

-- Love Life --

Sexuality, Singleness, Relationships, and Marriage From A Christian Perspective

A Position Paper from the leaders of Capilano Christian Community in North
Vancouver, BC

Introduction

God has made us sexual and moral beings — we have bodies and souls. We are created in God's image with our masculinity or femininity an intrinsic part of our identity. Because God created sexuality, it is good. Sex and its enjoyment is not a sin, but a divine intention through which God sustains life and affords His creatures pleasure. We believe His good plan was for a man and a woman to delight in love, sexuality, and relationship within a monogamous heterosexual marriage. Our intent in the following pages is to set forth an understanding of relationships, marriage, and sexuality from a Christian worldview to the extent we have understood God's wisdom and experienced His grace.

We are created in God's image with the capacity for relationships. Relationship histories as recorded in the Bible as well as our personal histories show us that there are many relational delights to be enjoyed as well as the possibility of much relational pain. One of God's great delights is to redeem brokenness and pain. As Christians we believe that healing takes place by first experiencing a relationship with God through the person of Jesus Christ. As we experience God in Christ loving us without reservation and without condition, we come to understand relationships and ourselves in a whole new light. One Bible writer put it

something like this, "We can love, because we have first received love from God" (1 John 4:19). We also see anew how God intended our sexuality to be enjoyed.

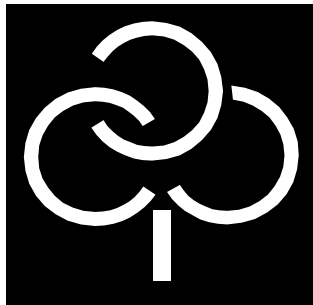
As a person gives every aspect of their life over to God—including their relationships and their sexual identity, God empowers and "coaches" that person through the Spirit of Christ into a new sexual and relational lifestyle. He also provides the person with the fellowship of mature Christians who will both model and teach godly relationships. These relationships are characterized by love, forgiveness, mutual submission and self control. In the area of sexuality, they exemplify the equal worth of men and women, as well as the virtues of sexual sobriety, sexual self-respect, sexual faithfulness, and sexual purity in thought and deed.

With this understanding as our foundation, we will examine some important aspects of relationships and sexuality for the Christian.

Healthy Sexuality

It seems that one could discern at least five elements to healthy sexuality from a Biblical perspective.

- ♦ Love is understood as something one *receives* from God. The Christian responds to that love by "offering their body (heart, soul, mind, strength) to the Lord" (1 Corinthians



Pastoral Letter – Fall / Winter 2000

6:12) With the help of God's Spirit the Christian is empowered to begin a new relational and sexual lifestyle.

- ♦ The physical body, and one's relationship to it are an acceptable and essential part of our spirituality. The Christian *accepts* their body, sexual desires and sensuality as part of God's good creation (Genesis 1:27-31).
- ♦ There is a need to change our relationship to sexuality from what it was without God's influence to what God intended it to be. The Christian must re-examine and, wherever necessary, *repent* from what is contrary to God's purposes for sexuality.
- ♦ Non-sexualized friendships are one of the foundational skills for healthy sexuality. The Christian must endeavor to develop healthy *relationships* in all areas of life. These are friendships that, though mutual and caring, are not sexual in nature.
- ♦ Sexuality, expressed in a monogamous, heterosexual, marriage relationship with mutual and maturing intimacy, is the biblical norm for active sexuality.

Learning Healthy Sexuality

We believe that the most appropriate setting for learning to be relationally and sexually healthy is in a home where parent(s) model godly relationships. Positive modeling along with love and affirmation give children the first foundation for trust in God's goodness and faithfulness. Within the family, a healthy attitude and respect for God's design for sexuality in the context of a marriage covenant can be conveyed.

We understand that for many, a positive family experience is absent or deficient. This does not in itself diminish God's good intent. We are committed to assist families and parents to experience all that God has for them—and to train them as we are able to model and teach relational skills to their children.

In our culture, much sexual learning has been assumed by the media and the schools. While public educational efforts to teach sexual responsibility and sexual self-respect can be helpful, we don't believe this should be the only

or primary venue of sexual education. There is a need for Christian parents to assume first authority in defining godly sexuality and for the church to teach and model healthy sexuality through godly lifestyles and by helping individuals to heal and redeem their sexuality through the grace of God.

Sexual Waiting

We believe that there are advantages to sexual waiting whether one has had no sexual experience or is sexually experienced and now wants learn from God a new relational and sexual lifestyle. Learning the skills that lead to mature relationships takes longer than simply passing through puberty. The pressure to sexualize relationships early retards learning good relational skills. For those who want to begin a new life in God where they "honor God in their bodies," sexual waiting allows one to "back up, start over, and learn" what healthy sexuality is. Sexual waiting relieves much of the pressure, confusion, and immature behavioral habits that are often reinforced from entering prematurely into another relationship, even as a new Christian.

