

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

A Social Document from the
Augustana Lutheran Church



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

A Series of Statements of the Augustana Lutheran Church, 1939, 1954, 1957

1939: Minutes p. 264

Whereas, the significance of the marriage relationship needs to be emphasized, as indicated by the high divorce rate, and most of our congregations contain members who have been divorced, and members of our Synod are subjected to harmful influences in reference to marriage and divorce, and

Whereas, the chief causes of divorce, desertion, adultery, incompatibility, cruelty, nonsupport and drunkenness, also obtain among the members of our churches,

Therefore be it resolved that:

1. Recognizing the home as a basic institution for the welfare of human society, the Synod urges its pastors and educators to carry on an educational program with respect to the marriage relationship and its significance. We request that the Board of Parish Education and Literature supply suitable material for this purpose, setting forth the causes of divorce; the peril of hasty marriages; the conditions in the structure of society which make for the instability of the home; the deceitfulness of relying upon mere physical attraction as a bond of union for husband and wife; the obligations of this sacred bond; the significance of high moral ideals, right spiritual attitudes and mutual confessional loyalties for the highest type of family life; the propriety and desirability of seeking the blessing of the Church for the marriage ceremony and of making the marriage ceremony a dignified, solemn and Christian rite.
2. Marriage is a holy estate instituted by God himself and a covenant which cannot be set aside by men at will. According to the will of God and the ideal for marriage set forth by Jesus, marriage is a union for life. The Synod deplors the alarming divorce rate and condemns divorce as a violation of the Christian ideal. Whenever divorce occurs it is due to sin. We urge our members to seek the counsel and meditation of their pastors before resorting to divorce to the end that every possible influence may be exerted to prevent marriage from becoming a failure. When, because of the hardness of men's hearts, divorce has taken place, it is the duty of the Church to exercise its disciplinary powers according to the congregational constitution, in the interest of the temporal and spiritual welfare of the individuals concerned.

3. The Synod forbids its pastors to officiate at the marriage of persons concerning whom they do not have a satisfactory assurance that they accept and have a sincere purpose to abide by the Christian ideal of marriage.
4. We favor the enactment of uniform marriage and divorce laws for the nation, requiring among other matters a medical certificate for marriage and providing for a period of at least five days between the application for a license and marriage.

1954: Minutes, p. 229

1. Scripture teaches that children are a gracious gift from God (Genesis 33:5), "a heritage from the Lord" (Psalm 127:3), who may bring much joy but who may also cause much heaviness of heart to their parents (Proverbs 10:1).
2. A married couple normally expects to have children as a fruit of their marriage. This is in fulfillment of God's blessing first given in the Garden of Eden and renewed to Noah and his sons, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28; 9:1).
3. Because children are intended by God as a blessing and a reward (Psalm 127:3) every child may justly expect love, care and nurture from its parents. To be unloved or rejected by its parents is a cruel tragedy which may forever mar the child's personality and may subject the parents to the dangers of the millstone the Savior described (Matthew 18:6).
4. To enable them the more thankfully to receive God's blessing and reward, a married couple should plan and govern their sexual relations that any child born to their union will be desired both for itself and in relation to the time of its birth.
5. The means which a married pair uses to determine the numbers and the spacing of the births of their children are a matter for them to decide with their own consciences, on the basis of competent medical advice and in a sense of accountability of God.
6. So long as it causes no harm to those involved, either immediately or over an extended period, none of the methods for controlling the number and spacing of the births of children has any special moral merit or demerit. It is the spirit in which the means is used rather, than whether it is "natural" or "artificial," which defines its "righteous" or "wrongness." "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31) is a principle pertinent to the use of the God-given reproductive power.
7. Scripture recognizes that a couple may wish for a limited period to practice marital continence as a religious expression, but cautions against its prolonged practice (1 Corinthians 7:15). Continence in the marriage relationship, however, when its sole purpose is the selfish avoidance of pregnancy, is

equally as wrong as is the use of contraception toward this same selfish goal.

