

# Three Rivers Church

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## Elders' Position Paper on Abortion

We believe that all persons, male and female, are made in the image of God; and, therefore, have eternal worth (Genesis 1:26-27). We believe that from conception a preborn is a person (Genesis 1:26; Jeremiah 1:4-10; and Psalm 139). Therefore, we believe that it is wrong to intentionally take the life of an innocent preborn person through abortion (Exodus 20:13).

TREFC 02/01

## Elders' Position Paper on Marriage, Divorce & Remarriage

### INTRODUCTION

The problem of divorce is one of the staggering problems of our society. In 1900 one marriage in twelve ended in divorce; by 1925 it was one out of eight; now it is one out of two.

The problem is not only limited to society. It has deeply affected the church. Over the years churches have responded in a variety of ways. The extreme poles of the responses are represented by the following:

- No divorce and no remarriage of divorced people for any reason.
- Divorce is no different from any other sin, and therefore; it should be confessed, forgiven, and forgotten.

The purpose of this paper is to explain the Three Rivers Evangelical Free Church elders' position on what God says in the Bible about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Certainly every case involving a divorce and/or remarriage must be considered individually, but the principles explained herein should provide a Biblical framework to evaluate each individual case.

### A. THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON MARRIAGE

One man with one woman joined together in a permanent union throughout life (Genesis 2:18-25; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:39).

Marriage was instituted by God. (Genesis 2:18, 24; Matthew 19:4-6) God created a wife for Adam and ordained marriage because in His divine wisdom He deemed it "not good" for man to be alone. God created man a "suitable helper" to partner with him in ruling the earth, raising a family and worshiping God. What takes place today at a marriage altar is not primarily the doings of the church or the state. It is first and foremost a sacred act before God.

Marriage is to be a monogamous relationship. (Genesis 2:22; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8)

God gave to Adam just one wife. Christ expounded this original ideal with His words: "For this cause shall a man [singular] leave...and shall cleave to his wife [singular] and the two shall be one flesh." (Matthew 19:5)

Marriage is to be a heterosexual relationship. (Genesis 1:27; 2:22)

God created for Adam (a male), Eve (a female). Adam was not given another human being like himself to marry. Eve was created as his complementary opposite. In Genesis 1:28, God gives a command for procreation to this man/ woman couple which points to the fact that God ordained marriage to be heterosexual. (Though God loves all people regardless of sexual orientation, He clearly states that homosexual relationships are sinful and condemned in the Scriptures. Genesis 19:1-25; Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Romans 1:24-27)

Marriage is a separation from parents. (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7)

Marriage involves a formal and public leaving of one's own parents in order to establish a new family as a married couple. Leaving one's parents indicates that one is to leave the deepest tie known to a child in order to establish a new tie in marriage that actually supersedes the old.

Marriage is the deepest possible relationship into which a man and woman can enter. (Genesis 2:24)

The term "one flesh" refers to a unique and profound biological, psychological, and spiritual bond. To be "one flesh" reaches to the depths of a couple's soul. It is the commitment of two wills. It is the blending of two minds. It is the mutual expression of two sets of God-given emotions. Thus, a husband and wife are mysteriously the male and female parts of a single entity.

Marriage is to be permanent. (Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9; Matthew 5:33; Ecclesiastes 5:4-6; Deuteronomy 23:21-23)

When two people are married, God provides the "glue" and bonds them in a union which is never to be broken. God's original plan did not include the prerogative of tearing a marriage apart. To do so is to cause severe damage. Divorce is like an operation in which a vital member is taken from a living body. Divorce is more like losing your arms or feet than it is like quitting a club or dissolving a business partnership. When a person has a wounded leg, the last thing a surgeon considers is amputation. God intends for marriage to be permanent.

## B. A BIBLICAL POSITION ON DIVORCE

God hates divorce. (Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:5-9)

In Matthew 19:5-9, Christ teaches that divorce is an accommodation to man's sin and is in violation of God's sovereign purposes for the intimate unity of the marriage bond. Divorce is only a concession to man's sin. Divorce was never God's original intention or desire for marriage. Even if there are biblical grounds for divorce, it is not mandatory.

