

Admissions Policy Concerning a Divorced Pastoral Applicant or Spouse

Concordia Theological Seminary Fort Wayne, Indiana

“The saying is sure, if anyone aspires to the office of bishop he desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach” (1 Timothy 3:1-2). These words of Paul to a brother pastor set before us the high requirements of the office of the public ministry. In public and private life, the one who aspires to the office of pastor is called to a most high standard. It is, therefore, necessary for the seminary conscientiously to address the issue of divorce among those aspiring to the office of the public ministry, in order to ensure that its students are above reproach and suitable for the highest office in the church.

Scriptural and Spiritual Factors

What God says about all marriages and his will for marriage is stated in simple straightforward language in the Scriptures. His expectations are high (e.g., Matthew 19:5-6). The relationship of marriage is to be regarded as holy and should be given the highest priority in one’s personal and professional life. Special expectations are placed on the man who desires to be called as a pastor in the church. Therefore, with respect to an applicant who has been divorced—assuming evidence of repentance, the acceptance of forgiveness, and a willingness to cooperate—criteria to be considered by the seminary’s Admissions Committee include:

1. The teaching of the Scriptures concerning marriage and divorce (e.g., Gen 2:4-25; Matt 5:31-32 and 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; 1 Cor 7:10-15; Heb 13:4).
2. The broader scope of Scriptural qualifications for holding the pastoral office, especially as these impact on the church and community (1 Tim 3:1-7 and 4:11-16; 2 Tim 4:2-5; Titus 1:6-9).
3. Applicants with more than one divorce will not be considered.

Personal Factors

Since the seminary has the responsibility to admit only such applicants as are suitable for seminary training and ultimately a call into the pastoral ministry, it is necessary to consider the following personal factors of the divorced applicant:

1. The causes for the dissolution of the marriage.
2. The degree to which the applicant has acted or is acting responsibly toward his former wife and family, specifically, whether adequate emotional and economic support is being given to his former wife and children of the marriage.
3. Whether there is evidence of growth and maturing, both on a personal and spiritual level.
4. The results of any pastoral or professional counseling.
5. The amount of time that has elapsed since the divorce was finalized, ordinarily not less than two (2) years prior to application.
6. Whether the applicant and/or former wife were Christians at the time of the marital difficulties and divorce.

Procedures

In order for a divorced applicant to be considered for admission to the seminary, it will be necessary for him to:

1. Satisfy the Admissions Committee that he understands and agrees with the Divorced Applicant Admission Policy.
2. Submit a comprehensive and detailed account of the circumstances of his divorce, including the following information:
 - A. The date on which separation leading to the divorce occurred.
 - B. The party who filed for divorce.
 - C. The personal reason(s) for the divorce.
 - D. The number of years of marriage before the divorce.
 - E. The date the divorce was legally finalized.
 - F. The legal justification for the divorce.
 - G. The settlement terms of the divorce decree. The applicant will provide a copy of the divorce decree and property settlement documents.
 - H. The details concerning any children of the former marriage (e.g., ages, custody, child support, visiting rights, and the like). The applicant will provide a copy of the child custody agreement.
 - I. The details concerning the remarriage, if the applicant has remarried:
 1. To whom?
 2. When?
 3. Are there children from this marriage?
 - J. The name of the pastor and/or congregation by whom the divorce was adjudicated.
3. Submit a statement of his understanding of divorce as it related to the pastoral office.
4. Seek and supply a letter of endorsement from his pastor as it relates to the pastoral office.
5. Seek and supply an evaluation and recommendation from the president of the synodical college if the applicant is or will be a synodical college graduate.
6. Request that the conclusions drawn from any pastoral or professional counseling be forwarded by the counselor(s) to the Admissions Committee.
7. If the applicant's present wife has been divorced, she is asked to submit in writing to the Admissions Committee her answer to the following questions: What were the circumstances of your divorce(s)? What is your understanding of the biblical teaching about divorce?
8. In addition to the requirements listed above, it may be deemed necessary for the applicant to appear for a personal interview. This is left to the discretion of the Admissions Committee.

Fulfillment of the requirements listed above does not guarantee admission to the seminary.

Non-Residential Pastoral Formation Programs

This policy applies to both applicants for residential and non-residential (i.e., distance education) pastoral formation programs.

Applicant Whose Spouse Was Previous Divorced

If a non-divorced applicant to a pastoral or deaconess formation program is married to a person who was previously divorced, then procedure 7 above that requests information from the previously divorced spouse should be included in the application process.

Adopted by the Faculty
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Fort Wayne, Indiana
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