

## STATEMENT ON THE FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

**Statement on the Family and Marriage****An Official Statement of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada****Preamble**

There are few things that touch the soul more intimately than our families. No doubt, the anecdotal evidence will point to every possible expression of family either venerated or scorned. *“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children”* (Ephesians 5:1) was the admonition of Paul. The upward calling of Christ is to something more than the definitions the world offers; it is to embrace the pattern of life embodied in Christ, to be empowered by the Spirit, and to be focused on our priestly mandate to represent God in the most intimate of human relations and in our movement’s missional mandate. This document is presented to offer that calling.

**1. Introduction**

It is God’s creational design for human beings, made in God’s image and likeness, to live in relational, faithful and fruitful communion with God and with others.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> The family reflects the communion enjoyed by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the Divine life. As such the family is designed by God to be a place of acceptance and love, respect and honour, security and refuge, nurture and encouragement, giving and forgiving, instruction and correction, joy and laughter, and grace and blessing. God has given the family as a blessing to humanity, as a place of Christ-like spiritual formation, and as the bedrock of society.<sup>4</sup>

**2. Theological Foundations for Understanding the Family**

- 2.1.** First, God has revealed himself as Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the first experience of family comes from the triune God himself. Fatherhood and Son-ness is not only a human experience but is the means by which God revealed the intimate union that exists within the Divine life. Our families are thus created and called to reflect the familial fellowship revealed within the Godhead.
- 2.2.** Second, in Jesus Christ<sup>6</sup> and because of His self-sacrificial love poured out on the cross of Calvary we are given the opportunity to become children of God. Through Jesus’ atoning work we have been given access to the Father as adopted children.<sup>7</sup> Through Christ’s life, death and resurrection our primary identity as children of God is won for us.

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<sup>1</sup>The triune God exists in perfect relationality, fidelity, and fecundity (John 17:20-26).

<sup>2</sup> Human identity, fulfillment and flourishing are established in relationship with the triune God and in relationship with other human beings.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18, 23-24

<sup>4</sup> The Biblical narrative reveals the importance of the marriage relationship as it is both central to God’s creational design for human beings and informs the eschatological fulfillment of the Church in its relationship with Jesus Christ.

<sup>5</sup> Trinitarian Theology: Theological understandings of the family are rooted in a Trinitarian understanding of the imago Dei (image of God). God’s self-revelation reveals the one God.

<sup>6</sup> Christology: Theology of Christ.

<sup>7</sup> John 1:12, Ephesians 1:5.

- 2.3.** Third, as God's children we are all called to be part of a spiritual family. Though every person is born into a biological family, God desires us all to be part of the spiritual family of God as embodied in the Church.<sup>8</sup> Properly understood, our spiritual family and our biological family should function in harmony and in loving obedience to the triune God. We are called to reflect God and His glory in all our relationships.
- 2.4.** Fourth, all of us come from a biological family.<sup>9</sup> This means that we are related by blood to a mother and a father and, potentially, to siblings and/or children. We may also be related by adoption in the same manner. The family unit is part of God's creational design and family relations have been given to us by God as a gift of grace.
- 2.5.** Fifth, our present reality is that we are all sinful individuals living in a fallen world.<sup>10</sup> Thus, no family perfectly fulfills the vision and calling for which the family has been designed by God. No individual persons, family unit, or local church, is free from the impact of sin. All people at the personal and social level are tainted by sin and its impact in the world and so are all in need of God's grace.

### **3. Purpose and Calling of Family**

The family reflects the unity and diversity that exist both in the triune God and the local church. There are multiple and dynamic roles in family relationships. Each person within the family and each role within the family is a gift and a work. Every family member has the calling and responsibility to grow in Christlikeness, to reflect God in all their relationships, and to further the Kingdom of God by carrying out the Great Commission. This means that the family becomes the prayerful, Christ-centred, Spirit-empowered and Mission-focused community within communities that our denominational vision prayer longs for. Such a vision of the family will increasingly be characterized by love of God and love of neighbour, the presence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, faithful, Spirit-led service, regular repentance and growth toward holiness, and forgiveness being both offered and accepted.

#### **3.1 Singleness**

Whether called to a lifetime or a season of singleness, the single person has the unique opportunity of deep and undivided devotion to God. Their focus is not divided by marital responsibilities.<sup>11</sup> A single person is called to a life of celibacy for as long as they are single. Though celibacy is a challenge in a sexualized culture, God is more than able to meet our deeper need for loving companionship and intimacy through His own presence as well as through the spiritual family of God. Jesus himself, as a celibate single, modelled a fulfilled and fruitful life, complete and holy in and through His union with the Father by the Holy Spirit.

