture allows divorce for sexual immorality, it does not command it, nor encourage it. The first priority is to seek forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus is in the "business" of reconciling people and the church should be about her Savior's business. Husband and wife have the same Lord and have received forgiveness from Christ. How then can one deny the other forgiveness when it is sincerely sought?

The church must proclaim Christ and counsel each spouse regarding his or her sin against God. Forgiveness should start with repentance of the sin precipitating the crisis. Too often the church is willing to deal with the immediate sin (e.g. adultery, wife-beating) without asking God to expose other sins in the relationship. Such matters are hard to consider and require time and prayer by elders and counselors. But unless the couple recognizes and repents of sin in the relationship, the problems will reoccur.

The church should stand ready to assist the couple in other ways. The elders should guard against the couple withdrawing from fellowship in the church. Their friends may need to encourage them and make special efforts to include the couple in fellowship. If the church refers to another counselor, but money is scarce, the referring church should consider helping the couple to pay. If the problem is physical abuse, a temporary home may be needed for one of the spouses.

4. What if one spouse refuses to talk with an elder?

This is a common situation. One spouse makes his decision apart from, or in spite of, elder involvement and separates and files for divorce. There are concurrent steps the church should take with each spouse.

a. For the spouse who will talk with an elder

First, the elders must counsel patience. Too often a spouse is willing to initiate legal process when one can and should wait.

Second, the elders must carefully approach the question of delving beneath the precipitating cause of the divorce to the underlying issues. The elders cannot allow themselves to be used by one spouse seeking the condemnation of the other's sin, while refusing to acknowledge, in most cases, some responsibility for the crisis. The elders may face a member whose conduct evidences relief that the other spouse has committed a sin that allows the member to initiate divorce proceedings without guilt. The elders must exercise discretion and not allow themselves to be manipulated.

If the wife is the spouse willing to meet with the elders, she may feel intimidated as the only woman in the meeting. A godly woman friend or, if applicable, her counselor could be encouraged to attend the meeting with the wife, or the elders can encourage her to bring her counselor to the meetings for support and assistance.

Third, the Session must make a judgment as to each spouse's willingness to seek reconciliation and which spouse, if any, has Biblical grounds to initiate dissolution of the marriage. If the Session determines that formal discipline is mandated, the *Book of Church Order* must be followed closely. Also, the church must make clear to the offended spouse and *to the rest of the church* that that spouse is a member in good standing and should be supported by the church.

Fourth, the church should be ready to recommend legal counsel to the spouse. When one spouse leaves, the other one should be able to talk to a lawyer to be sure the demands and limits of divorce laws are understood. Godly legal counsel can help avoid steps that make reconciliation more difficult. But the elders should understand that the courts will grant a spouse's request to dissolve the marriage; present law in the various states requires scant, if any, ground for divorce. "Contesting a divorce" actually means contesting the arrangements regarding the children or finances, not whether the court will grant a divorce.

Fifth, diaconal ministry may be needed. Often a wife begins legal process for the very practical reason that her husband refuses financial support while they are living apart. Family members should be encouraged to help. If family assistance is insufficient, the church should consider whether financial assistance for living expenses can be provided to allow the wife to avoid initiating legal process during the period when attempts are being made by the church to reclaim her husband. Other appropriate assistance may include finding a home for a battered wife, assisting with child care and finding employment. Above all, elders should encourage church members to reach out to, not withdraw from, those facing divorce.

b. For the spouse who will not talk with an elder.

First, every effort must be made to reclaim the offending spouse. The elders must try to get the member to talk with them following Jesus' guidance of Matthew 18 in resolving disputes within the church if the member is contumacious. The same approach can be made with a non-member. The Session may want to appoint a commission to attempt to talk with the member and report to the Session and to institute formal disciplinary procedures as necessary.

There may be other church members whose aid can be enlisted by the elders. Let the member know that the elders want to hear both sides of the problem and that underlying issues will be explored. This can be done without excusing sin. If the elders

are perceived by the member to have “taken sides” with the other spouse, communication will be impossible. The member may refuse the first attempt to talk, but the elders must not be satisfied with an "obligatory" attempt. Be persistent.

If the spouse refuses any communication with the elders, then the church should write to the unwilling spouse of their concerns. Tell the spouse that the elders want to help the couple explore the problems of the marriage and recommend a counselor, if needed. Offer, if appropriate and the church is capable, to pay for counseling. Admonish the spouse that divorce will lead to grievous consequences for the couple, their children and even their children' children. Straight talk about sin and the reality of divorce is called for. Explain the financial hardship of running two homes on an income probably stretched to run one, the effects on the children and parents of weekend visitation, and the loneliness of holidays without the children. Advise the unwilling member of possible formal disciplinary actions if the healing of the marital difficulties is not sought.

5. What if the elders pursue formal discipline?

Elders should be familiar with the provisions in the *Book of Church Order* regarding discipline and they should be aware of actions which could invite a lawsuit. If the Session determines that formal discipline is required, the *Book of Church Order* must be followed closely. This committee commends to each Session for careful consideration the following advice given by James E. Ostenson:

- “1. Of the numerous lawsuits that have been filed by disciplined church members and church staff, there have been four primary causes:
 - a. Inconsistency by a church in exercising discipline -- disciplining some, while ignoring the discipline of others.
 - b. Abuses by churches of the discipline process -- spreading gossip, failing to follow established procedures, etc.
 - c. Failure by churches to communicate with members about the role of discipline in the life of the church, so that members do not know in advance that they may be subject to discipline.
 - d. Society's emphasis on the rights of the individual.