8. An unrestrained production of children without realistic regard to God-given responsibilities involved in bringing up "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4) may be as sinful and as selfish as indulgence of the lusts of the flesh as is the complete avoidance of parenthood. God does not expect a couple to produce offspring at the maximum biological capacity. The power to reproduce is His blessing, not a penalty upon the sexual relationship in marriage.
9. In planning their family a married couple would wisely heed the Psalmist who pointed out the special blessings that may accrue to large families and the rich joys from children born in one's youth (Psalm 127:4-5). They are then more likely also to experience the truth that "Grandchildren are the crown of the aged" (Proverbs 17: 6).
10. Having children is a venture in faith, requiring a measure of courage and confidence in God's goodness. A married couple should accept parenthood without a rigorous calculation of all the cost involved. Income and standards of living, pressures for advancement in one's work, concern over the maternity process and over the health of the mother or of the child, and the uncertainties of the times or of social conditions should not be given undue consideration in determining a couple's acceptance of parental responsibilities.
11. Should an unexpected pregnancy occur, the Christian couple will accept the responsibility involved, prayerfully seek the blessing God offers, and be ready to accord the new child the love due him. Except as a medical measure to save the mother's life, abortion will not be resorted to by Christians, in obedience to the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill."
12. A married couple desirous of children but seemingly unable to have any of their own should seek competent medical counsel. In their desire for help they will not neglect the resource of prayer to which Rachel and Hannah, among the company of noted women, turned in their barrenness. Perhaps it will come true for them as it is recorded for Rachel: "And God hearkened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son..." (Genesis 30:22-23).
13. In those cases where both husband and wife are shown to be fertile but are unable to initiate pregnancy, the artificial insemination of the wife with her husband's semen, performed under the administration of a competent medical practitioner, may be justified.
14. Because of its moral implications as well as its clouded legal, social, biological and psychological aspects, the conscientious Christian will avoid participation in the process of artificial insemination wherein the semen of a man other than

the wife's husband is used. In this process the united of "The twain" is jeopardized by an unknown person intangibly realistically present in the child he has sired.

15. Sex relations outside of marriage, whether before an intended marriage or outside an established marriage bond, are a violation of God's will. The use of contraceptives by the unmarried can indeed reduce the risk of an illegitimate child, but this changes the character of premarital relationships just as little as the fact that one party to adultery may be sterile changes the nature of adultery.
16. The Christian couple anxious for but unable to have children of their own have other courses open to them. Perhaps they can adopt children through legitimate channels which safeguard the interests both of prospective parents and of children. Perhaps they can find constructive outlets for their interests in direct child-serving occupations or in community services for the welfare of children, thus reflecting the Master's concern for children (Mark 10:13-16).
17. Much as they may regret their inability to have children, the Christian couple will come to accept this fact as God's way of directing them to some other sphere of useful service in His kingdom. Their personal fruitfulness and the fruit of their faith can show itself in works of love and kindness to the least of His brethren. In so accepting their role and selflessly yielding themselves to God in Christian service to man, they may even find Him adding His blessings in the form of the long-desired child of their own.
18. Any planning for the number and spacing of the births of their children must be practiced prayerfully in accord with the fruits of the Spirit rather than in indulgence of the lusts of the flesh, and in the full freedom of the redeemed believer who feels his stewardship responsibility to his Lord. When so practiced it can bring the conscientious Christian husband and wife a deep appreciation for God's gracious blessings, a greater joy in the responsibility which parenthood brings, and a richer satisfaction over their partnership with God in His creation of each new life entrusted to them.

Note: All Scripture quotations in the above are from the *Revised Standard Version*.

1957: Minutes, p. 200

Whereas, the spiritual nurture of children is a primary duty of parents,

Be it resolved, that it be the official position of the Church that no Lutheran should enter into an agreement imposed by Roman Catholic Canon Law, where the promise is made to rear the children in a faith that he himself cannot accept.