#### **3.2 Marriage**

In the biblical narrative, marriage is used as a metaphor of the love relationship between Christ and His church,<sup>12</sup> of which covenant commitment and intimacy are hallmarks. The Church ought to do everything it can to promote, nurture, encourage, and protect the marriage relationship. Like singleness, marriage is a sacred calling and is a relationship in which a man and a woman can exercise love and intimacy, care, servanthood, unity, and mutual submission. In this way, marriage reflects the relational nature of the God in whose image men and women are created.

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<sup>8</sup> Ecclesiology: Theology of Church.

<sup>9</sup> Theological Anthropology: Theology of human beings.

<sup>10</sup> Hamartiology: Theology of sin.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:25-35

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 5:32

Marriage is instituted by God and entered into freely by adults with mutual consent.<sup>13</sup> Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in a loving covenant commitment which is:

**3.2.1. Lifelong.** Marriage is a covenant until the death of one of the parties.<sup>14</sup>

**3.2.2. Sacred.** Marriage is sacred in its establishment by God and in its function under God. Marriage was given for human companionship, union, fruitfulness and care of creation.<sup>15</sup> It has the capacity to reflect the nature of God to the world.<sup>16</sup>

**3.2.3. Intimate.** Marriage involves leaving one's family of origin, being united in a one-flesh union, and establishing a new family unit with the potential of children.<sup>17</sup>

**3.2.4. Exclusive.** No other human relationship must interfere with the marriage commitment. Jesus treated sexual immorality, including lustful thoughts, with utmost seriousness. For the same reason, premarital sex is understood to pose a significant threat to a future spouse's hope of an exclusive union.<sup>18</sup>

Marriage is God's unique means to reveal the union between Christ and his Church. Marriage also provides for the man and the woman the God-given context for intimate companionship, God-honouring sexual intimacy, and the procreation of the human race.<sup>19</sup>

Married couples are called to be devoted to God and one another and, in reverence to Christ, to live in mutual respect, submission and self-giving love to one another. The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since humanity both male and female are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people, first towards one another, towards the Church, and then towards the world.<sup>20</sup>

In a marriage lived according to these truths, the love between husband and wife will show itself in listening to each other's viewpoints, valuing each other's gifts, wisdom and desires, regular acts of repentance and forgiveness, building one another up in Christ, serving in faithful partnership wherever God calls them, honouring one another in public and in private, and always seeking the best for one another.

### 3.3 Parenthood

Parents are to reflect God's love to their children. They are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to raise their children to be mature and godly adults by training them in the ability to know right and wrong, discernment and wisdom, the right use of freedom, and godliness in both character and intimacy with God. Parents, in partnership with the Church, are to lead and teach their children in these ways through the example of their own lifestyle, instruction, and loving discipline.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Genesis 2:23-25; Matthew 19

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 19:6

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 1:27-28, 2:20-25

<sup>16</sup> Ephesians 5

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 2:22-25

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 5:28, 19:9, Genesis 2:22-25, 1 Corinthians 7:2-5. See the Statement on Human Sexuality.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:3-5

<sup>20</sup> Ephesians 5:21-33

<sup>21</sup> Deuteronomy 6:6-9

### 3.4 Childhood

Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Children are to honour and obey their parents.<sup>22</sup> As children mature they are also called to grow in Christlikeness, reflect God in all their relationships and be filled with the Holy Spirit using their giftedness in service of the Church and the world.

## 4. Divorce

The fall of humanity into sin resulted in brokenness on all levels, including marital relationships. Though divorce is not part of God's design, the church has a responsibility to shepherd those impacted by divorce, leading them toward healing, wholeness, and hope in Christ.<sup>23</sup> Scripture overwhelmingly bears witness to the transforming love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, which heals, restores, and resurrects the dead. So, even in circumstances where divorce may be seen as a biblical option, it is never to be the first or sole option. Rather, even for those struggling through the pain of a fractured relationship, Christ continuously calls his followers toward wholeness and reconciliation. Any discussion about divorce from a Christian perspective must be viewed through the lens of God's working and calling toward reconciliation.

### 4.1 Adultery

Adultery violates the marriage covenant. In such cases, when reconciliation cannot be realized, divorce is a biblical option.<sup>24, 25, 26</sup>

### 4.2 Abandonment

An unbelieving spouse who refuses to continue in marriage and leaves the relationship,<sup>27</sup> violates the marriage covenant. Divorce is a biblical option.

