

**REPORT OF THE  
DIVORCE AND THE MINISTRY STUDY COMMITTEE  
to the  
TWENTY-THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
of the  
CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE  
July 25-30, 1993  
Indianapolis, Ind.**

## **DIVORCE AND THE MINISTRY STUDY COMMITTEE**

The original purpose of this committee was to study the issue of divorce and the ministry in order to give guidance to district boards in their work with candidates for ordination and to clarify the language of the *Manual* in order to harmonize with accepted procedures (from General Board minutes of February 1989, p. 46).

As our committee studied issues at the first meeting, October 11, 1990, it was determined that another very important issue related to the original purpose of the committee is the right of ministers of the Church of the Nazarene to perform marriages of divorced persons.

At the request of the committee Dr. Alex Deasley prepared a paper titled "Marriage and Divorce in New Testament Interpretation." This paper has served as the biblical and theological foundation for the proposed recommendations for clarifying and harmonizing the *Manual* language concerning the issue of marriage and divorce.

Dr. Deasley's paper is divided into three parts:

Part One: Exegetical Survey of New Testament Passages on Divorce

Part Two: Theological Positions Deriving from Exegesis

Part Three: Guiding Principles in Constructing a Christian Position on Divorce

In Part Two Dr. Deasley points out two ways of deriving theological positions from the exegesis:

A. The teaching of Jesus is viewed as prescriptive law.

B. The teaching of Jesus is viewed as an ideal.

Based on the exegesis and rationale that Dr. Deasley set forth, the committee unanimously agreed that the teaching of Jesus on marriage and divorce should be viewed as an ideal.

In Part Three Dr. Deasley set forth guiding principles for constructing a Christian position on divorce. He stated, "In the last analysis there is only one guiding principle: The law must be proclaimed in the context of the gospel." He continued by pointing out that this basic undergirding principle should be spelled out in at least three specific guidelines as follows:

A. The biblical ideal of the permanence of marriage must be clearly and unambiguously acknowledged as the baseline of the biblical view.

B. If and when resort is made to divorce and remarriage, the place for repentance and forgiveness must be given recognition.

C. It would seem that there must be some defined discipline.

At the request of the committee Dr. Deasley drafted proposed *Manual* changes of paragraphs relating to divorce and the ministry, using the guiding principle of his paper, "The law must be proclaimed in the context of the gospel."

The committee unanimously proposes the following *Manual* changes:

### **PREFACE**

1. The following are changes in the *Manual* (1989) that appear to be entailed by the committee's decision that the teaching of Jesus on marriage and divorce is to be understood as an ideal rather than as legislation.

2. The paragraphs in the *Manual* specifically involved are: 35, 35.1, 35.2, 35.3, 35.4, 320, 347.2, 403.1, 404.3, 405.3, 409.15, 409.16, 409.17, and 410.7.

3. In the statements following, the proposed changes are underlined and the existing wording is placed in brackets.

4. The overall rationale for the proposed changes is (as indicated) the committee's decision that the biblical teaching on marriage and divorce represents an ideal. Where any further rationale has seemed necessary, this has been appended to each proposed change.

### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

1. The effect of the changes suggested, resulting from the committee's conclusion that the biblical teaching regarding marriage is an ideal rather than a law, is to throw the weight of the evaluation of individual cases from the legal side to the pastoral and spiritual. There is no longer a rule of thumb, namely: did adultery take place or not? The question is now: has there been a truly Christian attempt at reconciliation, and if so, is there no reasonable hope for restoration, and therefore no ground for resisting divorce? And if this is the case, is it acknowledged in penitence as a breach of God's design and purpose? At all levels—local, district, and general—such a process will lay heavy demands on spiritual insight and pastoral responsibility with regard to the maintenance of the biblical ideal and the pastoral care of broken lives.

2. If the view set forth here as biblical and commended by the committee is adopted by the church, it will be important to make clear to pastors and people alike that viewing lifelong marriage as an ideal rather than a law, far from being a charter for easy divorce, is designed to underscore the biblical view of the permanence of marriage, while also proclaiming the good news that the grace of God in Christ Jesus is powerful enough to forgive marital failure.