Grounds for Biblical Divorce:

a) Fornication (Matthew 5:32; 19:1-9; Leviticus 18:1-30)

The word "fornication" is used throughout the New Testament to describe illicit sexual activity of any kind. In the case of married partners, it refers to intimate sexual involvement with someone other than one's mate—either of the opposite sex (heterosexual infidelity) or of the same sex (homosexual activity) or bestiality (sex with animals).

When a spouse is guilty of immoral sexual conduct with another person and continues to remain unfaithful, the option is there for the faithful mate to divorce. Divorce, however, is not mandatory.

b) Or desertion by the unsaved partner (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)

If an unbelieving partner desires to preserve the marriage, the believing partner has no freedom to divorce him/her. (1 Corinthians 7:12, 13)

If an unbelieving partner chooses to leave his/her believing spouse, refusing to live with him/her, the believing partner is to let him/her depart. (1 Corinthians 7:15)

The word "depart" is a strong word. In Matthew 19:6 and Mark 10:9, it is translated "put asunder" in opposition to "joined together."

Both verbs in this verse are durative. A good translation would be "if the unbelieving one keeps himself separated, let him keep himself separated." Permanence is in view. The tense of the verbs implies a determined and willful decision to leave a relationship with no desire to return, no interest in cultivating the home, no plan to bear responsibilities, and no commitment to the vows once taken. In the mind of the "deserter," marriage to the "deserted" is over. In such cases, the believing partner is not "under bondage" to that marriage which has been deserted. (1 Corinthians 7:15) The deserted believer is at liberty to leave the marriage bond which has already been broken.

Willful desertion on the part of the unbelieving partner is a ground for divorce. It dissolves the marriage bond and sets the believer free from the marriage relationship.

Man in his sinfulness, by a life of fornication and/or a decision to permanently separate, can and often does tear apart what God has joined together.

## C. THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON SEPARATION

Separation is not advisable except by mutual consent for a set time and for spiritual purposes. (1 Corinthians 7:5)

Christians are not to permanently separate. (1 Corinthians 7:10, 11) Even where there is adultery, the Bible stresses forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration. In Hosea, for example, the prophet continued to show his love to his adulterous wife and sought for her restoration.

If Christians separate (apart from fornication and willful desertion), they are to remain unmarried or to be reconciled to their mate. (1 Corinthians 7:11)

If a non-Christian mate is willing to live with the Christian, the Christian is to maintain that relationship, except where temporary separation (see next paragraph) is advisable. (1 Corinthians 7: 12, 13)

Temporary separation is sometimes advisable for the purpose of reconciliation/restoration and may be advisable for the physical or emotional protection of the spouse and/or children in an abusive situation. (The church stands ready to offer counsel, assistance, and referral in these matters.)

#### D. THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON REMARRIAGE

Remarriage according to the New Testament must be carefully examined on the basis of the classification of those involved.

For those who are divorced due to fornication and/or willful desertion of an unsaved partner:

Remarriage is neither commanded nor forbidden to the partners involved. (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). This silence cannot be considered positive permission, nor is it prohibition. Forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration are preferable and far more ideal.

For those who are divorced for causes other than fornication and/or willful desertion: (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11, 12)

Remarriage of these persons constitutes adultery. All four of the passages in the Gospels teach this. These New Testament references give a word of caution to anyone who is considering marriage to a divorcee. If the divorce was not on Biblical grounds, the person who marries the divorcee is considered an adulterer.

The remarriage of illegitimately divorced people is an act of "adultery" not a life of "fornication." That means that even though remarriage is a grievous act of adultery, it can be repented of and forgiven without dissolving the present marriage.

For widows and widowers: (Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:6-9)

For such persons remarriage is neither commanded nor forbidden, but it is allowed. (Paul does recommend to younger widows to consider remarriage. 1 Timothy 5:14.)