2. There is no guaranteed method of avoiding a lawsuit, but the following are recommendations for churches in practicing church discipline:
 - a. Give notice that the church practices discipline
 - (1) In church bylaws
 - (2) In formal written membership covenants
 - (3) As part of church membership training - provide a written Biblical statement as part of membership materials
 - (4) As a subject of preaching and teaching
 - b. Make sure the church is consistent in its practice of discipline, even' when a potential case is particularly awkward.
 - c. Determine the church's disciplinary procedures in advance of needing to use them. In the Presbyterian Church in America, the *Book of Church Order* covers all essential procedures. Be sure officers are familiar with

- the steps outlined there, and that they study them thoroughly before beginning a disciplinary matter.
- d. In handling a disciplinary case, stress accuracy. Basing actions on assumptions and impressions will lead to trouble.
 - e. If legal action is threatened by the member charged consult a Christian attorney to review the procedures the church is following before proceeding.
 - f. Limit the “audience” to the “community of interest”. Unnecessary publication of the disciplinary matter is unethical and can lead to lawsuits. The *Book of Church Order* gives church courts discretion as to public announcements of church discipline. If the court decides to announce the discipline to the membership, the following are recommended guidelines:
 - (1) Hold a closed congregational meeting. Ask all visitors to leave.
 - (2) Read a brief statement from the Session which has been written ahead of time and deals with the case only generally, not in specific detail. Do not mention other individuals, who, while perhaps involved in the matter, were not members of the church subject to discipline.
 - (3) Discreetly tape record the meeting so there is a record of what was said. Also keep a copy of the written statement that was read.
 - (4) After reading a brief statement which focuses on Biblical reasons for the discipline, lead the congregation in prayer for the individual(s) involved and the church as a whole. Be sure that the scope of information disclosed is limited. It is not necessary to identify the specific sin involved -- a reference to “unrepentant sin” might suffice.
 - g. Any written announcements made should usually be sent only to the congregational membership, and no more should be said than is necessary to inform the congregation of the Session’s compliance with biblical teaching in dealing with the problem, and to inform the members of the repentance expected of them by the Scriptures (cf., Paul’s correspondence about discipline, 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 2:1-11; 7:8-13).
 - h. Maintain an attitude of planning your procedures in advance rather than just reacting to problems that develop. In the care of Christ's Church, there will inevitably be difficulties, but He will honor efforts to maintain the purity of His Bride.
 - i. More than anything else, do church discipline “by the Book”. Follow Scripture and the *Book of Church Order* meticulously. Many problems in discipline cases can be traced to church officers getting creative and ignoring established procedures.”

Proceed slowly. No deadline need be immediately imposed and, although the uncertainty and pain of separation for the remaining spouse is great, the church must counsel patience. Allow time for the Holy Spirit to work in both spouses.

B. Resources.

1. Books
 - Baker, Don, *Beyond Forgiveness - The Healing Touch of Church Discipline*, Multnomah Press.

Buzzard, Lynn and Lawrence Eck, *Tell It To The Church*, David C. Cook Publishing Company.

Elliott, Elizabeth, *Discipline, The Glad Surrender*, Revell.

Gage, Joy P. & Kenneth G., *Restoring Fellowship*, Moody Press.

MacNair, Donald J., *Restoration God's Way*, Great Commission Publications.

Schaeffer, Francis A., *The Church Before the Watching World*, Inter Varsity.

White, John and Blue, Ken, *Healing the Wounds, The Costly Love of Church Discipline*, Inter-Varsity.

Wray, Daniel E., *Biblical Church Discipline*, The Banner of Truth Trust.

2. Pamphlets

Buzzard, Lynn, *"Readiness For Reconciliation, A Biblical Guide"*, published by the Christian Conciliation Service, a ministry of the Christian Legal Society, P.O. Box 2059, Oak Park, IL 60303.

Cassity, C. Fred, Chairman of Mediation/Arbitration Subcommittee, Christian Legal Society, *"The Resolution Of Disputes Between Christians"*, published by the Christian Legal Society, P.O. Box 2069, Oak Park, IL 60303.

Gilchrist, Paul, editor, *Divorce And Remarriage*, Documents of Synod, RPCES, p. 199.

IV. PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSEL OF THOSE SEEKING REMARRIAGE

A. Understanding the person seeking remarriage

1. Know the times

Scripture tells us to know the times. We are to understand our culture, the change, and the people who respond to those factors. With first-time marriages ending in divorce at a fifty percent (50%) rate and second marriages failing at a much higher rate, the church cannot avoid the resulting issues and problems. One issue is the fact that people will seek remarriage. These couples will approach the church, will seek counsel of the pastor, and will ask to be married.

The church will have to give spiritual direction to these people, minister to the families of the divorced, and make biblical decisions concerning the remarriage of a growing number of people. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the church and the local pastor to be aware of the times, to seek knowledge of the issues involved, and to make the Bible relevant to the life and struggle of the divorced.

2. Know the people

When one or more of the parties seeking to be remarried approaches the church to perform the ceremony, the pastor or counselor should be aware of the tensions, struggles, anxieties, and euphoria that may be taking place in the once-married party.

a. The emotional state

Depending upon the person and the length of time he or she has been divorced, the party desiring remarriage may be experiencing the following emotions which the pastor

must somehow help the party work through, come to acceptance of, and apply biblical solutions to.

(1) Euphoria

The party may be on an emotional high. He or she may see the future spouse as God's special gift to him or her and an answer to prayer and to the frustrations of single life. Elated with the prospect of remarriage, the person may become blinded to issues he or she never dealt with in the previous marriage. The party may become numb to his or her own faults and the faults of his potential partner. Such numbness is a failure to realize that marriage is to be a reflection of Christ's marriage to His church. As a reflection, earthly marriage is to become a Christ-centered institution with each party seeking to love the Savior more by ministering his love to the other.

(2) Anxiety

The once married person may be experiencing anxiety. He or she was emotionally hurt in the first marriage and is a bit ambivalent to proceed with another. This person may feel pressured into this marriage by the future spouse who has dreamed of a blessed relationship for some time. Anxiety may indicate that the person has not completely worked through the process of loss (divorce being a loss), has not adequately "deconstructed" his prior marriage to come face to face with his own faults, has entered his present relationship too quickly after divorce, or is not entirely convinced he or she should be remarried. Sufficient time should be taken (some studies suggest two years) to insure that a new marriage rests on a solid foundation.