Sexual waiting helps us to learn the positive lessons of "patient" love expressed through sexuality. A significant part, though not the only part of "being in love" is yearning — feeling profoundly, even physically, the desire to belong to another person. The physical and sexual desire that accompanies the longing to belong is "God-made." This yearning, sustained over time, powers the experience and the feelings of "being in love" and adds passion to sexuality.

To quickly "have" a person sexually, may short-circuit the most palpable part of learning what real love is. The time of not having, of yearning, of coming to apprehend just how desirable, how essential, how important, and how special that person is to you, is one of the greatest experiences of love that sexual waiting teaches. To quickly sexualize a relationship may actually dull love rather than allow it to flourish. Part of God's good design is to teach us to love deeply. Premature intimacy can deny us the satisfaction of experiencing a real depth of intimacy in relationship. For many, sexual waiting as a new

relational skill can be part of God's gracious healing.

Marriage And Christians

We understand the Bible as saying that marriage was instituted by God rather than invented by culture. Therefore, we affirm that marriage is desirable. It is also a relationship in which God teaches a man and a woman, both individually and as a couple, how to love and how to mature. Marriage challenges a couple to live by forgiveness, mutual submission, and grace. Marriage is a crucible. It can be a crucible of grace. When two Christians consciously make a covenant with God and have as a resource the presence of Christ dwelling in the covenant, there is indeed hope that they will learn to have a great marriage.

Marriage in God's sight is not merely a religious service, a legal contract or even a private commitment. The essence of marriage, as we understand the Bible, is covenant — the binding and bonding personal agreement made with God by which a man and a woman write their future in advance as they voluntarily consent to belong together in an exclusive way for life. Genesis 2:24 suggests that three dimensions create a complete marriage covenant:

- ♦ A public (and legal) dimension ("therefore a man will leave his father and mother" — i.e. the public part).
- ♦ A relational, friendship dimension ("and cleave to his wife" — i.e. the personal part).
- ♦ A sexual dimension ("and they will become one flesh" — i.e. the private part).

The presence of these three dimensions - public, personal, and private - are marks of a complete marriage. It is much more than a legal contract or a private union. God intended marriage to be a reflection of his own loving relationship within the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit as well as a picture of His loving relationship to His people, the church; a gift of companionship to each spouse; and the rightful context of child-rearing (Ephesians 5:18ff; Genesis 2:18; Genesis 1 :28).

Christians, while they have no monopoly on marriage in God's sight and no exemption from marriage problems, have the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as a special resource to make marriage all that God intended. Covenant calls us to *bless* or bestow good upon our covenant partner. Sexual faithfulness is only one part of a God-honoring, covenant marriage. Marriage partners are further called to deepen and enrich their marriage by blessing one another through the gifts of loyalty, honor, trust, devotion, and mutual encouragement.

At Capilano Christian Community we are committed to building good marriages. We not only want to help hurting marriages through counselling and other learning experiences; we are also committed to making good marriages better through adequate preparation, modeling and teaching practical life-skills for life-long marriages.

Mutuality & Empowering Love In Christian Marriage

The Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures do not prescribe a one-size-fits-all pattern for marriage. There is not a uniform pattern for Christian marriage. Rather, Christians marry and seek to creatively build their marriage relationship based on the general model of love, loyalty, and mutual subordination exemplified in the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit as well as the teachings of the Scriptures. Christian marriages will invariably have great variety in the details of how the couple makes decisions, how they structure their family life, how they define and experience intimacy and how they worship and serve God as a family. We want to affirm the freedom that couples have, bound by grace, love and the broad principles of Christian relationships, to shape their marriage according to their sense of God's leading and the unique expression of their love.

One of the broad principles that the New Testament teaches about marriage is the mutual subordination of equals to one another in a marriage built in Christ. We believe that God calls marriage partners to express this principle of mutual subordination as the basis of empowering love.

Pastoral Letter – Fall / Winter 2000

The Bible is often used to justify some forms of male hierarchy as the primary principle for Christian marriage. Many use 1 Corinthians 11 or Ephesians 5 for this purpose. We do not believe this is what the Bible teaches. 1 Corinthians 11 is not a passage about marriage – it is a passage about abuses in worship in the church at Corinth. This teaching cannot be used to justify hierarchy in marriage.

Ephesians 5 does contain teaching on Christian marriage and to that passage we turn our attention. One of the principles of sound biblical interpretation is that meaning cannot violate grammar. In other words, an interpretation of a text cannot violate the plain meaning of the words and the grammar in that text. We do not believe that Ephesians 5:21-33 teaches any of the following positions:

- ♦ Servile subordination or the breaking of the human will.
- ♦ The subordination of all women to all men.
- ♦ Female inferiority and male superiority.
- ♦ The husband's authority over his wife.
- ♦ Christ as the supreme example of male superiority.
- ♦ The husband as savior of his wife.
- ♦ Patriarchal headship of the husband over his wife.
- ♦ Wives, just submit and your marriage will work.
- ♦ One, fixed, ideal pattern for Christian marriage.