#### E. THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON DIVORCE AND LEADERSHIP

The body of Christ has a responsibility to uphold the biblical ideal of marriage. As previously stated, God hates divorce. (Malachi 2:16; Matthew 10:5-9) Divorce is a forgivable sin that is included in God's promise: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will

forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) However, forgiveness does not necessarily mean one is qualified to be an elder, deacon or church leader. “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” (Romans 12:3)

The only two biblical grounds for divorce are “fornication” (Matthew 5:32; 19:1-9; Leviticus 18:1-30) and “desertion by the unsaved partner.” (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)

These are the only two stated reasons in which God does not see the act of remarriage after divorce as adultery. (Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:15) Fornication and desertion by the unsaved partner break the marriage covenant before God. These acts free the innocent partner to remarry, and in so doing, they are not committing the act of adultery.

Biblically, such individuals, even if they remarry, would qualify before God as men who are “the husband of one wife.” Therefore, these men would be qualified to hold the office of elder or deacon, as long as the other characteristics in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-8 are an accurate description of their lives. Those unbiblically divorced are forgiven when they confess their sin but would require substantial counsel and consideration before being asked to lead in a ministry setting.

The elders have an obligation to carefully examine any past divorce in a leadership candidate’s history. A person who desires the office of elder or deacon needs to be willing to allow the elders to inquire discreetly about the candidate’s previous marriage experience. The elders will then carefully and compassionately determine whether the man is to be considered for an elected leadership position. We are in agreement and thankful that God forgives no matter what the circumstances. If a divorced man is presented to the congregation for a leadership position, the congregation will be informed of that in a brief biographical reference. If members of the congregation have questions about the divorce, they may talk to the candidate or one of the elders that has examined and approved of the leadership candidate.

#### F. SUMMARY STATEMENT

It has been our desire to state as clearly as possible the Biblical position of marriage, divorce, separation, remarriage, and leadership. We have endeavored to speak the truth in love. It is our further desire that this position paper will lead us toward grace and away from a critical and judgmental spirit. Please pray that the Lord will use it to further His kingdom, unify this body, and bring glory to His name.

#### G. ADDENDUM: Pastoral concerns and guidelines

The pastor will approach those considering marriage, divorce, and remarriage with love, compassion, and respect regardless of the circumstances.

The pastor must make a clear presentation of the biblical principles involved to those who seek his counsel regarding marriage, divorce, or remarriage.

Before agreeing to marry anyone the pastor must determine whether or not the marriage (or remarriage) is an “equal yoking” (II Corinthians 6:14-16) and/or falls within the scriptural parameters (see all the above).

The pastor is responsible for helping the parties wishing to be married to think through all the pertinent information and process the decision biblically and rationally. Thorough premarital counseling is strongly recommended.

Whenever possible, rather than divorce, reconciliation and restoration is the ideal.

People who have divorce and /or remarriage in their history need special consideration and presentation if they desire an official ministry assignment with the youth and/or adults of TREFC.

No document like this can address all the possible scenarios. In the final analysis, we want to live by faith through grace. Paul said it this way: "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." (Galatians 5:6b)

TREFC 07/99

## **Elders' Position Paper on Homosexuality**

(adapted from the resolution adopted by the EFCA General Conference, 1978, by the elders of Three Rivers Church April 26, 2005)

Due to the perceived confusion as to what the Bible says on the subject of homosexuality (i.e., "sexual relations between those of the same sex", Webster), the elders have agreed on this statement to clarify this church's official position.

To begin with, homosexuals will be treated with love and mercy, just as we would treat anyone stuck in a life-dominating sin (e.g., alcoholism, drug addiction, sex addiction, persistent adultery, pedophilia, et al). We will not, however, employ practicing homosexuals in either a paid or volunteer capacity.

In His Holy Word, God plainly condemns the practice of homosexuality as an abomination in His sight (Lev. 18:22), a degrading and unnatural passion (Rom. 1:26-27) that brings grave consequences in this life. Homosexuality is on the Biblical list of sins, any of which, if practiced as an unrepentant pattern of life, will result in the disinheriting of one's self from the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

It is not an unpardonable sin, but God desires that we call homosexuality what He says it is, sin; and implore homosexuals to repent and come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4). The Apostle Paul himself testifies that some who were formerly involved in homosexual practices were among those at the first century church at Corinth who were washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:11).

