

Policy for Ministering To Cohabiting Couples

God wants only the best for His people. Marriage is a gift from God by which He gives good things to His people. When we fashion relationships according to our own sinful desires, instead of God's design, we reject His good gifts and ruin the happiness He wants for us. But our gracious God gives healing through the preaching of repentance and forgiveness which He has entrusted to His church. In order that the people of God in this Place may be increasingly blessed by His good gifts and healing we, the Pastors and Elders of Hope congregation, confess the following truths:

Living together before or outside of marriage is a sin.

Exodus 20:14 You shall not commit adultery.

Ephesians 5:3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

God's Word on this subject has not changed or become outdated through the years.

Matthew 5:18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

This sin of cohabitation is especially destructive to the Christian faith because it is both public (seen by all) and persistent (done in an intentional and ongoing manner).

Luke 17:1-2 Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin."
(Public)

Hebrews 10:26-27 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. (Persistent)

The Christian church is commanded by God to confront such sin so that the erring brother might be won back and others might be warned of the dangers of such sin.

Matthew 18:15-17 If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

1 Timothy 5:20-21 NIV Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.

Galatians 6:1-2 NIV Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

On the basis of this, the Pastors and Elders of Hope Lutheran Chapel of Osage Beach, MO, intend to minister to such situations in the following manner:

Where A Wedding Service Is Being Planned

All requests to reserve the church for a wedding will be directed to the Pastor who shall begin preliminary planning with the couple. In completing the basic wedding information sheet, the Pastor will determine the couple's living status.

If it becomes known that the couple is living together outside of marriage, the couple will be shown how their lifestyle is offensive to God and to His Church with the goal that they will be led to repentance in order to receive forgiveness for their sin. In order to demonstrate the "fruit of repentance" (Matthew 3:8), the couple will have the choice of

- Living at separate addresses and remaining celibate until their wedding day,
- Having an immediate, private wedding ceremony with a larger, public service of celebration/affirmation to follow later, if desired.

Members who refuse or ignore the ministry of this congregation will be subject to church discipline which could lead to termination of membership.

When A Wedding Service Is Not Being Planned

The Pastors, in consultation with the Elders, will strive to stay informed of all live-in situations as they become public knowledge in the community.

Cohabiting couples who have not contacted the church for a wedding will be visited by one of the Pastors and/or their Elder, or receive a letter once the Pastors and Elders become aware of their situation. The member who is cohabiting will also be placed under church discipline, i.e., informed that he or she is no longer welcome at the Lord's Table until the situation is resolved in a God-pleasing manner.

If there is no immediate God-pleasing resolution, the Pastors and zone Elder will continue to visit and/or correspond on a timely basis until the situation is resolved positively or until termination of membership becomes necessary. In most cases, three visits within a six-month period of time should be sufficient.

CONCLUSION: The purpose in all this is to win back the erring brother or sister so that;

- ***God's forgiveness may be given and received with thanksgiving.***
- ***His people may be mutually encouraged to walk as children of the light.***

The Christian family may live joyfully according to God's design.