*Respectfully submitted,*  
LEE McCLEERY, *Chairman*  
JAMES W. DANIEL, *Secretary*  
JERALD D. JOHNSON, *Adviser*  
ALEX DEASLEY

### IMPLEMENTING LEGISLATION

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RESOLVED that *MANUAL* paragraphs 35-35.4, 320, 347.2, 403.1, 404.3, 405.3, 409.15-17, and 410.7 be amended as follows:

35. The Christian family, knit together in a common bond through Jesus Christ, is a circle of love, fellowship, and worship to be earnestly cultivated in a society in which family ties are easily dissolved. We urge upon the ministry and congregations of our church such teachings and practices as will strengthen and develop family ties. In particular, we urge upon the ministry the importance of teaching and preaching clearly the biblical ideal of the permanence of marriage.

The institution of marriage was ordained of God in the time of man's innocence, and is, according to apostolic authority, "honourable in all"; it is the mutual union of one man and one woman for fellowship, helpfulness, and the propagation of the race. Our people should cherish this sacred estate as becomes Christians, and should enter it only after earnest prayer for divine direction, and when assured that the contemplated union is in accordance with scriptural requirements. They should seek earnestly the blessings which God has ordained in connection with the wedded state, namely, holy companionship, parenthood, and mutual love—the elements of home building. The marriage covenant is morally binding so long as both shall live, and [therefore, may not be dissolved at will] breaking of it is a breach of the divine ideal of the permanence of marriage.

(Genesis 1:26-28, 31; 2:21-24; Malachi 2:13-16; Matthew 19:3-9; John 2:1-11; Ephesians 5:21-6:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Hebrews 13:4)

[35.1] 35.2. Ministers of the Church of the Nazarene are instructed to give due care to matters relating to solemnizing marriages. They shall seek, in every manner possible, to convey to their congregations the sacredness of Christian marriage. They shall provide premarital counseling in every instance possible before performing a marriage ceremony. They shall only solemnize marriages of persons [having the scriptural right to marry] who give clear declaration of their commitment to the biblical ideal of the permanence of marriage. (107-7.1[, 409.15])

[35.2] 35.3. Members of the Church of the Nazarene are to seek prayerfully a redemptive course of action when involved in marital unhappiness, in full harmony with their vows and the clear teachings of the Scripture, their aim being to save the home and safeguard the good name of both Christ and His Church. Couples having serious marital problems are urged to seek counsel and guidance of their pastor and/or any other appropriate spiritual leaders. Failure to comply with this procedure in good faith and with sincere endeavor to seek a Christian solution, and subsequent obtainment of [an unscriptural] divorce and remarriage, makes one or both parties subject to possible discipline as prescribed in 501-501.2 and 502-502.9.

Rationale. (a) The word "unscriptural" is omitted before "divorce" in keeping with the biblical understanding of marriage as an ideal. (b) The presence of discipline in existing 35.2 raises the question of its place in the new scheme of things. We would argue: (i) that holding that the permanence of marriage is an ideal does not mean that marriage may be dissolved flippantly. The terms of existing 35.2 are very appropriate in that respect. (ii) This would imply that the church make visible its upholding of the biblical ideal where members fail to do so.

[35.3] 35.1. [Though there may exist such other causes and conditions as may justify a divorce under the civil law, only adultery is a scriptural ground for divorce and only adultery will supply such ground as may justify the innocent party in remarrying. (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9)] In biblical teaching, marriage is the commitment of male and female to each other for life, reflecting Christ's sacrificial love for the Church. As such, marriage is permanent, and divorce an infraction of the clear teaching of Christ. Such infractions, however, are not beyond the forgiving grace of God when this is sought with repentance, faith and humility. It is recognized that some have divorce thrust upon them against their will, or are compelled to resort to it for legal or physical protection.

(Genesis 2:21-24; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 7:36-50, 16:18; John 7:53—8:11; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 7:10-16; Ephesians 5:25-33)

Rationale. A clear statement is needed of what is meant by the biblical ideal of the permanence of marriage. This statement attempts to set forth the divine standard; to indicate its ideal (rather than legal) character by making clear that infractions are not unforgivable; and at the same time to show that the emphasis must always fall on the permanence of marriage rather than upon the availability of forgiveness. Consequently, this paragraph becomes the baseline or reference point of all other statements in the *Manual* on this subject. For this reason, it is suggested that it stand as 35.1. (This will require renumbering of 35.1 and 2 as 35.2 and 3. In the remainder of this report where the renumbered paragraphs are referred to, this will be stated explicitly.)