We do not believe that individual Christians, nor ministers of the Word of God, nor congregations of the Lord Jesus Christ may take away from or lessen God's prohibition of and warning against the practice of homosexuality. Neither may they individually or collectively, as responsible citizens in a free society, urge or concede that the state should give special protection or approval to this practice or promote it as a matter of personal taste, free choice or sexual orientation.

We believe that individual Christians, ministers and congregations, having come to the understanding that all human beings are sinners, and having received God's mercy while

helpless, ungodly and hostile to God (Rom. 3:23; 5:6-10), must warn our society against homosexual practices as from the mouth of the Lord (Ez. 3:17). At the same time, we must proclaim the offer of forgiveness, cleansing restitution, and power for godly living, for all who will repent and believe the message of Jesus Christ (John 1:12; 3:16; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; Phil 2:13)

We believe that individual Christians, ministers and congregations should compassionately and lovingly proclaim the Good News of forgiveness as well as the admonition to sin no more (John 8:11) to those involved in homosexual practices. Former homosexuals should be admitted into this church fellowship after confession of faith and evidence of repentance, just as we would those who have been living in other life-dominating sinful patterns (1 Cor. 6:11).

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Scriptures referred to in this paper:

Leviticus 18:22 "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable."

Romans 1:26-27 "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion."

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

1 Timothy 2:4 "...who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

Romans 3:23 "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."

Romans 5:6-10 "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

Ezekiel 3:17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me."

John 1:12; 3:16 "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Romans 1:16 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

Philippians 2:13 "...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

John 8:11 "'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'"

TREFC 05/05

## **Elders' Position Paper on Tithing**

Since we have such wide opinions on the subject of tithing, your elders have decided to express themselves clearly and collectively on the issue.

### **TITHING: A PERPETUAL PRINCIPLE**

Principle: Tithing was practiced by Abraham and Jacob before the Hebrews received the Torah.

Scriptural basis: "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.' Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything." Genesis 14:18-20 (cf. Hebrews 7:4-6 This NT passage is an involved argument about the superiority of Jesus over Levi. Since Jesus is a priest of the order of Melchizedek and not Aaron, his priesthood is eternal and permanent. He is worthy to receive the tithes of all true worshipers after he fulfilled the Law's requirements.) "...And this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." Genesis 28:22

Application: The practice of tithing then is not an exclusive practice of the Jewish people at the specific time in history often referred to by Bible teachers as the period of "The Law". We believe it is a principle with perpetual application.

Scriptural basis: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.' He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.... What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise." Galatians 3:13-14, 17 (Hebrews 10:10-12)

### **TITHING AND PRIDE**

Principle: Tithing will not earn anyone a right to heaven or the right to boast.

Scriptural basis: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." Matthew 23:23-24 "To some who were confident of their own righteousness and



looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'" Luke 18:9-14 (Amos 4:4-5) "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2:8-9

Application: We give our tithes and offerings because we are Christians, not to become Christians. ("Offerings" are gifts given to God that are beyond the 10% tithe.)

Scriptural basis: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:10 "We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men....Therefore, show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it." 2 Corinthians 8:20-21, 24

#### JESUS' TEACHING ON TITHING

Principle: We follow Jesus' teaching that we should not neglect tithing, though there are weightier matters that we should address from his teaching: for example, justice, mercy and faithfulness.

Scriptural basis: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." Matthew 23:23 (Micah 6:8; Luke 11:42)

Application: Because Jesus does not put a lot of emphasis on tithing does not mean tithing is optional. To not tithe was unthinkable in his approach to living a godly Jewish life.

Scriptural basis: "However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.... Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you." Deuteronomy 28:15, 47-48

#### AN ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLE

Principle: We think that tithing is an elementary principle that should be learned early in the faith.

Scriptural basis: "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained

themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment." Hebrews 5:11-6:2

Application: We believe that giving a tithe to God's work is the place to begin, not stop.

Scriptural basis: "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

## GOD FIRST

Principle: We believe that giving to God is our first priority in managing his resources.

Scriptural source: "Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine." Proverbs 3:9-10

Application: The first item on our budgets, the first check written from your accounts each pay day, is for the Lord's work.

Scriptural source: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matthew 6:33

## GOD'S OWNERSHIP

Principle: We believe God owns it all.