(3) Fear

The formerly married party may be experiencing fear which makes it hard for us to take the next step. He or she may fear falling into the old patterns of the past that contributed to the prior divorce. Or the fear may be directed at the future spouse becoming like the former. Or the fear may have to do with being a step-parent, an absentee parent, or a parent of a blended family. These are normal fears that need to be resolved, faced, or accepted.

(4) Anger

Anger is a common emotion seen in the formerly married. This emotion may be overt or held inside. If inside, bitterness may take root, and bitterness is like an acid that eats the container (the person) from the inside out. The anger or bitterness may be directed at the former spouse or in-laws because of a hotly contested divorce, disagreement over parental right and responsibilities, or personally inflicted innuendos and emotional pain. It is important for the formerly married to attempt at least a reconciliation of friendship. If bitterness is involved, the party should ask for forgiveness of the bitterness even if it is provoked by the former spouse.

(5) Guilt

The formerly married may still be carrying guilt from the former marriage. Now walking more closely with the Lord, he or she may have been convicted of past sins, faults, and unkindnesses. He or she may see remarriage as the opportunity to make amends for past sins. But this is not a reason for marriage. The person needs to confess the sins causing the guilt, seek forgiveness from the party he hurt, and attempt at least a reconciliation of friendship.

(6) Stubbornness

This is more of an attitude than a feeling, but the pastor should be aware that some formerly married people will not care what the church says. He or she is here to be remarried, the church has no business in his or her former life, and no one can require

him or her to submit to counseling. This person is basically present in the church or in the pastor's office by the request of the future spouse. A contumacious behavior is sinful and must be confronted with loving discipline if the person is a member of the church. If not, the church should counsel the future spouse, who is a member, about its concerns and beliefs that marriage is not appropriate at this time.

b. The cognitive state

The tendency of the formerly married will be to make decisions based upon one or more of the above emotional states. Good cognitive judgment based upon scriptural principles gets clouded by the emotions. God created mankind to emote, to experience the entire range of emotions. If man has been created with emotions, emotions are, therefore, good. But one definition of evil is the abuse, misuse, or perversion of anything good. In man's fallen state emotions are easily abused and misused. And because people feel intensely and desire to feel good, they will tend to make choices based upon how they feel or what they desire to feel.

The pastoral counselor should recognize the tendency, point out areas where choices were made based on feelings, and direct his counselees to Scripture in order to think God's thoughts and make choices based on God's will.

c. The relational state

All human beings were created to relate to God and to each other. Their motivational thirsts for security and significance were to be satisfied in God and his design for His creation. Man and woman were created to complete and complement each other - to give each other a soul oneness. Since the Fall, this oneness has been disrupted. The thirst for security and significance became misdirected. Sin entered the world and self-centeredness became the norm. Men and women still want security and significance, but sin causes them to seek it by illegitimate means, i.e., not through God's constructed order.

A formerly married person may see the future spouse as filling the void which he or she has been experiencing. A man may see his future wife as providing the significance he needs. Or a woman may view her future husband as satisfying the security she desires. Now, there is nothing wrong with having security and significance in a marriage, but if these thirsts are sought to be satisfied outside of the Main Thirst Quencher, God, they will never be fully satisfied.

Relationship, therefore, has to be first established with the One who is the fountain of living waters and secondly, with people who are at times God's vessels to carry His thirst-quenching water to those seeking the oasis of life in a second marriage. The formerly married (as well as all of us) may have the tendency to be focused more on the human relationship and not on his or her relationship with Christ Jesus.

3. Know the ministry

When a formerly married person approaches the pastor in order to be remarried, the pastor is encouraged to seek understanding of the emotional state of such a person, how he or she may come to the decision of remarriage and how the pull to relate with another may cloud his or her relationship with the Savior. The pastor is the shepherd of his people and must know his sheep. As difficult as it may seem, the shepherd is to have an understanding of counseling his sheep. If he doesn't, he must seek training, have others in his congregation aid in the shepherding (and train them), or refer to people skilled in the field of counseling.

The pastor is a busy man. His job is to equip the saints for ministry, but he can't equip if he has never been equipped himself. More and more people will seek to be remarried. The pastor is the first person to whom they will come. If he is not equipped to minister to them, to make the Bible relevant to the issues they face, he must seek to be equipped by reading various resources, attending appropriate seminars, or bringing in an expert to teach him and his congregation.

B. Guidelines for remarriage

The local Session should establish its guidelines for remarriage. The position the church takes will clear up much confusion about the possibility of remarriage. The couple approaching the pastor for marriage can be handed a set of guidelines. The pastor can explain that the Session has made this a policy of the church. This will take pressure off him if there is a question about marrying the couple. The pastor should not be left in a position where he is the sole determinant in the remarriage of a couple. The following are suggested guidelines for remarriage which a local Session may adopt, modify, or just use as a reference.

1. Where the former spouse is deceased, remarriage is permitted. *Romans 7:2* "For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband."

1 Corinthians 7:39 "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, but only in the Lord."

2. Where divorce occurred prior to one's conversion, it is unclear whether the believer may remarry.

Note:

The Committee was divided in its opinion regarding related questions. A majority maintained, for example, that a Christian who was divorced during the time of his or her unbelief was obligated to seek reconciliation with the former spouse even though still an unbeliever. In their view, some of the Lord's statements in Matthew 19 and Paul's in 1 Corinthians 7 are based on the binding obligation of the original marriage. The minority felt, contrarily, that the requirement to marry only in the Lord took precedence. Again, the majority, by a similar principle, held that two divorced unbelievers, upon their conversion, are obligated to remarry one another. The minority, believing such a marriage to be, in fact, a new marriage, did not admit that obligation.

In the case of those who hold that the believer may remarry, but only in the Lord, the reasoning is followed:

- (1) *2 Corinthians 5:17* "Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."
 - (a) When a person has experienced the new birth, all sin is forgiven and all condemnation removed (Romans 8:1).
 - (b) Therefore, divorce prior to conversion doesn't preclude a remarriage to a Christian mate.