### 4.3 Abuse

Abuse of any kind (e.g. physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual) has no place in a marriage relationship. Anyone who would use their physical, intellectual, or emotional strength to manipulate, oppress, harm, or control another is in clear contradiction to the way of Christ.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, victims of abuse ought to seek relief and protection from destructive and violent spouses. At the same time, one must not be quick to break marital ties without the hard work of self-examination or the real support of the faith community for both spouses involved. Where reconciliation is not possible, divorce is a biblical option.

### 4.4 Reconciliation

The forgiveness and reconciliation we have with God through Christ by the Holy Spirit can extend into even the most broken of marriages. In any situation, one must not be hasty to break the marital ties. Any

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<sup>22</sup> Ephesians 6:1-4

<sup>23</sup> Malachi 2:10-16; Matthew 5:31-32; Matthew 19:1-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11,39; Ephesians 5:21-33. Though Moses made accommodation for divorce within Israel (Deuteronomy 24:1-4), Jesus made it clear that this was only because their hearts were hard and that God's intent for marriage never included divorce. He reinforced the deep intimacy and commitment intended for the marital union (Matthew 19:8, 5-6).

<sup>24</sup> God's divorce of Israel was because of her *spiritual unfaithfulness* – intimacy with other gods. Isaiah 57:1-13; Ezekiel 23:1-18; Hosea 2:1-23; Jeremiah 3:20.

<sup>25</sup> Jesus states this clearly in Matthew 19:9; cf. Matthew 5:32.

<sup>26</sup> The Greek word (*porneia*) translated here as "sexual immorality" refers to any kind of sexual activity outside of marriage. See: Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 770). New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>27</sup> In this situation, rather than attempting to force a relationship in which only one party is willing, the believing spouse is called to let his or her partner leave and, in this way, pursue peace rather. 1 Corinthians 7: 12-13, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Proverbs 15:1; Ephesians 4:32; 5:1-2, 21-33; Philippians 2:3-8; Colossians 3:12, 18-19; 1 Peter 3:7.

damaged relationship that has been restored through godly forgiveness and reconciliation displays the transforming love of Christ.

## 5. Remarriage

A person who has been divorced, for whatever reason, should be able to find help and support from the church and should seek this help and support as they move toward restored health and wholeness in every aspect of their life.

The divorced believer, or one who has become a believer following divorce, should always bear in mind that God's desire is to bring restoration to the original marriage relationship. If this is not possible, the divorced person may have freedom to contemplate remarriage to another person if such remarriage is on biblical grounds.

Scripture permits remarriage following divorce only if the divorce was on biblical grounds. Persons who remarry after being divorced on other than biblical grounds are guilty before God of adultery.<sup>29</sup>

The remarriage of persons who have been divorced is permitted by Scripture only under these circumstances:

- 5.1. If one of the original partners dies after a divorce, the remaining partner may remarry.<sup>30</sup>
- 5.2. If one partner's betrayal through adultery results in divorce, the other partner may remarry.<sup>31</sup>
- 5.3. If an unbelieving partner chooses to end the marriage, the believing partner may remarry.<sup>32</sup>
- 5.4. When two unbelievers have been divorced and one subsequently becomes a believer, if neither party has remarried, the believer should attempt to restore the marriage. If the unbeliever refuses, the believer may remarry.<sup>33</sup>
- 5.5. If a person is divorced on other than Scriptural grounds and his or her former partner remarries, the original relationship is dissolved and the remaining partner may remarry.<sup>34</sup>

## 6. Pastoral Considerations in Performing Marriages

Performing marriages is to be considered a solemn privilege. Official Workers are to fulfill this calling with wisdom, discernment and a true spiritual concern for all those involved. In light of this high calling, it is the position of the C&MA that no licensed worker or employee in any C&MA ministry or local church shall, under any circumstances, sanction, bless, conduct or officially participate in a marriage ceremony, civil or religious, that does not conform to the Statement on the Family and Marriage and the Statement on Human Sexuality. Also, no C&MA local church facility or other properties belonging to any aspect of the life and work of the C&MA may be used in any way that would result in a marriage or civil union that does not conform to the Statement on the Family and Marriage and the Statement on Human Sexuality.

## 7. Amendments

This Statement may be amended by a majority vote of General Assembly, written notice having been given prior to General Assembly.

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<sup>29</sup> Matthew 5:32, 19:1-12; Mark 10:2-12

<sup>30</sup> Romans 7:2, I Corinthians 7:39.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 19:9.

<sup>32</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:15.

<sup>33</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:15.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 5:32; 19:9