Scriptural source: "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it...." Psalm 24:1

Application: God holds us responsible for the management of all his resources, not just the tithe.

Scriptural source: "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.... After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them." Matthew 25:14-30

## DEMONSTRATION OF OWNERSHIP

Principle: The way we use our money demonstrates who we believe owns it.

Scriptural source: "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings." Malachi 3:8 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." Matthew 6:24 "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless." Ecclesiastes 5:10

Application: We believe we should express the vitality of our faith through the way we utilize the resources placed under our management.

Scriptural source: "But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others." 2 Corinthians 8:7-8 "But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.' Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.'" Luke 19:8-9

#### INDICATOR OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Principle: We believe the way we use his resources placed under our management is a great indicator of our spiritual maturity.

Scriptural source: "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?" Luke 16:10-12

Application: The elders have agreed to make tithing to this local church as part of their qualifications of leading by example.

Scriptural source: "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." 1 Peter 5:1-4

#### TITHING TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

Principle: We believe that God ordained the local church as the basic unit for winning and developing whole-hearted followers of Jesus Christ.

Scriptural source: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Acts 2:42-47

Application: We believe a Christian's tithe ought to go to the local church where believers are fed spiritually and the body of Christ gathers.

Scriptural source: "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need." Acts 4:32-35 (Malachi 3:8-10)

## SOWING AND REAPING

Principle: We believe God honors the principle of sowing and reaping in this matter of finances. No one can out give God, but the motive is not giving to obligate or manipulate God to prosper them in return.

Scriptural source: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." Galatians 6:7-10 "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." Luke 6:38

Application: Christians should be investing in eternity if they want eternal rewards. Tithing seems to be a minimum investment.

Scriptural source: "But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:19-21

## EQUAL SACRIFICE, NOT EQUAL GIVING

Principle: We believe God applauds sacrificial giving and financial faithfulness.

Scriptural source: "As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 'I tell you the truth,' he said, 'this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.'" Luke 21:1-4 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' " Matthew 25:21

Application: Our practice here is to recommend equal sacrifice, not equal giving.

Scriptural source: "When they arrived at the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, some of the heads of the families gave freewill offerings toward the rebuilding of the house of God on its site. According to their ability they gave to the treasury for this work 61,000 drachmas of gold, 5,000 minas of silver and 100 priestly garments." Ez 2:68-69 "But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." Luke 12:48 "Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have." 2 Corinthians 8:11-12 "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:7

### TITHING AND YOUR HEART

Principle: We believe that where you invest your money indicates the focus of your affection, expresses your heart.

Scriptural source: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:24

Application: We can clearly demonstrate our genuine belief in heaven and the unseen world; by using, for God's purposes, what this world admires and values so supremely: money.

Scriptural source: "For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." Philippians 3:18-21 "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:18 "For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings." Luke 16:8-9

### GOD'S PROMISE TO PROVIDE

Principle: We believe that God has given us all the resources we need to accomplish his will for us at Three Rivers Church from the tithes and offerings of his people who gather here.

Scriptural source: "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19 (Acts 4:32-35) "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work....You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion..." 2 Corinthians 9:8, 11

Application: When all of us tithe, your elders think that these principles will prove themselves by the overwhelming size of the offerings; showing the obedience, maturity, and generosity of his people; motivating others to give enthusiastically; and most importantly, bringing great glory to God.

Scriptural source: "And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.... And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it.....For I know your eagerness to help ....and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action....and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God." 2 Corinthians 8:1, 5; 9:2, 11 "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs....Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life." 1 Timothy 6:10, 17-19 "Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account." Philippians 4:17

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Questions and answers:

Q: How much is a tithe?

A: A tithe is 10% of all your income, calculated before deducting taxes or other payroll deductions. (Proverbs 3:9-10)

Q: Why does Three Rivers teach about tithing?

A: We teach about tithing for two reasons: first, Jesus instructed us to teach his commands, (Matthew 23:23; 28:18-20); and second, Jesus said more about how to handle money than he taught about heaven and hell combined.

Q: Is tithing and resource management that important to God?

A: See principles VII, VIII, XI, and XII.

Q: Should the whole tithe go to the local church?