The grammar of Ephesians 5 clearly teaches one principle—the mutual subordination of husband to wife, and of wife to husband in Christian marriage. The passage sets itself to correct the non-Christian male hierarchy over women that was prevalent in the ancient world. The text teaches that mutual subordination of marriage partners to each other is the proper application of the redemption in Christ to Christian marriage. Subordination only of the woman to the man in marriage (i.e. hierarchy instead of mutuality) is contrary to the gospel of Christ.

Sacrificial love is God's demonstrated way to empower the other person. Sacrificial love does not dominate or coerce the other person to submit or change. In marriage, as in any relationship, partners are always called to imitate Christ in voluntary, mutual subordination and sacrificial love. It is this kind of love in marriage that empowers one's partner to become all that God calls them to be. It is this kind of love that conquers the temptation to power competition in marriage. The Bible sees sacrificial love as godly — the kind of love we have first received from God, and which we should then imitate.

We want to encourage married couples to initiate submission to one another, to love each other, and to empower each other in the manner of Christ. This is the quality of love Christ demonstrates for us – and the model we are to imitate in Christian marriage.

Singleness

Western culture as well as much Christian tradition has generally assumed that singleness is only a prelude to a sexualized relationship or marriage. Being in a sexualized relationship is seen as a primary goal in life. This view of singleness as incomplete or disadvantaged or in some way unfulfilled, is not a biblical Christian teaching. When the church focuses almost exclusively on marriage and the nuclear family as the norm and as the primary context for intimacy it fails to present the whole spectrum of truth represented in the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures. The Bible teaches that all human beings are created with a capacity for relational intimacy. But it also teaches and gives countless examples of how the *primary* context for this intimacy is with God, and only *secondarily* to be found in the context of a community of relationships in which marriage and family are one part.

Jesus was single. He lived a godly single life in close relationship to his family and a small community of friends. He experienced being loved by the Father and the ability to give and receive love from family and friends. He knew how to be alone and to be with others. He lived as a sexual being but did not sexualize his

Pastoral Letter – Fall / Winter 2000

relationships. He lived a fulfilled life caring for many people and fulfilling his Messianic calling. In short, Jesus models for us healthy, intimate, fulfilling, interpersonal relationships as a single person.

The apostle Paul was also single. His personal preference for singleness allowed him to focus completely on serving God and the gospel of Christ. By necessity a godly married person has a primary concern to love and provide for family and children. Paul's focus was not divided between God and spouse and family. This was both Paul's choice and calling (See 1 Corinthians 7.)

A calling to be single is not simply a choice. It is a gift. Those called and gifted for singleness find grace and empowering from God to live with the realities of life-long or long periods of singleness and be content. To choose singleness (or marriage for that matter) when one is not called or graced by God for this reality can only increase frustration.

As a community of faith we are committed to those who are single — whether it is imposed or voluntary, temporary or long term. There are many hard realities, significant pains — even recurring pain at different stages and transitions for singles that require the understanding of the community. They include:

- ♦ Accepting the reality of singleness and learning what it means to live for God.
- ♦ Working through grief associated with the absence of a hoped-for-marriage and what it means to "still trust God."
- ♦ Working through grief associated with the loss of hope of being a parent and grandparent, and having your own children.
- ♦ Accepting singleness in its present form as from God and focusing on what God has given rather than what He has not given.

All people are in fact "single" at various points of their lives, particularly in early adulthood and often in old age. Voluntary singleness is a chosen lifestyle. Involuntary or imposed singleness, when someone loses a partner, either through death or divorce, creates a number of emotional and personal challenges.

Challenges that particularly press upon singles include loneliness and sexuality. The essence of relationship is the sense of "belonging to someone." Married people experience a "belonging bond" to spouse and children but single persons may often feel adrift.

Relationships change even in the most stable communities. There simply are no permanent relationships, no place to feel anchored that is comparable to a good marriage and family experience. So, an ongoing and often painful issue is, "Where do I belong and to whom do I belong and will I belong to them tomorrow?"

Sexuality is another challenge for the single person. We are all sexual beings. Our sexuality impacts every aspect of who we are as our sexual drive is a complex physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual experience. Finding a godly and healthy relationship to our sexuality is part of being a maturing person. We believe that this discovery is a redemptive process in which God calls every person, single and married, to form biblical values, learn from godly models, make better choices and deal with failures in the reality of God's grace, forgiveness, and correction.