35.4. Through ignorance, sin, and human frailties, many in our society fall short of the divine ideal. We believe that Christ can redeem these persons even as He did the woman at Samaria's well; and that sin against God's design for marriage does not place one beyond the forgiving grace of the gospel. Where [the scriptural ground for divorce did not exist] a marriage has been dissolved and remarriage has followed, the marriage partners, upon genuine repentance for their sin, are enjoined to seek the forgiving grace of God and His redemptive help in their marriage relation. Such persons may be received into the membership of the church at such time as they have given evidence of their regeneration and an awareness of their understanding of the sanctity of Christian marriage. (27, 107.1)

Rationale. The addition to sentence two is designed to reinforce the view that the law of marriage is not to be allowed to swamp the grace offered in the gospel.

320. The Board of General Superintendents shall have discretionary power in the ordaining of divorced persons to the office of elder or deacon in the Church of the Nazarene, provided such divorced persons have [scriptural grounds] biblical basis for divorce. (35.1-35.3, 404.3, 405.3 [409.15])

Rationale. These changes are recommended to harmonize with proposed legislation in paragraphs 403.1 and 410.7.

347.2. To emphasize the sanctity of marriage and the sacredness of the Christian home and to point out the problems and evils of divorce. In particular, stress should be laid upon the biblical ideal of marriage as a lifelong covenant, to be broken only by death.

Rationale. While using the language of the ideal, it causes the accent to fall upon the permanence of Christian marriage.

403.1. When there are members of the Church of the Nazarene who feel called to the ministry, they may be licensed as ministers by the district assembly provided they (1) have held a local minister's license for one full year; (2) have passed the complete first-year course of study for ministers, or if enrolled in a Nazarene college or seminary, have completed one-fourth of the units prescribed in the college or college-seminary program, or one-third of the Bible college ministerial curriculum. Exceptions to this requirement may be made by the District Ministerial Credentials Board provided the candidate is pastoring an organized church, and is registered in a system of approved studies, and provided he annually fulfills the minimum amount of studies required by the *Manual* for the renewal of his license, and provided the district superintendent approves the exception; (3) have been recommended for such work by the church board of the local church of which they are members, to which recommendation shall be attached the Application for Minister's License carefully filled in; (4) have given evidence of grace, gifts, and usefulness; (5) have been carefully examined, under the direction of the district assembly of the district within the bounds of which they hold their church membership, regarding their spiritual, intellectual, and other fitness for such work; (6) have promised to pursue immediately the course of study prescribed for licensed ministers and candidates for ordination; and (7) have had any disqualification, which may have been imposed by a district assembly, removed by an explanation in writing by the district superintendent and the District Advisory Board of the district where the disqualification was imposed; and provided further that their marriage relationship does not render them ineligible for a district license or ordination; (8) in case of a previous divorce and remarriage [as described in paragraph 409.15], the recommendation of the District Ministerial Credentials Board along with supporting documents will be given to the Board of General Superintendents, which may remove this as a barrier to pursuing a license or ordination. (35.1-35.3, 129.14, 205.7, 402.5 [409.5])

Rationale. The reference to 409.15 should be removed, since the new proposals will make it obsolete (see proposed legislation for 409.15). The cross-references should be amended by the omission of 409.5 (evidently an error for 409.15), which should be eliminated in harmony with the new proposals; and the addition of 35.1, 2, and 3, which contain the new baseline for the evaluation of divorce.

404.3. One who is called of God to this ministry, and who has fulfilled all the requirements of the church for the same, who has successfully completed the full course of study prescribed for licensed ministers and candidates for ordination as deacon, who has been recommended for renewal of district license by the church board of the local church in which he or she holds membership or by the District Advisory Board, and has been carefully considered and favorably reported by the Ministerial Credentials Board to the district assembly, may be elected to the order of deacon by two-thirds vote of the district assembly; provided he or she has been an assigned minister not less than two consecutive years; and provided further that any disqualification which may have been imposed by a district assembly has been removed in writing by the district superintendent and District Advisory Board of said district; and provided further that his or her marriage relationship does not render him or her ineligible for ordination. ([409.15] 35.1-35.3)

Rationale. If 409.15 is deleted, then the substitute baseline will be 35.1-3, as revised.