A: See principle IX.

Q: Can the tithe be designated to other appeals from the church?

A: Of course that can be done, but wisdom tells us that we have to take care of the basics (general fund) first before expanding our efforts. We must take care of what generates the resources to spread the Word locally and globally. Farmers know "you don't eat the seed corn."

Q: How should I respond to other appeals for financial support from other Christian organizations/missionaries?

A: See #4. Once the local church is supported, then ministries outside the church can benefit from our "freewill" offerings which are in addition to the tithe. (Ezra 2:68-69)

Q: Does my tithe make that much difference?

A: What did Jesus say about the widow who gave the equivalent of two pennies? (see Luke 21:1-4)

Q: What about tithing social security income, alimony and insurance?

Tough questions. Cut and paste the address below for Larry Burkett's advice  
HYPERLINK <http://www.crown.org>

Q: Am I responsible for tithing even when I don't attend church for some reason?

A: How do you handle your household expenses when you go on vacation? Who pays those?

Q: How soon should children start tithing?

A: As soon as they have income. (chores, gifts, garage sales, etc.) One family has three jars for their children: a 10% tithe jar, a 10% savings jar, and an 80% everything else jar.

FINAL TREFC 01/10

## **Elders' Position Paper on Water Baptism**

Our practice at Three Rivers is "believer's baptism." That means we immerse people after they have made an informed decision to personally trust Jesus Christ as their Savior. There is no required age, but we do rely heavily upon parents' assessment of their children. We ask everyone to write out their testimony and be prepared to read it (have it read) or give the gist of it at the time they are immersed. At TREFC it is a membership requirement to have experienced "believer's baptism." We do not require immersion since the real issue is the public identification with our Lord. (Pouring and sprinkling of believers is permissible.) We do, however, only administer immersion when people ask to be baptized. Baptism is a great time to invite your family and friends to hear what the Lord has done for you! Jesus said to the man He healed, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you." (Mark 5:19)

## **Elders' Policy Regarding the Credentialing of those Credibly Accused of Sexual Misconduct with a Minor**

The Elder Board of Three Rivers Evangelical Free Church of Plainfield, IL now subscribes to the document created by the EFCA Board of Directors which was adopted on September 25, 2007 and amended January 22, 2008 ©EFCA 2011.

For purposes of clarity, the Three Rivers Board of Elders has defined "credentials" or "credentialing" or any similar words as ANY/ALL positions where any reasonable person would believe that an individual is in a position of leadership within this local church. This includes, Pastors, Elders, Directors, Ministry Leaders/Area Coordinators, and any person who is in a visible position with/without title who has been delegated authority by any of the aforementioned positions or so designated on an organization chart or published document which cites either the individual/position as having leadership responsibilities, no matter how slight. Any judgments about the implementation/interpretation of this

policy will be made by the Three Rivers Board of Elders, with the guidance and direction of legal counsel and/or boundaries established by the laws of the State of Illinois, County of Will, or City of Plainfield. Further, guidance for decision making by the Board will be based on direction from those who insure/indemnify church property in order to protect the long-term stability/viability of Three Rivers Church, Plainfield, IL.

## EFCA BOARD OF MINISTERIAL STANDING POLICY REGARDING THE CREDENTIALING OF THOSE CREDIBLY ACCUSED OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT WITH A MINOR

### PREAMBLE

The policy adopted by the EFCA Board of Directors and affirmed by the EFCA Board of Ministerial Standing (BOMS) is as follows: "EFCA BOMS Policy on Sexual Abuse of a Minor: This policy of the BOMS will be that the EFCA will not credential, accept transfer of credentials or restore credentials to anyone who has been convicted of any sexual crime involving a minor and shall revoke the credentials of any person so convicted. (September 2003)"

This policy statement gives specific direction regarding the cases to which it applies. While it is clear in both intent and scope, there is need of a supplemental policy to give guidance to BOMS regarding those cases that this policy does not address.