- (c) Similarly, conversion does not necessarily require remarriage to a former spouse.
- (2) The Point: Jesus is in the ministry of reconciliation. We, his disciples, should reflect his ministry. Furthermore, repentance ('shuv') has the element of returning and going back in the opposite direction. This direction is back toward relationship with the offended party, vertically with God and horizontally with people. The church, therefore, should strongly encourage a healing of any difficulties with a former spouse.
3. Where the Session or its representatives has determined that the divorce had occurred on Scriptural grounds, remarriage is permitted for the party sinned against.
Matthew 19:9 *"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another commits adultery."*

1 Corinthians 7:15 *"Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; and brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases; but God has called us to peace."*
4. Where a former spouse has remarried and the Session or its representatives is convinced that the parties seeking remarriage are born-again, remarriage is permitted.
Reasoning: Regardless of the reasons for the divorce or who was the offending party, if remarriage has occurred, the marital union is permanently broken. Marriage could never occur between the parties (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Reconciliation is, therefore, impossible and the remaining former partner is eligible to remarry.
5. Where a Christian causes his or her marriage to end in divorce on non-biblical grounds, remarriage may be permitted only if the former spouse has remarried or has died, and the future spouse is born-again.
Note:
See Note above in B.2.
6. Where a "professing Christian" spouse has left his or her spouse, the offended party may seek a divorce and remarry only after discipline under the guidelines of Matthew 18 and the *Book of Church Order* has been prosecuted to its conclusion; and the Session has ecclesiastically decided to treat the offending spouse as an unbeliever (Matthew 18:17).

C. **Concerns of those in the congregation who have been divorced**

1. Will a divorced person be allowed to participate in various activities and service opportunities in the church?
Answer: Divorce in and of itself need not preclude opportunities to be involved in the church, except insofar as it may preclude a man holding a church office or other leadership position. As far as service opportunities are concerned, spiritual, psychological and relational

maturity as well as giftedness are the primary requisites. The Session will have to make the evaluations on a case by case basis. A person's divorce may be considered as only one part of the evaluation process. The primary consideration should be the person's reputation in the church and the local community, not his or her divorce.

2. Will there be a stigma placed upon a divorced person?
 Answer: Stigmas are the result of individual biases. The Session should do all it can to remove any stigma. It should attempt to assimilate divorced people into its membership by involvement on Sunday morning, explaining who they are, the difficulties they have and the need for the church to accept them openly and warmly into the fellowship.

D. Practical considerations for ministering to those contemplating remarriage

1. Require the couple to submit to pre-marital counseling which should cover the following subjects:
 - a. A frank discussion of the prior marriage and pitfalls.
Reasoning: Before a new marriage is attempted, the person seeking remarriage should “deconstruct” his prior marriage. He or she needs to break it apart, face the old issues and patterns, and confront the person he or she was and may still be. This is a painful process, but if a new relationship is to last, the former married must analyze his or her former way of thinking and responding to an unpleasant situation. Such an activity and process will also help the person work through any grief process not yet completed. Divorce is a loss. It is a heart-wrenching experience that needs a time of healing in order to bring one to acceptance of the divorce, of the finalization of a relationship, and of oneself as being okay in the economy of God (if God's forgiveness is obtained).
 - b. An honest discussion on sexuality
Reasoning: Often men and women don't really understand each other. A couple should seek to understand how each sex views the other, and how to be sensitive to each other's needs. A study of the Song of Solomon would be very beneficial.
 - c. A look at personalities and temperaments
Reasoning: Personality testing (like the Myers/Briggs Test) may be given with proper and adequate explanation to follow. God has created us all differently. If we are to minister properly to our spouse, we need to know his or her personality. We are commanded by Scripture to understand our spouse. Testing is a tool which aids us in this endeavor.

Temperament testing (like the Taylor/Johnson Temperament Analysis) may help the couple to see areas of weakness, compatibility and potential problems in dispute resolution.

Either a pastor will have to be trained to give and interpret these tests or he will have to ask a local counselor to perform the task.

- d. An in-depth look at biblical responsibilities
Reasoning: It is astonishing how little married couples know about their biblical responsibilities and their roles as husband or wife. It is the responsibility of the church to teach each party what their biblical job description is and how to accomplish it. For instance, what does it mean for a husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church? Or what is the meaning of biblical submission?
- e. A teaching on the different kinds of love that must be practiced in marriage
Reasoning: If you were to ask the average person to give you a definition of love, he or she would invariably describe something that had the concept of caring for another. Well, that is partially correct, but when we read the Scripture in its original languages, we discover many words for love, each having a different meaning. How do these words relate to marriage? If a marriage is to last, the parties need to be loving in a number of different ways.
- f. A teaching of vows
Reasoning: People in this society have not taken commitments seriously. A broken promise is not a big thing to people. But it is to God. People who are seeking remarriage have taken vows before, but the everlasting nature of them was not fulfilled. What makes this “go-round” any different? The seriousness of taking a vow before God must be stressed.
- g. A discussion, teaching, and practice of communication
Reasoning: The biggest complaint of spouses is a lack of communication. “My husband just doesn't listen to me”, complains the wife. “Oh, yeah,” responds the husband, “She doesn't understand me”. Pastors and counselors must teach the skills of communication as well as establish for his counselees ground rules for good healthy arguments.
- h. An honest discussion of the problems that normally occur in blended families
Reasoning: Remarriage often brings two families together. One spouse becomes the step-parent to the other's children. Occasionally, there is a mixture of children from both parents living under the same roof. Such a situation produces a new dynamic and creates additional tensions and problems.
- i. Encouragement to reconcile a friendship with the former spouse when possible
Reasoning: Although remarriage to a former spouse may be impossible, the party seeking remarriage needs to attempt a reconciliation of friendship with the former spouse. Friendship may never be attained, but the attempt should be made. The purpose for such an act is to complete the process of healing the loss occurred in divorce, to complete any process of forgiveness still needed, and to benefit the children if there are any.

