

Marriage and Family Agreement

(Dated September 25, 2014)

I. AFFIRMATION: Promoting marriage and keeping families intact is vital.

We, as representatives of the Christian faith community, believe that God has designed marriage to reflect the Father's relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ, and the relationship between Christ and the Church. God created this exclusive covenant relationship where a man and a woman come together for their health and well-being, any children they may produce and rear, and for the society at large.

God's Word provides the blueprints for courtship, marriages, parenting, and family. The gospel is the power of God (Romans 1:16-17) which brings hope and healing to the brokenness and alienation that is the result of human rebellion against God (Ephesians 2:13, I Peter 2:10)). This means that the gospel offers fresh starts and new beginnings along with the power to produce lasting change in marriages (II Corinthians 5:17). The gospel brings this real change into the lives of people as it announces to fallen people the gracious forgiveness of Christ and transformation that restores our humanity and enables people to live out God's design for marriage (Galatians 2:20).

Healthy marriages produce healthy families, which produce a relationally healthy community. Our intention as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to foster strong marriages, viable families, and healthy relationships.

II. CONCERN: Marriages are failing, families are breaking up, and communities are experiencing the effects.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the current condition of marriage and family life paints a discouraging picture. Four in ten marriages end in divorce, 41 percent of all children are born out-of-wedlock, 60 percent of all couples are cohabitating prior to marriage, blended families are almost as common as natural nuclear families, and a large portion of children live with only one parent.ⁱ The fragile state of family relationships is undermining the future generation of marriage, the emotional stability of children, and the relational health of our community.

III. RESPONSE: The ministers will invest in marriages, families, and the overall relational health of our community.

Being that the clergy perform three quarters of all weddings in North Carolina and are frequently looked to by people for marriage and family enrichment, we will uphold the God-given, proven standards for healthy marriages, families, and relationships. Because the needs are great in number, and diverse in nature, we will network with one another and proactively invest in the future generation of marriage; prepare couples for marriage; empower marriages, parents, and families; reconstruct hurting marriages, and families; and equip seasoned couples and families to reinvest themselves into newlyweds and young parents.

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IV. AGREEMENT: We will endeavor, with cooperation and resources, to strengthen marriages and families in the following six areas.

A. Investing in the future generation of marriage.

1. Providing a vision and blueprint for marriage and family ideals by instruction, teaching, and resources.
2. Urging young people and single adults to practice sexual purity in their relationships.
3. Providing opportunities to make a public pledge for abstinence and allow previously sexually active people to make a pledge for secondary virginity.

B. Supplying tools and resources for youth and singles to make healthy relationship decisions. (Preparing couples for marriage.)

1. Requiring engaged couples to attend at least eight hours of pre-marital education over a minimum of 4 months (6 month minimum is recommended).
 - a. Instruction will include Scriptural fundamentals on marriage, insights to grow their marriage, and tools to enhance their marriage relationship.
 - b. Couples will complete a relational inventory to help evaluate their relationship.
2. Providing seriously dating couples pre-engagement education to assess the future of their relationship.
3. Encouraging engaged couples to be coached by seasoned married couples.

C. Empowering married couples, parents, families, and individuals to grow in relational health.

1. Providing and promoting relationship-empowering retreats, conferences, workshops, and resources.
2. Encouraging coaching relationships for newlyweds, new parents, single parents, blended families, and others who can gain from the relational insights of seasoned couples, families, and parents.

D. Reconstructing hurting marriages, families, and individuals to complete relational health.

1. Promoting counseling, classes, retreats, and other resources that focus on Biblical approaches of reconciliation, mediation, restoration, and spiritual wholeness.
2. Supplying systems of support and/or recovery for fragile families, single parents, blended families, distressed marriages, pregnant teens, individuals struggling with addictive behaviors, and dysfunctional relationships.
3. Providing coaches who experienced similar circumstances and were restored to full relational health.

E. Equipping pastors, church leaders, and relationally healthy couples, parents, and singles to reinvest into others.

1. Encouraging church leaders to broaden their knowledge and expertise in areas of relational health.
2. Providing coach training to seasoned couples, experienced parents, and relationally healthy singles.

F. Encouraging one another as ministers to model healthy, growing marriages and healthy families to our congregations and our contacts.

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V. INVITATION: Our call is for unity and community-wide participation.

All churches who desire increased unity and investment in discipling and supporting traditional marriages are welcome and invited to join this effort. Our hope is to work with all who desire “marriage to be honored among all.”

VI. CONCLUSION: Today, ministers are entering into this long-term agreement and partnership, striving to positively impact marriages and families.

We recognize that this Marriage and Family Agreement establishes minimum, baseline standards, with the intention that each church will implement its own, specific policies. While unusual circumstances arise on occasion that necessitate variance from the details of this agreement, we are committed to practices consistent with and within the spirit of this Marriage and Family Agreement. We will cooperate with other congregations and organizations to create a cultural climate to assist marriages and families to develop and grow to their full potential, thus raising the relational health in our region.

ⁱ *The Good News About Marriage: Debunking Discouraging Myths about Marriage and Divorce* by Shaunti Feldhahn, Andy Stanley, and Tally Whitehead (May 2014).