405.3. One who is called of God to this ministry, and who has fulfilled all the requirements of the church for the same, who has successfully completed the full course of study prescribed for licensed ministers and candidates for ordination as elder, who has been recommended for renewal of district license by the church board of the local church in which he or she holds membership or by the District Advisory Board, and has been carefully considered and favorably reported by the Ministerial Credentials Board of the district assembly, may be elected to the order of elder by two-thirds vote of the district assembly, provided he or she has been an assigned minister not less than two consecutive years either as a pastor or as a registered evangelist, and has spent the major portion of that time actively in the field, or has served three consecutive years full-time as associate or assistant pastor; or one year as pastor and two consecutive years as a full-time assigned associate or assistant pastor; or has served four years as an assigned teacher in the religion department of one of our Nazarene institutions of higher education, or in a Christian ministry in such other institutions and assigned roles approved by the Board of General Superintendents; and provided further that any disqualification which may have been imposed by a district assembly has been removed in writing by the district superintendent and the District Advisory Board of the district where the disqualification was imposed; and provided further that his or her marriage relationship does not render him or her ineligible for ordination. (35.1-35.3, 203.4, 320, [409.15,] 434)

Rationale. As in 404.3.

[409.15. Persons who obtain divorce under the civil law prior to conversion and who subsequently remarry may be eligible for the office of the ministry of the Church of the Nazarene provided the candidate has demonstrated consistent godliness and faithfulness and has been thoroughly examined for district license by the District Ministerial Credentials Board as to his or her moral and spiritual fitness. The recommendation of the Ministerial Credentials Board along with supporting documents will be given to the Board of General Superintendents, which may remove this as a barrier to pursuing a license or ordination. (320, 403.1-3.2, 404.3, 405.3, 406)]

Rationale. This should be deleted as obsolete, since based on the guideline that adultery is the only ground on which divorce is biblically permissible.

[409.16. In a case where the minister has been faithful to God, to his or her mate, and calling, but the mate chooses to dissolve the marriage by filing for and obtaining divorce, that minister would be eligible for the office of the ministry in the Church of the Nazarene.]

Rationale. Delete for the same reason as 409.15.

[409.17] 409.15. It shall be the duty of every minister of the Church of the Nazarene to hold in trust and confidence any communication of a confidential nature given him or her by a counselee of the congregation while he or she is acting in his or her professional character as a licensed or ordained minister of the Church of the Nazarene. The public dissemination of such communication without the express written consent of the declarant is expressly condemned. Any Nazarene minister who violates the above regulation subjects himself or herself to the disciplinary sanctions set forth in Part VI, Subsection III of this *Manual*.

Rationale. This is simply renumbering this paragraph because of the recommended deletion of paragraphs 409.15 and 409.16.

410.7. Any elder or deacon within 48 hours of the filing of a request for divorce or legal termination of a marriage by the minister or within 48 hours of the physical separation of the minister and the spouse of the elder or deacon for the purpose of discontinuing the physical cohabitation shall: (a) contact the district superintendent, notifying the superintendent of the action taken; (b) agree to meet with the district superintendent and a member of the District Advisory Board at a mutually agreeable time and

place, or if no mutually agreeable time and place can be arranged, at a time and place designated by the district superintendent; (c) at the meeting designated in subsection b above, the elder or deacon shall explain the circumstances of the action taken and the marital conflict as well as the biblical [grounds] basis for justification as to why said elder or deacon should be permitted to continue to serve as an elder or deacon in good standing. If an elder or deacon fails to comply with the subsections above, such non-compliance shall cause said elder's or deacon's name to be stricken from the Roll of Ministers at the next annual district assembly.

Rationale. "Biblical basis" expresses the spirit of the new proposals, whereas "biblical grounds" suggests the strictly legal view.

## **REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE TO STUDY GENERAL BOARD REPRESENTATION**

**to the  
TWENTY-THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
of the**

**CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE**

**July 25-30, 1993**

**Indianapolis, Ind.**