NOTE: There are other subjects which undoubtedly should be covered. However, the process of preparing a person for remarriage is not a quick and easy one. A pastor may develop his own methodology, train lay people to help, or add to the subjects to be discussed.

2. Encourage the parties to discover and use their spiritual gifts.
Reasoning: This helps them to see in what way God has graced them, and gives them direction in the areas of their use to the church. Once tested, plug them into the appropriate ministry in your church.
3. Place them in a small group (preferably a group with the same or similar affinities).
Reasoning: This helps to assimilate them into the church and fosters acceptance within the church community.
4. Encourage them to participate in Sunday School and various church functions.
Reasoning: This helps them to feel part of the church body and aids in removing any stigma they may feel as being formerly married.
5. Once the person is remarried, introduce the person and the new spouse one Sunday morning as newly married.
Reasoning: It helps complete the process of assimilation into the church membership. It shows the members that the leadership supports the couple. It aids in the removal of stigma caused by the prior divorce. It enhances the couple's acceptance by the local church body.

E. Resources

1. Personnel
 - a. While the Elders may never abrogate their primary responsibility to the flock, they may for reasons sufficient to themselves refer them to a local counselor to do the counseling and/or administer the testing required. Prior to use of or referral to any counselor, determine the counselor's approach to therapy. Find out where and how the Bible fits into the counselor's philosophy of therapy. If you disagree or have reservations, do not refer to that counselor.
 - b. Pastors may seek help from those who are more experienced in counseling.
2. Seminars
(See II.D.2., p. 2361)
3. Books

To have a better understanding of biblical anthropology:
(See II. D. 3., p. 2362)

To gain insight in counseling couples for marriage and remarriage:
Stohman, Robert F. and Hiebert, William J., *Premarital Counseling*,
Lexington Books, D. C. Heath and Company.
Wright, H. Norman, *Premarital Counseling*, Moody Press.

To help determine if a person has Bone through steps of reconciliation:

Jones, John Edward. *Reconciliation*, Bethany House Publishers.

Talley, Jim. *Reconciliation Differences*, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

To build a biblical marriage:

(See II. D. 3., p. 2362)

To understand one's sexuality:

(See II. D. 3., p. 2362)

To understand the single parent:

Barnes, Robert G. Jr., *Single Parenting*, Tyndale House.

Smoke, Jim, *Living Beyond Divorce, The Possibilities of Remarriage*, Harvest House.

Mowday, Lois, *The Snare*, Nav Press.

Brown, Michael A., *Second Class Christians? A New Approach to the Dilemma of Divorced People in the Church*, Intervarsity Press.

V. PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSEL OF THE CHILDREN OF DIVORCED PARENTS

A. Understanding the child of divorced parents

1. Know the times

The single-parent family is the most rapidly growing family form in America. Since 1960 the female-headed family has doubled and is outgrowing the typical husband-wife family at a rate of two and a half times faster. One out of every five school age children lives in a single parent household. Furthermore, it has been estimated that as many as fifty percent (50%) of all children born in the next ten years will experience the loss of a parent (mostly the father) through divorce. For most of the affected children, divorce will be experienced as a personal, familial, and social loss.

Since remarriage is quite common within a few years, these children will be faced with still more emotional struggles - the remarriage of a parent, the living with a step-parent, and/or the living in a blended family (i.e., a family with children from two or more different families).

Pre-marital counseling of those seeking remarriage should, therefore, include frank discussions of the potential or present problems that children will or may be experiencing. Most remarriages have not given adequate consideration to the psychological, social, or familial effects upon the children. Since most pastors are not and will never be experts in the counseling of children, it is recommended that a child psychologist or similar expert be solicited to help counsel children and instruct the couple seeking remarriage of the present or potential problems that such a remarriage may expect.

2. Know the People

It is not the intent of this committee's report to make pastors experts on children of divorced parents. A pastor is wise to seek aid and assistance from those whose ministries are directed toward children and adolescents. What the pastor should understand is the various emotional states that such children may experience in order to properly counsel the parent and to determine if the child needs help.

Children have little or no say in the divorce of their parents. Yet the hurt they must endure is enormous. They are not as resilient as the modern-day libertines would have us believe. Studies are showing that the emotional scars from the trauma still remain years later. The following are some reactions and feelings by children to the divorce of their parents.

a. Resentment

Since they feel the tension and experience the turmoil of divorce, children tend to become resentful toward one or more parents and/or toward God. They may think, "Why did they bring me into the world? I didn't ask to be born? Why didn't God do something to bring my Daddy back? It isn't fair". Or they resent the new step-parent who tries to fill the shoes of the lost parent. They may think, "Look, I didn't ask for him to be my father. You picked him out. I don't have to like him or even cooperate with him".

b. Anger

Anger is a little stronger than resentment. Bitterness could be taking root. Older children may experience this more deeply and act it out with behavior that is obnoxious, unkind, inconsiderate, stubborn, and at times violent.

c. Guilt

Some children tend to blame themselves for their parents' failure. They may have heard their name called out in an argument or felt the angered look of a parent and took it personally. They may have thought it was their stubborn or disobedient behavior that caused a fight which eventually ended in divorce. Small children are especially tender and susceptible to taking the heavy burden of the marriage failure on their own shoulders.

d. Fear

A child's emotional and economic security is shattered by the breakup of his parents. He becomes fearful of the future. "Will I see Daddy anymore? Will I be loved? Where will we live? What about my friends?" are all questions that may arise. The best security a child has are two loving parents who nurture him to the point of facing the world alone. Divorce fractures this and thrusts the child into a cold and cruel world before he is ready. One parent can never give the total security a child needs. And so fear can easily enter the child's psyche.

e. Depression

Experiencing the collapse of his familial world, the child can sink into depression. If his own little world (the family system) couldn't protect him, what can? The child may look at himself as worthless. "If I were a better or different kid, Dad would have stayed", he may think. His self-worth is lowered, and positive reinforcement can't come from the parent from whom he needs it most -- the parent who isn't there. Fear may also contribute to the depression. Older children may develop a fear of commitment (They saw betrayal.) or fear of falling in love (They saw a bad result.) or a fear of making decisions (They saw wrong ones made.). All these emotions add to the

withdrawal of the child into himself, and then he becomes a prime candidate for depression which may even lead to suicide.

f. Lack of love

Children almost always feel the loss of love when their parents divorce, even when one parent is showering them with affection and consoling them with the loss of the other parent. Children innately know that love does not walk away from personal responsibility. When the leaving parent says, "I love you and always will," the affected child sees these words as hollow. What he is thinking is, "Oh yeah, if you really loved me, you would work this out with mommy." Love seeks answers, not excuses, and either parent usually comes up with excuses.