The adopted policy deals only with those persons who have been convicted of any sexual crime involving a minor – the presumption being that such a judgment has been handed down by a court of law, which will be validated by a background check. Many cases of sexual misconduct involving a minor are not prosecuted, and some that are prosecuted do not result in a conviction. We want to deal with these cases in a manner that is consistent with the above policy. We also recognize that not all cases demand as severe a restriction on credentialing and our response to each case should be based on its own circumstances. It is the desire of the EFCA to reflect both the holiness and grace of God in its policies and procedures. We hold as high priorities the need to protect innocent children, to hold credentialed members accountable to a high degree of personal integrity, and to protect the public reputation of the Gospel and the Church of which Christ is head. Our supplemental policy on this matter also reflects a primary concern for the victim of sexual misconduct, as well as for his or her family. The Scriptures call us to impeccable levels of sexual integrity (Eph. 5:3).

The fact that our secular culture and legal system highly censure such offenses is an emphatic reminder of our need to be above reproach (1 Cor. 5; 1 Tim. 3:2,7). 2 Adopted September 25, 2007 Amended January 22, 2008 ©EFCA 2011

### THE POLICY AND SUPPORTING PROCEDURES

It is the policy of BOMS not to grant, nor to allow anyone to continue to hold, a national ministerial credential if that adult has been credibly accused of sexual misconduct with a minor, even if this misconduct has not been successfully prosecuted in a court of law.

In exceptional cases, restoration of credentials may occur in accordance with special procedures established by BOMS. Moreover, BOMS reserves complete discretion with respect to the application, interpretation and enforcement of these policies and procedures, and its decision in all cases shall be final.



“Credibly accused” in this document is not restricted to matters before criminal or civil courts. Rather, the expression applies to any charge that has been clearly proven after adequate investigation according to procedures set forth in Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) documentation.

In the case of those who are applying for ministerial credentials with the EFCA who have been credibly accused of sexual misconduct with a minor, BOMS will use its existing investigatory procedures to process such an application. The process would be similar to that which is used for processing requests for exceptions to our policy on credentialing those who have experienced a divorce.

The restoration process of the EFCA, as it now exists, is sufficient to provide a framework for cases of sexual misconduct with a minor. Each case will be treated according to its own facts. In each case, BOMS – or an agency designated by BOMS - will formulate requirements, create accountability structures, and track and evaluate attitudinal and behavioral change that may lead to possible consideration of the restoration of a ministerial credential.

Exceptions to the stated policy would be granted only in those cases where there has been close supervision of a successful process over a prolonged period of time. Seven things will be made clear to any person seeking ministerial credentials who has been credibly accused of engaging in sexual misconduct with a minor:

1. The presumption is that such a person will not be credentialed by The Evangelical Free Church of America.
2. If BOMS is to err in judgment on this matter, it will do so on the side of protecting the victim, the victim’s families, the church, and society.
3. If BOMS is ever to consider granting or restoring a credential, it would only do so after a minimum of five years for the least offensive cases. The process will be rigorous. It will require a demonstrable change of character, perspective, and behavior over time. Ongoing discipleship and professional counseling will be required.
4. A clear plan of restoration and accountability must be duly presented, executed, and documented.

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5. Genuine confession and demonstrated repentance must be freely offered by the credibly accused party, and due consideration given to the perspectives of the victim, his or her family, and the local church.
6. The willingness of the credibly accused party to submit to this process will be judged to be a measure of God’s transforming work. However, entering into a restoration process does not in itself ensure that the restoration of a credential will take place, nor should this ever be assumed to be the case.
7. One condition of the granting of a credential to a person credibly accused of sexual misconduct with a minor will be a commitment on the part of such a person to make disclosure of this fact to any organization or church with whom this person is being considered for a ministry position. Such commitment will be registered in writing on a

form prepared by the BOMS and filed with the National Office of The Evangelical Free Church of America before credential is issued. Failure to make such a disclosure will result in the immediate revocation of the credential. A letter from BOMS will be sent to the appropriate persons notifying them of such revocation.