We want to assist singles in finding their primary intimacy with God through Jesus Christ, in the context of a relational community. We do not believe that there is a Christian imperative to be married or to prefer marriage over singleness. We recognize that some unmarried Christians feel disadvantaged due to the prominence of marriage and the family in the life of the church. However, while unmarriages set aside sexual fulfillment for the sake of personal purity and scriptural obedience, they are expected, as are married individuals, to discover the fullness of life for themselves in Christ. The community needs to learn from singles the difference between loneliness and positive aloneness and what it means to belong to a community as an individual. The extended family of the church provides a context for both singles and marrieds to be appreciated for their masculinity or femininity while living out their calling to ministry. Single parents in the church constitute a special opportunity for the church to be a family and to model healthy masculinity and femininity.

The Scripture and “Singleness Theology”

While presenting marriage as both a calling and a gift, Scripture also presents a single life as a desirable option and a gift (1 Corinthians 7:7,38). One must be careful in drawing on passages such as 1 Corinthians 7 for a “theology of singleness.” This passage must be understood in its context. Paul's main point in 1 Corinthians 7: 8-40 is that the call to Christ so changes your relationship with God that there is no need to seek a change in other relationships. The “status” (which was important to the Corinthians) of being married or single is not relevant to God's purposes in their life. Whether you are married or single, live your life free from the grip of the world and in the light of Christ's return. In other words live out your call to Christ in whatever situation you find yourself in — whether married or single. In Corinth there was pressure being applied to Christians to dissolve their marriages or abstain from marriage because “a single person could be more spiritual.” Paul corrects their faulty theology by affirming that both marriage and celibacy are good gifts. Although singleness was Paul's clear *personal preference* it is *not commanded*. Whatever your present situation, married or single, Paul's main point is — live life to the glory of God

In light of our understanding of the Bible we believe that singleness can be a voluntary, godly choice and a gift of God for some. Both marrieds and unmarrieds, are called of God to a full life of faith, godly relationships, and ministry for the Kingdom of God.

Marriage Preparation

We believe that a deep personal and spiritual friendship is the best preparation a couple can make for a covenant-life together in marriage. Once a couple decides to explore the possibility of marriage it is wise to seek the counsel of a leader in the Christian community as well as relationship/marriage mentoring. This can take place concurrent with engagement or well before engagement as the couple explores where their relationship is headed.

Marriage mentoring allows the couple seeking marriage time for mutual, honest empathy and

self-disclosure around the joys and challenges of the anticipated marital experience. It allows for healing of past issues and of forming new constructive patterns for healthy relationships. Whether the couple decides to marry or to continue as friends, they will have made valuable discoveries about positive, godly relationships. We will encourage and support premarried couples to keep physical intimacies appropriate for their level of commitment. We believe that the grace of sexual waiting and self-control are both fruits of the Spirit.

We do require that every couple who requests the church to marry them, regardless of their current circumstances and relational history, to participate in marriage preparation. We will not marry couples who will not participate in a process which assists them to have the best marriage possible.

Couples wanting Capilano Christian Community to marry them will be asked to notify us several prior to the wedding date so that we can arrange adequate marriage preparation and mentoring. Also, we will ask the couple to make a commitment to regularly attend our church for at least 6 months prior to the marriage. This will allow them to witness first-hand the context of experience to which the mentors refer. Our hope is that the couple would choose to continue their marriage growth in the context of a Christian community. We believe that marriages are most fruitful and find their greatest purpose within the context of community.

Dating

Scripture tells us what a marriage is. It does not tell us how to go about finding a suitable marriage partner. The Bible (for example: 1 Thessalonians 4, Romans 12, Matthew 5-7) suggests that a Christian's goal should be to establish godly relationships in a community of faith. It is in this context of shared ministry and building significant relationships that one will best discern God's wisdom for selecting a suitable marriage partner.

We believe that Christians may engage in social and “dating” relationships in a godly way within the extended community of faith and we encourage this. We see this as wholesome and

Pastoral Letter – Fall / Winter 2000

enriching whether or not it leads to marriage. Younger Christians are encouraged to avail themselves of the advice, support, and counsel of mature Christians in the matter of finding God's purpose in the single or married life.

Christians, Non-Christians And Marriage

There are several factors that can stabilize marriage relationships. One of the more significant factors is that of sharing common faith values. A joint commitment to building a covenant marriage relationship, where both partners are committed to the worship of God, and to pursuing personal and marital godliness, lays a strong foundation for a lasting relationship. When Christians and non-Christians marry, though they may share common values and interests, the absence of this common commitment to Christian marriage tends to diminish the depth of spiritual intimacy possible.

We believe that it is unwise for a committed Christian and a committed non-Christian to enter into a marriage relationship. Scripture clearly endorses and foresees that Christians will normally choose life partners from the community of faith. The Old and New Testaments warn against the intimate partnering of faith and unfaith and illustrate some tragic results when the warning goes unheeded. (Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 13:6-13; Joshua 23:7-13; Numbers 25:1-5). As a general principle we will not encourage serious marriage-seeking relationships between a Christian and a non-Christian. Further, when a Christian comes to us hopeful that his or her proposed marriage partner will eventually become a Christian, we will normally suggest the believer wait until his/her friend becomes a Christian before committing to marriage.

