

Marriage Policy of Lake Region Bible Church

Regarding marriage, our church holds to the teachings of Holy Scripture and shall abide by our church constitution (which includes our Statement of Faith), and the additional guidelines here. This policy shall be implemented relationally and pastorally, with grace and truth, and with flexibility in specific situations, as some issues are not defined in Scripture or are understood differently by those who hold to a historic-evangelical understanding of Scripture. Also, this policy, and much of the wording in it, relies heavily upon a document¹ provided by the EFCA called: *A Church Statement on Human Sexuality: Homosexuality and Same-Sex "Marriage"*² (see Footnotes, p.12).

Section 1 – Origin & Purpose of Marriage

We believe that marriage is the original and foundational institution of human society, established by God as a one-flesh, covenantal union between one man and one woman that is life-long (until separated by death), exclusive (monogamous and faithful), and generative in nature³ (designed for bearing and rearing children), and it is to reflect the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ge 2:23-24; Eph 5:21ff). Although the Old Testament records God graciously working through those who engaged in polygamy and other sexual sins, such acts of immorality run counter to biblical teachings, lead to devastating consequences, and are forbidden in the church (Ge 30; 38; 49; 2Sa 11-12; Mt 1:1-17; Ex 20:14; 1Ki 11; Mal 2:13-16; 1Co 5; Eph 5:21ff; 1Ti 3:2,12; Heb 13:4).

Section 2 – The Inseparable Relationship of Marriage & Christian Theology

We regard marriage as a good creation of God, and marriage within the Church as a rite and institution tied directly to our foundational belief of God as creator who made us male and female. We also regard marriage as a sacred institution which images the mysterious and wonderful bond between Christ and His Church. To us, then, marriage is much more than merely a contract between two persons (a secular notion). It is a covenant grounded in promises between a man and a woman which finds its divinely intended expression in the "one flesh" union of husband and wife, and between the "one flesh" union of husband and wife and God (the divine design). We therefore will only authorize and recognize heterosexual marriages, between one man and one woman. In saying "one man and one woman," we are implying their original-biological gender. We will not recognize or support a marriage involving a person who has had a sex change.

Section 3 – Sin in the Christian Life

We Christians who attempt to follow biblical mandates on sex and marriage are not immune to expressing our own relationships and sexuality in sinful ways, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Ro 3:23; cf. Ro 1:18-32). We must always be mindful of this and humbly relate to others, accepting that we are all fallen creatures, and that all sin should be confronted and repented of (e.g. idolatry, pride, abusive relationships, disobeying parents, pornography, fornication, homosexual behavior, gluttony, racism, oppressing the poor, etc.).

Section 4 – Honoring & Loving all People

All human beings deserve to be treated with dignity and respect because each of us bears the image of God. This includes, for example, an LGBT⁴ person, who deserves this dignity and respect no less than any other. We, as Christians, should lovingly demonstrate this in our thoughts, speech, behavior, and in the way we communicate the gospel and teach the Holy Scriptures. Speech, including humor, which demeans LGBT people, has no place in the Christian community. Likewise, this means we oppose any mistreatment of those who identify as LGBT. We mourn with those who struggle with same sex attractions, and with their families, but as we grieve, we encourage behavior that follows the clear divine teachings of Scripture. (See Ro 12:9-20; Gal 6:1; 2Co 2:5-11).

Section 5 – Celibacy, Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage

1. The celibate life lived for Christ and His kingdom is praised in Scripture and should be honored and promoted by the church. If a believer does get married, he/she shall only marry another believer (of the opposite sex), and should not marry an unbeliever. Couples should not live together or come together in sexual union until after they are married, and spouses should love, serve, and be faithful to one another. If a believer's spouse dies, he/she is free to remarry another believer.
2. Believers should nurture their marriage in, and be accountable to, the fellowship of the local church. Those who are married should not seek a divorce, unless they have biblical grounds to do so, and only after seeking godly counsel. A believer who is married to an unbeliever should not initiate a divorce, if his/her unbelieving spouse is willing to remain with him/her. If two believers mutually decide to separate or get divorced without biblical grounds, they should remain celibate in hopes of reconciliation. The church shall extend loving-support to all those who have suffered divorce, and shall instruct those who have wrongly initiated or caused a divorce to repent, reconcile when possible, and rejoice in God's forgiveness and grace. (See also Section 6).
3. If someone is in an abusive-marital relationship, he or she should seek godly counsel, including immediate help or safety if the situation is harmful or life-threatening (including help from law enforcement, professional counseling, and/or medical professionals). The church shall also take a loving stand against abusive behavior in the hopes of leading the abusive spouse to repentance, provide loving support and protection for the abused family members, and exercise church discipline against the abusive spouse when necessary. Those in our fellowship, who engage in ongoing acts of disobedience related to sexual activity, marriage, or anything else, shall be lovingly confronted based on Scripture's teachings and as defined by our constitution, with the hopes of repentance and reconciliation. (See Mal 2:13-16; Mt 17:3-9; 18:15-19; 1Co 5 & 7; Gal 6:1).