For the purposes of this policy, the term “sexual misconduct” is to be construed broadly. It is not limited to intercourse or physical touching. It applies to any behavior in which the motivation of the adult or the likely effect of the behavior is to stimulate himself/herself or the minor in a sexual manner. Examples of this consist of the following:

- Overt sexual touching, penetration, or intercourse of any kind, or the invitation for the minor to touch the adult in a sexual manner
- The use of suggestive or erotic language
- Explicit sexual invitations, commands, or comments
- Self-stimulation or exposure by the adult
- Voyeurism conducted by the adult
- The display of pornographic materials or situations to the minor
- Capturing images of the minor in sexual or suggestive poses

#### FOUNDATIONAL ASSUMPTIONS

1. Non-marital, adult sexual involvement with a minor is ALWAYS sinful (Exodus 20:14).
2. The adult who engages in sexual contact with a minor sins flagrantly against God and the child. This is true irrespective of the background, emotional state, or personal motivation of the offending adult (Mt. 18:6).
3. The adult who becomes sexually involved with a minor is always at fault and always culpable for his or her behavior, even if the misconduct was apparently, or in fact, initiated or welcomed by the minor.
4. This sinful behavior necessarily involves a serious breach of professional and interpersonal boundaries between a spiritual leader and one placed under his or her care and protection.

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5. This violation of a fiduciary relationship is a profound offense against a public trust that seriously undermines the spiritual and psychological health of both the adult and the minor.
6. Adult sexual misconduct with a minor demonstrates a severe corruption of the Adult’s moral integrity and necessarily disqualifies him or her from ministry. It is also the case that we take seriously the statements of Scripture about the sufficiency of God’s grace and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian (1 Cor. 6:9-11). We grant that there may be those who commit what we regard as egregious sin, who later demonstrate that God has so worked in their lives that they have transcended the sin and the condition of the soul that led to it (1 Tim. 15-16). This, too, is a dimension of witness to the Gospel of grace in Christ and the affirmation of which allows the Church to speak prophetically to the culture about the reach of redemption. Such a person may possibly become a candidate for a credential for ministry following an extended period of time that involves personal confession and repentance, deeper personal insight into mindset and motivation, focused discipleship and professional counseling, and long-term accountability.

We understand that the circumstances of sexual misconduct with a minor differ from case to case, and that all instances of sexual misconduct are not equal. The more severe and the more numerous the aggravating factors, the less likely it will be that a credential will be granted to the credibly accused party. Examples of such factors are:

1. The age of the minor involved: The younger the child, the more severe the offense.
2. The age differential between the adult and the minor: The larger the age difference, the more severe the offense.
3. The invasiveness of the sexual activity: Intercourse, sodomy, vaginal or anal penetration, etc., are more severe offenses than less invasive behaviors.
4. The degree of coercion involved in the sexual misconduct: Higher degrees of coercion represent a more severe offense.
5. The length of time over which the sexual misconduct was carried out and the frequency of sexual encounters during that time: The longer the period and more frequent the sexual contact, the more severe the offense.
6. The number of victims. The greater the number of victims, the more deeply rooted the sin is likely to be and the more severe the offense.
7. The nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim: The closer the relationship, the more severe the offense. The greater the authority/ trust placed in the perpetrator, the more severe the offense.
8. The manner in which the sinful behavior came to light: If the perpetrator voluntarily confesses the sin and repents of it, there is more reason to believe that he or she is sensitive to the Word and the Spirit than those exposed by the victim or a third party. If the perpetrator is discovered – or denies or minimizes the misconduct, the offense is to be considered more severe.

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We make a further note regarding the age at which the perpetrator began interacting sexually with minors. Sexual curiosity and experimentation by prepubescent and adolescent children is not uncommon. In most cases, these activities take place among peers. While they are inappropriate and often sinful, they do not constitute an orientation toward minors as sexual objects.

However, a long-term pattern of sexual interest in minors that is maintained (whether acted upon or existing simply as a fantasy, perhaps fed by use of pornography) into the late-teen years may be a strong indicator that the initiator of such sexual activity will become a pedophile or will become fixated on minors as objects of sexual fantasy or behavior.

Virtually all sexual orientation is well established in childhood and early adolescence. Therefore, such long-term patterns must be taken into consideration when dealing with an adult credibly accused of sexual misconduct with a minor. The longer and more established a pre-occupation with minors as objects of sexual interest is, especially as the individual approaches adulthood, the less likely it will be that the credibly accused party will ever be granted a ministerial credential.