In existing marriage relationships (co-habitant or married and with or without children) where one partner becomes a Christian, we believe the Bible calls the believer to remain with their unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:12) and to seek to "win them to God" not by verbal witnessing or manipulating, but by love and integrity (1 Peter 3:1). This marriage (which began with common non-Christian values) is

more likely to thrive and survive one partner becoming a Christian than when a Christian/non-Christian intentionally pursue a marriage relationship that includes spiritual ambivalence.

We encourage couples to seek pastoral guidance about their relationships. Our concern is to assist them in making wise decisions that will continue to bring God's grace and healing to their personal life and relationships.

Cohabitation And Common Law

Many couples, with or without Christian faith, choose cohabitation as an alternative to covenant marriage. Some choose cohabitation as a trial for marriage. Others choose cohabitation to avoid the complexities of a wedding or of family entanglements. Still others simply want certain *marriage benefits* such as regular sexual intimacy or economic support without the permanence of marriage.

Regardless of the couples' reasons for cohabiting, we have found through our pastoral care experience, that cohabiting relationships without clear, intentional commitment, function on the level of conditional love rather than unconditional love. We find that cohabiting partners have a difficult time unlearning conditional love and embracing the unconditional, covenant security of love that marriage was designed for. Our experience with couples who choose to cohabit as an alternative to marriage is that short-term gains normally win out over the long-term welfare of the relationship. We find that women are often more easily exploited in such arrangements than are men.

We believe that cohabiting is poor preparation for a good marriage or a good relationship. Even though one can point to examples of "succeeding" cohabitants, we do not recommend cohabitation as an alternative to marriage.

When cohabiting couples present themselves to us and desire to be involved in our community of faith, this indicates a willingness to be influenced by our pastoral care in the gospel of Christ. We will endeavor to pastor couples, first, by

Pastoral Letter – Fall / Winter 2000

establishing them individually in Christian faith; and second, by assisting them to live godly lives consistent with their commitment of faith. We will work with cohabiting couples to assess their relationship *against the greater good of covenant marriage and godly relationships in Christ*. We will encourage them to learn from God, the Scriptures, and good marriages in the community the ways and benefits of godly, unconditional love. We will advise the couple to consider mature choices in the pursuit of renewed godly relationships. These may include separation for the purpose of assessing God's direction for each individual and for the relationship; premarriage counselling or relationship-mentoring to learn the skills of covenant love; sexual waiting in preparation for covenant marriage. It may also include intentionally ending the relationship if marriage is not an intended goal.

Sexual Orientation And Sexual Purity

Sexual orientation or tendency (i.e. heterosexual or homosexual), in and of itself, does not influence a person's value as a member and participant in the community of faith. We believe that all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation, are called to a redeemed sexuality and sexual purity in thought and action. Sexual actions however, when outside of God's design, undermine progress in godliness and in godly relationships. Growth in sexual self-control demonstrates that a Christian is participating in the grace of God in Christ and bearing the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5 and 1 Thessalonians. 4). When people come to the church recognizing their need for sexual healing, we believe that the grace of God will lead them toward sexual wholeness in Christ. We will encourage those who desire sexual healing to repentance, and to sexual godliness in their outward actions, motives, and thought life and to a new sexual respect for self and others. (See Matthew 5:27-30; 15:19.)

Part of sexual healing and self-control includes the conversion of our fantasies and thought-life (Job 31:1 — "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully..."). In our society this requires reducing our exposure to unhealthy sexual stimulation. We will call Christians to face

and control any sexually addictive behaviors they have or are engaged in. We will encourage Christians to present themselves to God, to yield to His Spirit, and to participate with Him in establishing sexual godliness in their lives.

Masturbation

Masturbation is not referred to in Scripture. The Bible is silent on this subject. So, how do we think Christianly about masturbation as a sexual activity? Here is our present thinking and wisdom on the subject. The Bible affirms sexual intimacy within the marriage relationship. The Bible also has a long list of prohibited sexual relationships (Leviticus 18:6-23; 20:10-21; Deuteronomy 22:13-30). Because masturbation is not mentioned as a prohibited sexual relationship (i.e. relationship to oneself), we are hard pressed to add it to the Bible's list.

When the Bible is silent on a subject, then we must proceed by asking ourselves how a behavior fits with the general will of God clearly known to us in Scripture.

We encourage Christians to thank God for their sexual desires and to be filled with the Spirit so that they experience the Spirit's leadership toward redeemed sexuality and self control.

