



L. C. A. ARCHIVES

SOCIAL STATEMENTS

OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

Marriage and Family

Adopted by the Second Biennial Convention

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1. Marriage is that order of creation given by God in love which binds one man and one woman in a lifelong union of the most intimate fellowship of body and life. This one-flesh relation, when properly based on fidelity and love, serves as a witness to God's grace and leads husband and wife into service one of the other. In their marriage, husband and wife are responsible to God for keeping their vows and must depend upon his love and mercy to fulfill them.

2. God has established the sexual relation for the purpose of bringing husband and wife into full unity so that they may enrich and be a blessing to each other. Such oneness, depending upon lifelong fidelity between the marriage partners and loving service one of the other, is the essential characteristic of marriage. Marriage should be consummated in love with the intention of maintaining a permanent and responsible relation. Continence outside of marriage and fidelity within marriage are binding on all.

3. Procreation is a gift inherent in the sex relation. In children the one-flesh idea finds embodiment. Children bring great joy to marriage and reveal how God permits men to share in his continuing creation. Married couples should seek to fulfill their responsibilities in marriage by conceiving and nurturing their children in the light of Christian faith.

4. Husband and wife are called to exercise the power of procreation responsibly before God. This implies planning their parenthood in accordance with their ability to provide for their children and carefully nurture them in fullness of Christian faith and life. The health and welfare of the mother-wife should be a major concern in such decisions. Irresponsible conception of children up to the limit of biological capacity and selfish limita-

tion of the number of children are equally detrimental. Choice as to means of conception control should be made upon professional medical advice.

5. Marriage, as ordained by God, is a lifelong indissoluble union consummated through consent and coitus. Any breaking of the marriage bond involves sin and suffering. Forgiveness and reconciliation are incumbent upon all within marriage, and especially upon Christians. The church should extend its counseling services in an effort to maintain and strengthen families when they face difficulties threatening their unity.

6. Where marriage failure and divorce occur among Christian people, the church should recognize its involvement in the failure and seek to lead all concerned to repentance and forgiveness. If it proves impossible or unwise in the light of Christian love and concern for the welfare of all involved to reconstitute the marriage, then the church should continue, insofar as possible, to minister to each person involved.

If the question of the remarriage of a divorced person arises, pastors and congregations of the Lutheran Church in America should make their decisions on the particular circumstances in each case, being guided by the following considerations:

- a. While it is the Christian teaching that marriage is a lifelong, indissoluble union and that divorce and remarriage do violate God's order, nevertheless, God in his love does accept the sinner and deals with him according to his need. The church has recognized that marriage may be a remedy for sin and has seen in such Bible passages as Matthew 5:32; 19:9; and I Corinthians 7:15 the possibility of remarriage, but it also knows that the final basis of decision is loving concern for man in his actual situation.
- b. The divorced person seeking remarriage must recognize his responsibility in the breakup of the former marriage. He must give evidence of repentance and have made an effort to overcome his limitations and failures. He must have forgiven his partner in the former marriage, and he and his intended spouse must give assurance that he will fulfill his obligations to those involved in his former marriage.
- c. The divorced person must give evidence of his Christian faith by his witness in the church and must have received adequate counsel and training in preparation for marriage. He must be prepared to undertake the full responsibilities of marriage in dependence upon God.

7. The church should provide opportunities for its pastors and lay leaders to prepare themselves to meet their responsibilities in ministering to families and young people contemplating marriage. This involves seminary training, in-service training opportunities, college courses, and special courses and institutes for lay leaders. Study material based on the view of marriage set forth in these Summary Statements should be provided.

8. Congregations should provide opportunities for study courses and other activities in preparation for marriage. Help should be given through activities strengthening and enriching the life of existing family groups. Each pastor should require regular counseling periods with couples before marriage. In part this may be done with groups, but private and individual conferences should also be required.

9. Congregations and youth auxiliary and student groups of the church should continue to carry on educational programs regarding the special problems in mixed marriages. The inevitable compromise or denial of the evangelical faith, and the social and cultural problems usually accompanying such marriages, should be thoroughly explained.

10. The wedding service is a service of the church in which the atmosphere of reverence and worship should be maintained. The recognized service of the church should be used, and only such activities as are in conformity with the Christian view of marriage and in keeping with a service of worship should be permitted.

11. The home as the best channel for Christian nurture, education, and evangelization should receive renewed emphasis by all agencies of the church. Baptism, as God's act of accepting the child into the church in response to which parents have far-reaching responsibilities, should receive its proper stress in Christian teaching and practice. In preparation for baptism, parents should receive special counsel and instruction as to their duties and opportunities in the rearing of their children. The church should prepare and encourage the use of materials to stimulate and help parents in their task of Christian nurture.

12. In order to develop the highest standards of pastoral practice regarding marriage and family life, synods should hold conferences of pastors for discussion and clarification of the pastoral practices envisaged in this study.

13. Christian citizens should seek the enactment of uniform and constructive marriage and divorce laws. Such laws should encourage the procedures of adjustment and reconciliation rather than adversary litigation.

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