

Policy: Divorce and Remarriage Among Pastors (Proposal)

March 8, 1994	Original Draft
May 10, 1994	Revised by Southern California Ministers
July 7, 1994	Revised by OMB
January 24, 1995	Revised by OMB

This policy results from the struggle of our Conference Pastors to answer the question, "What can we do when one of our fellow pastors experiences the trauma of marital failure?" Over the period of its development, we pastors have also sought to work through what it means to correctly interpret and apply Scripture within our Conference policies. That would do so speaks well for our Conference. For in part, it is a statement that the Bible is our rule in matters of faith and practice. This policy includes the following sections:

- I. Biblical Position on the Divorce of Pastors
- II. Biblical Position on Restoration to Ministry
- III. Situations covered by This Policy
- IV. Procedures

I. Biblical Position on the Divorce of Pastors

Scripture is clear about the sanctity of marriage in God's eyes. We see it established by God as a uniquely important, committed, mutual, permanent relationship of love. It is therefore, of primary importance for our Conference to do all that it can to strengthen and protect the husband and wife relationships of its pastors. (Genesis 2:18-24 Malachi 2:16 Matthew 19:3-12 Ephesians 5:21-28 Ephesians 2:14-18)

Divorce is sinful.

When Jesus was questioned about the conditions under which divorce is acceptable. He stated that the Old Testament regulations allowing for divorce in certain situations were given "because your hearts were hard" (Matthew 19:8). In other words, divorce was allowed because of the sinfulness of humankind and as a prevention from people falling even deeper into transgression. Jesus' bottom line about ending marriages is, "therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6).

Therefore, we understand divorce among pastors to be sinful and its root. It is the separation of two who have been joined together by God. While the responsibility for the failure of the marriage may not be equally shared, it is none the less shared.

Divorce makes a pastor unfit to continue in ministry.

The OMS Holiness Church of North America believes that because of the importance of the husband and wife relationship and The OMS Holiness church of North America believes that because of the importance of the husband and wife relationship and because of the trauma associated with divorce, that marital failure makes the pastor unfit to continue serving as a pastor.

Reconciliation of husband and wife if the preferred goal.

While we realize that there are situations in which no reconciliation may be found between separated spouses, we will in all cases seek every appropriate means to encourage and facilitate God's healing of a broken marriage so that husband and wife may come together again and experience the shalom of Jesus Christ within their marriage. We believe this is possible because Jesus creates not only peace between ourselves and God, but can create peace between separate even warring parties. For this reason, we also see the healing process as one accomplished by God in the lives of willing participants.

II. Biblical Position on Restoration to Ministry

Restoration is God's intention. It may or may not include restoration to the pastorate.

The Conference believes that sin in the lives of ministers, both lay and clergy makes them unfit to serve. We also believe that God's grace is such that He desires to forgive and restore people to full function within the body of Christ. Anything less would be to say that the blood of Christ is insufficient. In the case of pastors who have suffered a divorce, this full functioning may or may not include returning to the pastorate. While God's forgiveness and restoration are not limited, He is free to restore us to different ministries than those that we previously forfeited. (Psalm 51 1 John 1:6-9 and various passages)

We will seek to participate in God's process of forgiveness and restoration. We will further support our pastors through this process, seeking God's placement and timing for restoration to ministry.

III. Situations Covered by This Policy

1. Conference Pastors who marital problems are leading toward divorce.
2. Conference Pastors who are divorced.
3. Conference Pastors married to divorced spouses.
4. Pastoral Applicants who spouses were divorced.
5. Applicants to be pastors within the Conference who are divorced.
6. In the case of applicants for local hire.

IV. Procedures

1. The goals of this policy:

- A. to encourage Conference Pastors and applicants to the Pastorate the OMS Holiness Church of North America to uphold the importance of maintaining a healthy loving marriage.
- B. to provide a means for healing, forgiveness and restoration for those experiencing marital failure either impending or divorced.
- C. to provide a way to administer these situations within our Conference.

2. The Ordained Ministers Body (OMB) shall be responsible to implement the removal, counseling, and restoration of pastors found to be unable to carry out their responsibilities due to marital failure.

- A. Pastors experiencing extreme marital conflict or who are undergoing a divorce will be placed on leave by the Conference until they have undergone a time for repentance, healing and counseling through which their restoration to ministry may be ascertained.
- B. The Conference and pastor on leave will negotiate whether or not to continue Conference health care, pension and retirement benefits.
- C. Pastors on leave for reasons of marital conflict will not be paid their normal compensation unless otherwise negotiated.

3. These procedures shall be done with the cooperation and approval of the Executive Council of the OMS Holiness Church of North America. The OMB's official lines of communication with the Executive Council shall be through the Executive Secretaries and the Ministerial Appointment Committee.

4. In cases involving Conference Pastors, the OMB will encourage the subject pastor to participate in the following procedure. For those who desire the possibility of resuming pastoral responsibilities within the OMS Holiness Church of North America, this is mandatory. For those who intend to terminate their relationship as a pastor of the Conference it is encouraged.

- A. An ad hoc committee of not less than 2 nor more than 4 Ordained Ministers shall be appointed by the OMB to minister to the pastor in question.
- B. This group should be available to meet on a monthly basis and more often if necessary.
- C. Their purposes shall be
 - 1) to encourage as necessary towards repentance, healing and restoration.

- 2) to share God's truth in consistent compassionate ways.
- 3) to report to the OMB the progress of the pastor in question.
- 4) to recommend their best understanding of God's will for the restoration and to recommend that plan to the OMB.
- 5) to work with the subject pastor in developing a plan of restoration and to recommend that plan to the OMB.

D. The OMB shall receive reports and recommendations of the ad hoc committee and be responsible to approve them and pass them onto the Executive Council as their own recommendation.

E. A Professional Christian Therapist, skilled and experienced in these matters may be employed at Conference expense for the subject pastor with that pastor's approval.

F. The aim of the Ad hoc Committee shall be to conclude this process within three years.

5. In cases involving applicants to the conference.

A. The OMB will determine along with the Ministerial Appointment Committee (MAC), whether or not the applicant has already been through an equivalent procedure with another Christian organization.

B. If so,

- 1) the results/reports of that body will be requested and reviewed. The OMB may at its discretion, accept the report made by another Christian organization about the fitness of the applicant for ministry. This report should specifically comment upon the applicant's spiritual and emotional health, as well as readiness for ministry in the context of the applicant's marriage.
- 2) The OMB will either meet or appoint a sub-committee to meet with the applicant in addition to the normal interview process to corroborate the findings of the other group.

C. If the applicant has not been through a process of reconciliation, healing, and restoration with another Christian group, the OMB may at its discretion appoint an Ad hoc committee and implement steps 4A-F above.

D. The OMB will communicate its acceptance of the applicant to the Executive Council via normal channels and procedures.

6. In the case of applicants for local hire, the OMB may at its discretion allow the local church to handle matters related to the candidate's marital status.