Sexual Healing

Sexual sins are no less forgivable than other sins. On the other hand, Scripture repeatedly suggests that sexual sins may leave a deeper scar because our whole person is affected. Paul said that every other kind of sin was "outside the body" (1 Corinthians 6:18), whereas sexual sins affect the whole personality. The Bible will never let us think of the body as the shell of the soul or spirit. Touching the body is one way of touching a person. To experience sexual intercourse is to become "one with (the other's) body" (1 Corinthians 6:16). In this passage, Paul is emphasizing the profound effect of sexual sins: "the one who sins sexually sins against his body" (1 Corinthians 6:18; Romans 1:27).

We believe that the first resource offered by Christ to those suffering sexual brokenness is radical and complete forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

Pastoral Letter – Fall / Winter 2000

Confession and complete appropriation of the forgiveness of Christ releases a flood of health and the will to maintain a life of repentance from sin. Secondly, as the Holy Spirit fills a person with the love of Jesus and leads them to participate in a positive community of faith, they experience a loving environment which is conducive to change. The faith fellowship is called to be a healing community offering multiple models of masculinity and femininity, liberating worship, an extended family experience, and the opportunity to find personal expression in serving others. This goes a long way to release one from bondage to old habits and memories. Thirdly, we believe God heals in an ongoing way through the means of prayer, counselling and spiritual direction.

We do not believe that healing is automatic. Healing comes to those who choose not to be defined by their past and the pain of their sin and who choose to walk in God's light and receive His grace brings healing by allowing people:

- ♦ To take responsibility for their pain and for their healing.
- ♦ To face the deviation from god's ways (past or present) rather than deny or run from it.
- ♦ To identify and grieve what they will lose by bringing this to God for healing.
- ♦ To receive God's forgiveness.
- ♦ To begin the process of forgiving the other party (usually the last part of the process).
- ♦ To formulate a future sexual and relational script in light of god's view of wholeness.
- ♦ To seek a coach/counsellor to assist in the healing process.

There is nothing in this life that has been done to us or which we have done which cannot be redeemed by Christ.

Abortion

Although we can understand some of the emotional, economic and societal pressures that lead women with unwanted pregnancies to consider abortion, our view is that life, created in

God's image, is destroyed every time an abortion is performed.

While the Bible does not explicitly mention abortion, much of its teaching bears directly on the sanctity of human life:

- ♦ The creation of man and woman in God's image (Genesis 1:27; 9:6).
- ♦ The judgement of God against violence (Genesis 6:13).
- ♦ The involvement of God in creating and caring for human beings even before birth (Psalm 139:13-16).
- ♦ The incarnation of Jesus Christ as recognized from the moment of his conception (Matthew 1:18-25).

We therefore reject abortion as an option for birth control, except when it is done to save the life of the mother.

Capilano Christian Community endorses several practical responses of compassion in this area:

- ♦ Extending the forgiveness and knowledge of Christ to those who have suffered the guilt and trauma of having had an abortion.
- ♦ Counselling referrals with positive and accurate medical, psychological and spiritual resource materials for those considering abortion.
- ♦ Assisting women practically with emotional support, shelter, and clothing if they decide to carry and deliver their baby and are unable to support themselves.
- ♦ Directing young adults and others into a Biblical understanding and practice of sexuality and marriage so that the possibility of a crisis pregnancy is minimized.
- ♦ Calling upon our civil government to protect the innocent, including the unborn.

Abuse Within Marriage

As we have discussed above, the only subordination to which God calls marriage partners is that of mutual subordination to love. The very notion of abuse goes against God's heart desire, which is revealed in the Scripture, to heal and make whole any person who is

Pastoral Letter – Fall / Winter 2000

oppressed. God condemns any form of abuse in the marriage relationship or elsewhere (Colossians. 3:18-19; Galatians. 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:26; Matthew 5:21-22).

Physical or psychological abuse within a marriage is a symptom of an unhealthy relationship and of a deterioration of the covenant to cherish one another. Marital abuse should be confronted at an early stage and not allowed to develop. We believe that an abusive marriage can be restored and that healing can be found through God's grace. A marriage in which abuse is regularly occurring however has failed to be a covenant relationship. A prolonged separation may at times be necessary. While there is no explicit mandate in Scripture for divorce based on abuse, abuse is undeniably contrary to the heart of God. If all attempts at reconciliation have failed to restore the relationship, then a divorce may be an inevitable course of action. We believe that Capilano Christian Community is called to be a place of refuge and an agent of healing in such situations and we would take practical action to help any victim of abuse by:

- ♦ Arranging for shelter and safety for abused partners and/or children. A spouse should not feel obliged to remain in a situation where an individual's health and security are at risk. This separation may need to be maintained over a period of time in order to facilitate the healing and restoration process. We will endeavor to provide support, prayer and counsel as appropriate during this period.
- ♦ Administering spiritual and biblical correction where both partners are members of Capilano Christian Community and are willing to hear our counsel. Spiritual correction is intended to bring about forgiveness and restoration of the individuals to God and the marriage partners to each other (Matthew 18:15-18; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 2 Corinthians 10:5-11).
- ♦ Should the couple choose litigation, the church leadership will work with the couple through the process and will support the legal decision.