In the same manner, when a parent wants to remarry, the child could be thinking, "If she really loved me, she wouldn't marry him, or she would ask Daddy back, or she wouldn't want to bring him into our little nest."

g. Loss

Children of divorced parents may feel cheated. They experience loss – of companionship of a parent, of celebrating holidays together, of establishing family traditions, of family structure, of economic stability, of normal existence. One teenager asked her mother a hundred times why she and her father divorced. The answer she kept hearing was, "Everybody is happier this way." Well, this teen wasn't happier. She missed her dad's hugs, the walks in the park with him, the fun times together. Divorce is usually the result of selfishness, and so, because of the self-centeredness of one or more parent, the children suffer loss.

h. Confusion

Divorce abruptly changes life which causes children to experience confusion and conflict. Not knowing what caused the divorce or what was going on, children are suddenly put in a quandary. This confusion stays with them for a long period of time.

And if a new marriage brings in children from the step-parent, conflict usually results. Children invariably think the step-parent favors his or her own children. They, therefore, feel less love and complain to their natural parent who usually takes their side and speaks to the step-parent, who disagrees. Before you know it, there is turmoil between the parents and the children.

Discipline is another problem area in blended families. One parent has normally not disciplined his or her children as sternly as the other. In fact, he or she may have been quite lax. Now, when the step-dad disciplines his step-children who were not used to the method nor the intensity, the natural mom may complain, demand he not discipline "her" kids, or defend "her" children.

A in discipline problem leads to a problem with authority. A problem with authority leads to confusion and problems in relationships.

i. Being different

Some children feel that they are not like the other kids anymore. They can't do what they used to do. The school may have a "Dad's Day" and Dad isn't there to there to participate. There may not be any money to participate in a favorite sport or buy the dress for the prom. Older children may have to baby-sit younger ones and, therefore, can't linger with friends after school.

Not only may they feel different, they may feel isolated because of their difference. Because they can't linger with friends, they may not get invited to the special parties or outings or social events. It is not uncommon for these children to feel lonely and helpless.

3. Know the ministry

To help single-parents and their children cope with their situation and to foster a better relationship for families of the remarried, the church must provide services and programs that meet the special needs of the children and the parents. Possible programs are single-parent support groups, children's peer support groups, parenting classes, latch-key programs after-school teen activities, counseling referrals, counseling programs, divorce recovery workshops, Pioneer or Awana programs, adult home Bible groups, and service-oriented projects.

Parents have to be encouraged to pursue social and physical activities, especially those that involve peers. The tendency of a single parent is to withdraw because of lack of energy, low motivation, or smothering of the child. Once remarried, the couple needs to be continually active, particularly with other couples.

B. Practical considerations for ministering to those contemplating remarriage when children are involved.

1. Require the person with children to make a list of the problems he or she thinks each child is having at present as a result of the prior divorce or loss of a parent.
 - a. Have the fiancé make a separate list based on his or her observations.
 - b. Compare these lists and bring up other areas of possibilities such as various emotional states of children of divorce.
 - c. Be frank in your discussions because the children are an integral part to remarriage. Remind the future step-parent that when he or she marries the parent, the children are part of the package.
 - d. Suggest methods to overcome some of the problem areas – which should include the seeking of family counseling.

2. Require the person with children to make a list of potential problems or foreseeable conflicts as a result of this remarriage.
 - a. Have the fiancé do the same.
 - b. Compare lists and see how realistic they are.
 - c. Discuss openly the potential problem areas and formulate a plan to prevent them from occurring or to overcome them if they do occur.

3. Require that the children visit with the pastor.
 - a. Explore their feelings about the divorce, about their future step-parent, and about their relationship with both natural parents.
 - b. Determine if they need professional counseling.

4. Encourage the parent to have his or her children involved with the church youth programs, including Sunday Schools.
 - a. Have the youth leaders monitor their participation and social adaptation.
 - b. Have youth leaders encourage other children to socialize with them.
 - c. Consider establishing a peer counseling program at your church since kids will more readily talk with peers than with adults.

- d. Encourage your youth leaders to:
 - (1) Visit the child at his or her home.
 - (2) Call the child and let him know he is missed when he is sick or could not attend a youth function. Or send the child a “We missed you” postcard from the youth group.
 - (3) Assure the child that the youth leader is always available to talk.
 - (4) Attend athletic events, special activities, and/or school plays in which the child is involved.
 - (5) Send birthday cards.
 - (6) Demonstrate unconditional love at all times especially when the child is frustrating.
 - (7) Pray daily for the specific needs of the child and ask God for wisdom to touch the life of this child in a unique way.
 - (8) Give the child personal attention outside the normal youth activities. Take him to a ballgame. Go out for ice cream.
 - e. Have the church sponsor after-school programs.
- 5. Encourage the parent and potential step-parent to participate with the children in various church activities.
 - 6. Encourage the parent to maintain social friendships and participate in fellowship activities without the children.
 - 7. If remarriage is decided upon, have a ceremony which recognizes and includes the step-children. (See suggested Ceremony below.)