Section 6 – Church Sponsored Marriages and Guidelines Regarding Divorce & Remarriage

1. Only such marriages which fit the definition above may be conducted on our church property and/or officiated by members or staff of our congregation. Regarding more specific details of our policy on marriage, divorce and remarriage, we take into account the following:
 - A. That marriage is a life-long covenant between one man and one woman, and that sexual relations is a blessing from God that should be enjoyed within marriage only;
 - B. That our marriages should be built up by the local church, which includes believers voluntarily submitting ourselves and the decisions we make to the protective covering and accountability of a local church;
 - C. That adultery, abandonment and abuse violate the marriage covenant; that God hates not just the act of divorce, but also the immorality, abuse and neglect within marriage that sometimes lead to, or is perpetuated by, divorce (Mal 2:13-16); and that God permits divorce in some circumstances as a means of protecting and providing for the spouse who has been, or is being, sinned against (Mt 16:8; 1Co 7:15).
2. In general, our church will support a divorce and/or remarriage for someone whose spouse commits sexual immorality, or for one who has an unbelieving spouse who separates from him/her, and we believe that someone who is divorced and remarried might still qualify⁵ to be an elder or deacon. In order to understand and obey all that Scripture's teaches, it is important to ask not only "when" does God permit divorce but also "why" (His loving provision for those who have been sinned against, etc. [Mt 19:8; cf. Mt 12:1-14]).
3. In light of differences Christians have in understanding biblical principles and teachings regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage, we allow for some differences of opinion on these matters. This flexibility is permitted for at least two biblical reasons.
 - A. First, some situations are not clearly defined in Scripture, and/or there may not be a consensus within church history or within current evangelical perspectives on a specific situation. Therefore we want to allow for some flexibility in order to most faithfully address each situation, and for the sake of conscience (not mandating that our pastors or church members be forced to act contrary to their personal beliefs).
 - B. Second, we seek to faithfully teach and practice all that Scripture teaches, which includes both honoring the marriage covenant and extending grace to sinners. This includes our call to promote reconciliation in troubled marriages, to take a stand against unbiblical divorce, and to extend grace, protection, and provision to those who have been or are being sinned against in marriage. Church members, and regular attenders, who are experiencing difficulty in their marriages, should proactively seek help from the elders, or other godly Christians, before seeking separation or a divorce. Part of obeying Christ is voluntarily submitting our selves and our marriages to a local church and the shepherding role of the elders.
 - C. Here are a few examples in which we will allow some flexibility regarding when marriage, divorce or remarriage may be accepted or supported by the church, the elders, or our pastor(s): 1) pursuing marriage when already engaged in sexual relations; 2) initiating a divorce (instead of reconciling) when one's adulterous spouse has repented; and 3) initiating a divorce when one's *unbelieving spouse separates or is abusive (causing forced separation) and refuses to repent and reconcile (*this might include a professing believer who is viewed as an unbeliever in light of his/her ongoing-willful sin [cf. 1Co 7:15; 1Jn 3:9; 5:18]). In some of these situations, we may not think the person is making the best choice, or we are not sure, but we believe he/she might have biblical grounds for his/her decision.

Section 7 – Marriage and the Free Exercise of Religion

Our definition of marriage is intimately connected to other foundational matters of our faith. Therefore, we regard this definition of marriage and these restrictions of marriage, applied by our church and church members, to be an expression of, and protected by, the free exercise of religion clause, in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

¹ That document was written by the Spiritual Heritage Committee of the EFCA (May 2013). It is not an official EFCA policy, but it is provided as a resource for us to use. Sections 1 through 4 and Section 7 of our policy rely heavily upon this EFCA document.

² Because we do not believe same-sex "marriage" constitutes a God-ordained, biblically defined marriage, we have noted this by including quotation marks around the word "marriage" when referring to this concept.

³ This is true whether the couple is able to/intends to have children. One of the primary purposes of marriage is procreation. We recognize that there are couples who are infertile and unable to procreate. We are also aware that for those who marry at an older age they may not be able to bear children or have already raised their family. While we recognize these unique situations, some of which remind us of the brokenness of this fallen world, it does not change the fact that marriage is generative in nature.

⁴ The common expression LGBT is used here, which is also intended to include QIA (LGBTQIA): Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Ally (friend), or any other group not conforming to the traditional view of sexuality or marriage.

⁵ In 1Timothy 3:2 & 12, "husband of one wife" is literally "of one woman [wife] man [husband]." This might mean "having the character of a one-woman man" [faithful to his wife], or that polygamists do not qualify, or that he has never had more than one wife (Source: ESV Study Bible © 2007).