The Abuse Of Children

The abuse of children within a family is disturbing and offensive, particularly in light of the relative defenselessness of children. Whenever the potential for child abuse, or patterns of behavior that could lead to child abuse are recognized, we will strongly encourage parents to seek immediate counselling, accountability, and prayer support in order to change both their present thinking and their emerging behaviors. If the children in question are at any risk we will involve whatever resources necessary to ensure that they are protected. We recognize that there may be criminal repercussions in abusive situations, and we acknowledge the legitimacy of the state's role in protecting those suffering abuse.

As a church community we are committed to protect children and to provide practical support to parents as appropriate in these situations. We cannot treat abuse lightly, and we will work to encourage repentance, restoration and reconciliation, as is appropriate especially where believers are involved.

Divorce

We do not believe that divorce is an acceptable way to resolve marriage difficulties. The vow of the marriage covenant is "for better or for worse." Anyone entering a marriage covenant does well to renounce the notion of leaving the marriage should significant challenges arise. Far from being "locked in," a couple, committed to covenant, has the only adequate security within which to negotiate the many adjustments that will be required in the evolution of a marriage. Though our society presents depressing statistics regarding divorce, we believe that well-prepared couples can enter marriage with full confidence of experiencing a love that is sustained by God.

Jesus states that the reason divorce was condoned in Old Testament times was due to a "hardness of heart" (Matthew 19:8). One of the reasons couples cannot get past "irreconcilable issues" is often due to their unwillingness to change. God continually holds out hope for the renewal of a marriage relationship through the renewal of hearts, especially when the marriage

Pastoral Letter – Fall / Winter 2000

is in crisis. As the Bible story of Hosea and Gomer demonstrates, though it takes two people to make a covenant, it only takes one to keep it. In Matthew 19:3-8 Jesus both reaffirms the original ideal for marriage as expressed in creation (Genesis 2:24), and then shifts the focus of discussion from reasons to break the marriage bond to the reasons to keep it intact. Jesus, following God's heart, shows that marriage is intended to be permanent. Divorce is not n as a healing or redemptive choice because it is damaging to individuals and to the family.

We believe that divorce is a concession, marking the failure, or inability to pursue a positive and good marital relationship. The New Testament lists two situations where believers may "concede" to divorce — persistent adultery (Matthew 19:9, 5:32) or desertion by an unbelieving partner (1 Corinthians 7:15). The term "adultery" is generally assumed to embrace various ongoing extra-marital sexual behaviors (e.g. fornication, incest, homosexuality, or prostitution). Divorce is not seen as an automatic option after an isolated act of marital unfaithfulness, but only where there is clear indication that the unfaithful partner refuses to repent and change his or her behavior. In the case of an unbelieving partner being unwilling to continue in the marriage to a partner who has become a Christian, the believer is called by God to make every effort that will ensure the marriage is as workable as possible (e.g. 1 Peter 3:1-7) and to not give cause for the unbelieving partner to leave. If the latter chooses to leave, however, the Christian is no longer bound to the marriage covenant. It is important to note that although there are recommendations made for concessions in these case, *Scripture never requires or advises divorce.*

Separation when mutually agreed on should not be viewed as the first step towards divorce, but rather as the first step towards reconciliation and healing. The separated partners are therefore encouraged and exhorted to give themselves to prayer, rethink the issues, and repent of wrongful behavior with the goal of reuniting with each other. In these situations we as the church are committed to offer emotional and spiritual support, counselling, and structure for the period

of separation so that the possibility of reconciliation is maximized.

We believe that, where there has been marriage breakdown, our first priority is to seek healing and reconciliation. Even where there has been adultery or desertion, we hold that forgiveness and reconciliation are possible through Jesus Christ and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Further, we encourage all our married members to continually work to better their marriages, to settle conflicts early, and to overcome grudges and hurts with God's grace. We encourage husbands and wives to embrace whatever personal growth and godly change a crisis in their marriage may yield. We affirm marriage and hold out hope to those who are in crisis, but we must also be compassionate to those whose marriage covenant has failed.

When a divorce does occur, we affirm that, like any other failure or sin, it is forgivable with repentance (1 John 1:9). Though we cannot recommend divorce, we are committed to love and support the individuals as they heal, and receive God's grace in this transition and as they try to better understand the factors that contributed to the marriage breakdown.