C. Resources

- 1. Personnel
 - a. A local counselor could be of great help. Prior to any referral or request for aid, determine the counselor's relationship with Christ, his or her approach to therapy, and how the Bible fits into this approach.
 - b. A trained lay person who loves kids, has had experience in ministering to them, and is willing to help them overcome the difficulties in divorce and remarriage should be sought, encouraged, and used in the church's ministry.
- 2. Ministries
 - a. Fresh Start Seminars, Inc.
751 North Wayne Avenue
Wayne, PA 19087
800-882-2799
 - b. Dad, The Family Shepherd
P.O. Box 21445
Little Rock, AR 72221
 - c. Rainbows for All God's Children
1111 Tower Road
Schaumburg, IL 60173

3. Books

To help understand children of divorce:

Barr, Debbie, *Caught in the Crossfire*, Pyranee Books.

Hart, Archibald, *Children and Divorce*, Word Publishing.

Johnson, Laurence and Rosenfeld, Georglyn, *Divorced Kids*, Thomas Nelson Publishing.

Wallenstein, Judith and Blakeslee, *Second Chance*, Ticknor & Fields.

To help understand the changed family dynamic:

Nordtvedt, Matilda, *Daddy Isn't Coming Home*, Zondervan.

Spilke, Francine Susan, *The Family That Changed: A Child's Book About Divorce*, Crown.

Phillips, Carolyn E., *Our Family Got Divorced*, Regal Books.

Danziger, Paula, *The Divorce Express*, Delacorte Publishing Co.

To help children cope:

Stein, Sarah Bonnett, *On Divorce: An Open Family Book for Parents and Children Together*, Walker and Co.

Berger, Terry, *A Friend Can Help*, Advanced Learning concepts.

Rofes, Eric E., Editor, *The Kids' Book of Divorce*, Lewis Publishing Co.

Berger, Terry, *How Does It Feel When Your Parents Get Divorced?*

Julian Messner/Simon and Schuster Publishing Co.

D. Addendum:

Ceremony For Recognition Of Children At Remarriage

This part of a remarriage ceremony may be inserted after the prayer for blessing the covenantal union and before the lighting of the unity candle. In any event, it should be inserted prior to the declaration of marriage.

RECOGNITION OF CHILDREN

Minister: The ring(s) that you have exchanged symbolizes the bond and commitment that you _____(groom)_____ and you _____(bride)_____ have just made. As we bring praise for the bringing of you two together, we also give thanks for the merging of families. As a result of your union, you _____(whichever party is becoming a step-parent to live-in children)_____ have committed yourself to rearing _____(children's name)_____ in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. As an Israelite was to take in his deceased brother's family and raise the children within his own family environment, so, too, have you agreed to take in as your own the child of _____(groom or bride)_____.

BRING CHILDREN FORWARD (Young ones may be carried by grandparents or close friends.)

Minister: As part of the family which the bonds of matrimony have united, we recognize _____ (children) _____ and the significant role he/she/they play(s) in this marriage today celebrated. The love and the hope which God sends to you through the gift of children find expression in Psalm 127:3-5.

Behold, children are a gift of the Lord;
The fruit of the womb is a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So are the children on one's youth.
How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them;
They shall not be ashamed,
When they speak with their enemies in the gate.

EXPLANATION OF THE MEDALLION*

Minister: I understand you, _____ (groom) _____ and you, _____ (bride) _____ have a medallion to present to _____ (children) _____. The medallion has engraved upon it three intertwined circles which represent the linkage of all members of this family into a bond of love. It also depicts the way in which children are a part of the family unit -- not alone or separated from their parent and step-parent, but an integral part of a relationship which begins today. _____ Each time (children) look(s) upon the medallion, he/she could be reminded of the love both parents have for him/her.

PRESENTATION OF THE FAMILY MEDALLION (OR NECKLACE)

Minister: Do you _____ (groom) _____ and you _____ (bride) _____ now wish to present a family medallion (or necklace) to _____ (children) _____ as a symbol for family unity and _____ (children's name) love?

Bride and Groom: "We do."

Minister: Take the medallion(s) [or necklace(s)] from the Best Man and place it (them) upon each child repeating after me these words in unison:

Bride and Groom: (repeat after minister):

"We pledge our continuing love for you _____ (name) _____, _____ (name) _____, and we promise to cherish you/ and to hold you close to our hearts./ We promise to raise you/ in the nurture and admonition of the Lord/ and to give you the security/ of a family in Christ."

PRAYER FOR THE FAMILY

(Have children remain standing -- some with the Best Man and some with Bridesmaids. When the couple is presented and they leave to proceed from the church, have the children follow after them and the wedding party after the children.)

SPECIAL MUSIC (optional)

NOTE: Proceed to part of service that has the lighting of the Unity Candle.

* Medallion information: Rev. Roger Coleman, % The Westport Allen Center, 706 West 42nd Street, Kansas City, MO 64111, (816) 753-3886

VI. The Church's Ministry to the Separated and Divorced

A. Understanding the separated and divorced

1. Know the times

The single parent family is the fastest growing in the United States. During the past two decades, the single parent household, i.e., the separated or divorced has increased at a rate 2 1/2 times that of a two-parent family. Along with the rapid growth has come an awareness that single mothers are experiencing a considerable amount of emotional and psychological stress. Added to these stresses are the anxieties felt from rejection in the churches. The separated and divorced have complained about being treated as second class citizens in the family of God.

The church will have to give both spiritual direction to these people, minister to them and their children, and give practical wisdom to them for coping with life's struggles.

2. Know the people

a. The emotional state

The separated and divorced person experiences many varied emotions, some of which are similar in description as those listed in Section IV. A. 2. a. (Pastoral Care and Counsel of Those Seeking Remarriage), but different in intensity. For example, fear and anxiety are quite prevalent and attack the single parent in an acute way. Fear of the future, what will happen next, whether happiness will ever occur are haunting thoughts which can paralyze the individual. Fear of loneliness and not being accepted by former friends or church members may preoccupy the separated. The tendency will be to make choices based upon these fears and not upon good cognitive judgment. Wanting to feel secure and significant will lead them to wrong decisions and inappropriate friendships.

b. The cognitive state

See IV. A. 2. b. Two possibilities could occur in the exercise of the cognitive functions. The separated may make decisions based on his or her will to please, for the desire to overcome loneliness and make friendships is a strong survival instinct. The wrong friendships, or a quick marriage could result.

