

DIOCESE OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

BACKGROUND STATEMENT RE: CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Revised 5/98

At the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.

Mark 10:6-9

Christian marriage is the lifelong union between a man and a woman in which they make vows before God and the Church and receive the grace of God to help them fulfill those vows. The Church considers marriage to be sacramental in character, expressing something of the nature of Christ's love and commitment to his Church. The purpose of marriage is for "their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and when it is God's will for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord." (BCP p.423) Jesus said that when two people marry they leave their fathers and mothers and become one flesh. To live as one flesh means to regard each other's security, happiness and personal growth as important as one's own. In the view of the Church, this is accomplished through agreement of both parties to establish the gospel of Jesus Christ as authority over themselves and their lives together. In practice the study of scripture, daily prayer, regular worship and the support of consistent Christian fellowship enables the couple to be successful in determination of the will of Christ in all decisions affecting them individually or corporately. The sacrifice of dying to one's self and living in Christ is the heart of every Christian marriage.

Since scripture plainly states that "God hates divorce" (Malachi 2:16), the provision for remarriage must not be seen as condoning or approving of divorce, but rather a pastoral response to the fact that divorce does occur. The Episcopal Church seeks to help people make a new life when their marriages are clearly and irreversibly broken. When both partners seek to follow the redemptive path of Christ they discover that such a commitment not only works, but brings great joy to themselves and others.

Christian marriages are begun with the sacramental grace of holy matrimony and are strengthened through the grace extended to God's people in baptism, the Eucharist, and reconciliation of a penitent. Through baptism we are made members of God's family, we are given the Holy Spirit, we are promised forgiveness and forgiven, and we are enabled to embark on a pilgrimage of faith in which we die to self and are raised as new people in Jesus Christ, our Lord. We can be sure that God will nurture us on our journey through participation in the sacraments and interacting with other members of the body of Christ, and corporately we become lights to the world in our generation. As expressed in the Book of Common Prayer, every member of the body of Christ has responsibility to encourage and assist those who are married in the Church to grow in their capacity to love, forgive and affirm one another.

THE DIOCESE OF CENTRAL FLORIDA - DIOCESAN POLICY HANDBOOK

It is the policy of the Diocese of Central Florida that:

1. At least one member of the marriage must be baptized.
2. Regular attendance at worship is required.
3. In a situation of remarriage, at least one year shall have passed from the date of the divorce decree.
4. Pre-marital instruction shall include the items mentioned on the petition form.
5. The judgment of the Bishop shall be requested at least 30 days prior to the date of the marriage.
6. The approved petition form shall be used by the clergy in obtaining a judgment.
7. When either person seeking the Bishop's permission to marry following divorce (or annulment) has had more than one previous marriage, it is the policy of this diocese that in addition to the pre-marital pastoral counseling given by the clergy, there shall be evaluation by a professional psychological counselor. We recognize there are no guarantees as to the "success" of a proposed marriage, but our concern is to ensure - so far as is possible - that a pattern of marital failure not be repeated. We seek the assurance of a professional counselor that the current relationship is a healthy one, and there are no obvious psychological impediments resulting from the previous marriage(s).

CONCERNING CLERGY DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

A member of the clergy whose marriage is in jeopardy shall inform the Bishop. The Bishop shall be made aware of the problems and the measures taken to resolve them. Plans for remarriage will not be given consideration until at least one year has elapsed after the final divorce decree, except in those cases in which an extremely lengthy separation has preceded the final legal decree.

The diocesan guidelines for remarriage after divorce are in all cases to be followed. The Bishop, Priest, and intended spouse will mutually agree on a marriage counselor to conduct premarital preparation and submit an application to the Bishop for judgment. Inasmuch as the clergy guide and counsel persons seeking remarriage, their own preparation under such circumstances should be a model for the process which the church intends. In his counseling with the priest intending marriage, the Bishop will usually advise against remaining in the parish served prior to the divorce.

Under no circumstances will a marriage be recognized unless it has complied with canonical procedures.

We recognize the clergy to be leaders of the congregations and as such they must be models of reconciliation. If the clergy are involved in scandalous or immoral behavior their resignation will be required.