Remarriage After Divorce

When a person comes to us desiring remarriage after divorce, he or she will be encouraged to evaluate the possibility and wisdom of temporary or long-term singleness as a life-style. Offering God an extended period of time free from relational responsibilities is conducive to godly maturity and healing. A considerable time period, as well as wise counselling may be necessary to prepare for the possibility of a subsequent marriage. We believe that, as much as is possible, this preparation should include having a right relationship with the previous spouse, and with the extended families involved in the previous marriage.

Those divorced who are considering remarriage will be encouraged to seek counsel for the purpose of learning whatever can be learned from the breakdown of the previous marriage. Since divorce almost inevitably involves deep hurts and scars, counselling will also help in overcoming serious hindrances to remarriage. In

Pastoral Letter – Fall / Winter 2000

order to allow for a reasonable and necessary period of healing and change, divorced persons are advised to wait at least one year after the decree absolute before considering remarriage. We believe that two to five years is a more appropriate period to make a healthy transition to a new marriage.

The officiating pastor will work with the new couple to ensure the best foundation is laid both in the premarital counselling, the wedding and the follow-up. For the person who is entering remarriage it may be appropriate for a prior testimony to be made to the leaders of Capilano Christian Community. This would be an opportunity to be assured of God's forgiveness for any sin that contributed to the breakdown of the previous marriage, as well as acknowledge the repentance and change that has taken place. Such a meeting would give opportunity for the leaders to fully endorse the remarriage and pray for God's blessing for the couple.

When couples come to us already divorced and remarried, we will accept the remarriage as a *fait accompli*. We will encourage repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation wherever possible with the previous partners. The new marriage makes total reconciliation impossible, but the former partner and children (if any) need to be recognized and provided for. We will give such pastoral support as will enable those forgiven to live as comfortably as possible with the stresses of such a situation.

It is obvious that situations pertaining to divorce and remarriage are surrounded with unique difficulties and circumstances. Therefore each case must be considered individually with compassion and empathy for the history involved.

Divorce, Remarriage And Church Leadership

We hold the conviction that leaders in the faith community are to exhibit the character of Christ and the leadership qualities called for in Scripture (1 Timothy 3:1-13) which command respect from both the church and outsiders. The context of the first letter to Timothy suggests that the Apostle Paul is not primarily referring to the past history of the candidates. Paul is interested in a leader's present life-style and whether it

gives evidence of Christ's Lordship over and in their life. How love, loyalty and leadership is exercised in the context of the candidate's own family is one of the qualifiers for leadership in the church. One of the criteria specified in this passage is that the candidate be *the husband of one wife*. We understand this to mean that church leaders are to be persons who respect marriage, who exhibit fidelity in their own marriages (or family relationships and friendship if not married) and whose sexual conduct, as in all other matters, has earned them the respect of both Christians and non-Christians. These people have demonstrated by their lives a maturity in Christ which qualifies them to be considered as leaders among God's people.

We do not believe that divorce and remarriage in and of themselves prevent anyone from serving in a leadership role in the church. Nevertheless, we strongly advise persons who are experiencing marital break-up and divorce to withdraw from active leadership. This should be to the advantage of both the persons involved in the marriage crisis and the church itself. In addition, it would seem wise and appropriate for a divorced and remarried person not to seek and take on leadership for a period of time until a new stability has returned to their life. The divorced and remarried who are considered for leadership will be those who indicate a clear sense of repentance towards their marriage or relationship failure, have reconciled past relationships as much as possible, and presently exhibit a character of love, faithfulness, and commitment in their own marriages and relationships. We recognize that all church leaders are persons who have fallen short of the glory of God, but who by the grace of God have been forgiven and made new persons in Jesus Christ, gifted by the Holy Spirit to guide the church.

Conclusion

As leaders of Capilano Christian Community, we would be happy to discuss any of the issues presented above and to recommend further reading or counsel to those interested. Our pastoral concern is to guide and mentor individuals, couples and families into grace-filled relationships. We rejoice in the opportunity we

Pastoral Letter – Fall / Winter 2000

have in God to live full, holy and redeemed lives. We believe and have experienced that the call of God is always accompanied by the empowering

grace of His indwelling Holy Spirit who brings hope and healing to all through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the leaders of Marineview Chapel, University Chapel, and Holy Trinity Anglican Church in the development of this pastoral letter on marriage and sexuality. Capilano Christian Community is pleased to make our version available for the encouragement and direction of those seeking to live healthy relational lives before their Creator.

If you wish a copy of this document, please contact us at:

- ♦ Capilano Christian Community, 940 West 16th Street, North Vancouver, BC V7P 1R3 (604-980-8997)
- ♦ (email) Life@CapChurch.ca ♦ (web) CapChurch.ca
- ♦ Revised Fall, 2000

For further information about Paddy & Carole Ducklow, please contact us at —

✉ Paddy and Carole Ducklow
6420 Fox Street
West Vancouver, BC V7W 2C4 Canada

-- or --

✉ pducklow@shaw.ca
✉ 604.921.9542