On the other hand, the separated or divorced may make decisions based on the hurt or guilt he or she may feel. This will normally catapult them into depression or isolation. They don't want to be around people; so they take themselves out of the mainstream to avoid further hurt.

The pastoral counselor should recognize the tendencies, encourage proper choices, and bring them to a point where they can risk further hurt.

c. The relational state

See IV. A. 2. c. Separated and divorced people still need to relate. Since God created them as relational beings they must continue to exercise this capacity and become involved with others. Withdrawal from relationships is a strong possibility. The church must prevent this.

3. Know the ministry

The pastor as the shepherd of his flock should realize that the separated and divorced feel estranged from the church and its members. They may think they have been stigmatized or branded as second class citizens. In fact, there are church members who are predisposed against them. The pastor needs to root out the bias and plug the separated and divorced into the ministries of the church. He should solicit session members to aid him in the assimilation of the separated and divorced into the membership of the church as well as the appropriate ministries of the church.

Of course, the session will have to make evaluations on a case by case basis whether a separated person may undertake a ministry. For instance, if reconciliation to a spouse or former spouse has been proposed, then the person should be working on the matters that would heal the marriage. Involvement in a ministry may hinder the process.

Furthermore, a person may be in an unrepentant state of sin. If so, then participation in a church ministry or program would be inappropriate. In fact, the process of discipline should have commenced.

B. Guidelines for ministry

1. Converse with the separated and divorced.

Many people who have become or who are in the process of divorce have felt themselves unseen, unknown, and untouched by the church. Even though most churches benignly neglect these people, neglect is still painful.

It is wrong to assume that the separated or divorced prefer silence on the subject of their marriage or the position in which they find themselves. Talking to them shows concern, and concern care. They already are treated like lepers by some friends. They surely don't want to be lepers in the church.

Conversing with them doesn't mean to force yourself on them. Pray for opportunities to speak, but in any event show cordiality and sincerity in greeting them if only in passing.

Do not worry what to say to them. Even if your words are “I just didn’t know what to say”, they convey concern. And remember, divorced people really don't need your guidance and wisdom nearly so much as the warmth of your smile and the sincerity of your words.

2. Act on their behalf.

If you sincerely care for the separated and divorced person, you will act on his or her behalf. If he or she needs a place to live, help him or her find it. If a shoulder is needed to cry on, give him or her yours. Introduce him or her to people who could help meet a need.

3. Include them in activities and ministries.

The reason why most separated and divorced people feel like they don’t fit in is because in many churches they don’t. Most church ministries focus on families, not the divorced or single parent. Most church functions are designed around family activities.

It is not specialized programs, as helpful as they are, that these people need. Rather a genuine awareness of their existence among the congregation is needed more. They need love and the feeling of belonging. So encourage congregants to include them in special activities, to invite them to special events and programs, and to ask them to their homes.

As a church, include them in ministry opportunities. They want to feel part of the team, contribute to the goals of the team, and make themselves useful to the team. Let them serve in some capacity, for serving is conforming to the image of Christ. And the job of the pastor is to disciple his sheep so that they do mature in Christ.

4. Reach out and touch them.

The separated and divorced have been deeply hurt and in some cases greatly traumatized by their divorce and the splitting of families. They need people to acknowledge their hurt, give them a hug, and to extend warmth and acceptance. These brothers and sisters more than others need to be physically touched. Yet when a godly brother or sister hugs a person of the opposite sex, sexual innuendos rush to the surface and rumors fly about.

Divorced people often feel they have become a threat to other marriages. Those who are insecure and have rocky marriages are the ones who fan the gossip fires. This is a shame, for the body of Christ is to hurt with each other and rejoice with each other. When the arm suffers, the whole body hurts. What often happens in churches is that the arm is hurting and the rest of the body wants to amputate it for fear of contamination.

The separated and divorced will always be part of the church. They will be a fast growing part of the church. In fact, most of the church families have been or will be touched by divorce in one way or another, whether it be through direct family split or a child of a member gets divorced. The church has the job of recognizing these people, ministering to them, and encouraging others to fellowship with them.

C. Resources

1. Personnel

- a. Local counselors may be able to give insight on ministering to the separated and divorced.
- b. Experts in the field may come to train pastors and lay people to do counseling and sponsor programs for the separated and divorced.

2. Seminars

- a. Fresh Start Seminars, Inc.
751 North Wayne Avenue
Wayne, PA 19087
- b. Fresh Start is one of several ministries that offers a three-day divorce recovery program. It is founded by Rev. Bob Burns, Associate Pastor at Perimeter Presbyterian Church (PCA), Atlanta, Georgia.

3. Books

To have a better understanding of biblical anthropology:

(See II. D. 3., p. 2362)

To understand the separated and divorced:

Smoke, Jim, *Suddenly Single*, Fleming H. Revell.

To help determine if a person has gone through steps of reconciliation:

(See IV. E. 3., p. 2377)

To help in recovering from divorce:

Augsburger, David, *Caring Enough to Forgive; Caring Enough Not to Forgive*, Regal.

Burns, Bob, *Through The Whirlwind: A Proven Path to Recovery From the Devastation of Divorce*, Oliver Nelson. (Bob is the founder and Board Chairman of Fresh Start Seminars, Inc.)

Smoke, Jim, *Growing Through Divorce*, Harvest House.

To understand the single parent:

(See IV. E. 3., p. 2377)

To look at sex from the single perspective:

Jones, Tom, *Sex and Love When You're Single Again*, Oliver Nelson. (Tom is the former pastor of Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Belleville, Illinois, and is Associate Director of Fresh Start Seminars, Inc.)

White, John, *Eros Defiled*, Intervarsity Press.