

**RELATIONAL COMMITMENTS OF
CLARENCE CENTER-AKRON MENNONITE CHURCH INC.**

**COMMITMENT TO
PRESERVING MARRIAGES**

So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate (Matt. 19:6).

Because our church recognizes both the divine origin of marriage and the devastating effects of divorce, we are deeply committed to preserving marriages and preventing divorce. Toward this end, we will devote a meaningful portion of our preaching and teaching ministry to strengthening marriages and families. We require and provide thorough premarital counseling to ensure that couples enter into marriage advisedly and are well prepared for its many challenges.

God designed marriage to reflect the beauty and permanence of Christ's loving relationship with his bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7). Jesus taught us that marriage in the Father's eyes is the permanent union of one man and one woman, joining together to become one flesh (Matt. 19:4-6). God designed marriage for companionship through life's joys and sorrows. Marriage is God's provision for the nurture and upbringing of children. God's family structure provides strength and cohesiveness to society.

In society marriages can fail for many reasons. Many have gone through divorce before having a relationship with Christ, and others have experienced divorce through no desire or decision of their own. Still others may have divorced because of their own wrongful choices, but have since experienced the repentance and forgiveness offered by the Lord Jesus to those who repent. Whatever your circumstance, you are welcome in this fellowship.

Our leaders are committed to provide counsel and support to couples who face marital difficulties. We will discourage couples from using divorce as a way to run away from issues in their marriage and encourage reconciliation through Spirit-led counseling, repentance, forgiveness and ongoing discipleship.

We also encourage couples to nurture their marriages by participating in fellowship groups in which people can grow together in their love for God and one another (Heb. 10:24-25). We expect husbands to spur each other on to love and cherish their wives, and wives to encourage one another to love and respect their husbands (Eph. 5:33).

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We recognize, however, that there are times when God permits a believer to seek a divorce without sinning against God or a spouse. We believe divorce is permissible when the other spouse has been sexually involved with a person outside the marriage (Matt. 5:31-32), or when an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage (1 Cor. 7:12-16). Even though divorce is permissible in these situations, it is not required. God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to him (Ps. 103:8-12; Isa. 55:7). When divorce becomes an option, an offended spouse can imitate God's love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Eph. 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Col. 3:12-14; Gal. 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the church to initiate formal discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matt. 18:12-20).

Just as church leaders are involved in beginning a marriage, they should be involved when it ends. Therefore, when someone is considering divorce, he or she is expected to bring the situation to our leaders and cooperate with them as they determine whether grounds exist, promote repentance and reconciliation, and exhaust redemptive discipline, if appropriate. During this process spouses should refrain from extramarital dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with being married.

This fellowship is always interested in helping divorced people restore their previous marriage if that is possible and appropriate. We will support a decision to pursue a second marriage to a different person only when we have determined that it is biblically valid and that every reasonable effort has been made to seek and grant forgiveness of the sins that contributed to a previous divorce.

We rejoice that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been unwillingly divorced, as does our fellowship. God graciously extends this same love to those who have wrongly left their marriages. That love moves him (and us) to call them to repentance, to encourage and aid reconciliation when possible, and to gladly restore those who have done all they can to rebuild broken relationships.

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