

LIVE AT PEACE MINISTRIES

Policy Regarding Separation and Divorce

Introduction

Conflict is a reality that everyone experiences. Live at Peace Ministries ("LAPM") exists to help others resolve conflict in a biblically faithful manner and specializes in helping marriages in crisis. Our mission statement, *Transformation Through Reconciliation*, reveals our commitment to see others transformed even in the midst of painful and destructive conflict. Counseling or conciliation services (e.g. marital mediation, conflict coaching) are effective vehicles to help couples in significant marital conflict experience repentance, reconciliation, and restoration.

Couples Seeking Services at LAPM

Individuals or couples seeking counseling or conciliation services at LAPM are often considering separation or divorce, or are currently separated and/or pursuing divorce. The following hopes to clearly set forth our concerns and commitments when separation or divorce issues arise before or during a marital mediation. A biblically faithful reconciliation process remains committed to seeking to preserve and build the covenant of marriage.

It is the conviction of Live at Peace Ministries ("LAPM") that even the most damaged marriage relationship may be redeemed through the grace and renewing power of God. Therefore, LAPM does not wish to facilitate or encourage separation or divorce, and will participate in a reconciliation process where separation or divorce are current issues for discussion only when the couple's church(es) support our involvement and when we believe that our involvement provides an opportunity to present a gospel-centered approach to reconciliation. This redemptive approach to reconciliation is one that seeks to preserve personal relationships through repentance, confession, and forgiveness.

LAPM Criteria for Mediating Divorce

Each marital dispute is unique, and several factors are considered in determining whether LAPM should be involved in a marital mediation in which separation or divorce is being considered or pursued:

1. *Is one person in the marriage desiring and willing to work toward reconciliation?*

The power of reconciliation is unleashed even when only one person in the marriage desires reconciliation and is willing to work diligently to improve their own attitude and conduct, regardless of the other person's response. Moreover, a mediator may see an opportunity to encourage a desire for reconciliation even where none exists. In that case, it would be appropriate to continue working with a couple until such an opportunity ceases to exist. Additionally, at times it may be appropriate to continue the mediation even when only one party wishes to reconcile if a Christ-centered mediation process is helpful to prevent emotional, spiritual, or other harm to the couple's children, Christian community, or the reputation of Jesus Christ.

2. *Are there biblical grounds for divorce?*

It is the understanding at LAPM that there are certain circumstances under which divorce may be biblically permitted (i.e., adultery and abandonment). If biblically permitted grounds for divorce do not appear to exist, we advise the couple that their divorce decision appears to be against God's revealed will. Since we maintain that the

local church has primary responsibility for shepherding its members, as well as making a determination if a divorce is biblically permitted, every effort will be made to encourage the couple to seek guidance under the authority of their church(es) and may include LAPM contacting the couple's appropriate church leaders to inform them of an impending divorce decision.

3. *Have the couple's church(es) approved LAPM's involvement?*

Even though LAPM does not advocate for divorce, we respect the couple's choice to divorce when permission has been granted by their church(es) to do so. LAPM encourages couples to seek out the accountability and help of their churches, and to submit to their church leaders as they respond to their God-given responsibility to shepherd and discipline its members. Even when a marriage is dissolved, LAPM encourages relational reconciliation as a necessary responsibility for believers. In the event of marriage dissolution, the manner in which dissolution occurs must reflect the gracious character of God. A redemptive mediation process emphasizes Christ-like behavior on the part of both the husband and wife. When biblical grounds do exist for divorce, Scripture indicates that God favors forgiveness and reconciliation if the offending spouse will repent (Hosea 3:1; Luke 17:3-4). Therefore, reconciliation will be encouraged throughout any divorce mediation process.

LAPM Criteria for Mediating Separation Agreements

When requested to assist couples in structuring a formal separation agreement. LAPM recognizes that marital separation significantly increases the likelihood of divorce. As a result, LAPM does not advocate for separation, but in certain conditions understands that a formal and structured period of separation may provide an alternative to marital failure and subsequent divorce. In all cases, LAPM strives to facilitate the development of a separation agreement that increases the likelihood of a redemptive outcome, including reconciliation and restoration. The answers to the following questions directly affect our decision to be involved in a counseling or conciliation process in which separation is being considered or pursued:

1. *Have the couple's church(es) approved LAPM's involvement?*

Even though LAPM does not advocate for separation, we respect the couple's choice to separate when permission has been granted by their church(es) to do so. LAPM encourages couples to seek out the accountability and help of their churches, and to submit to their church leaders as they respond to their God-given responsibility to shepherd and discipline its members.

2. *Will the couple's church actively supervise the separation?*

LAPM is committed to helping couples work through destructive conflict in order to be fully reconciled through a process of repentance, confession and forgiveness. In addition, LAPM is committed to helping couples restore their marital relationship by structuring interventions that promote and build trust, respect and intimacy. Knowing that long-term and painful conflict tears at the fabric of the marital relationship, LAPM understands that when a couple's church actively shepherds and cares for its hurting members, separated couples can receive the accountability, support and care needed as they faithfully comply with the mandates of a reconciliation- and restoration-focused separation agreement.

3. *Will the separation facilitate reconciliation and marital restoration?*

Couples in conflict experience tremendous pain. In most cases, marital commitment is increased when couples work through that pain while living together. However, in some cases, marital commitment may be seriously diminished or destroyed if a couple continues living together. In cases of domestic violence, church-supervised separation becomes a valuable option to provide safety and structure for both members of the marriage while they engage in a change process designed to bring about lasting reconciliation and marital restoration. In cases where spiritual, emotional and relational crises exist at such a level that it is likely that one of the spouses will exit the marriage to reduce what they experience as unmanageable stress, a structured, church-supervised separation may provide the stability needed to help the couple address the issues underlying their conflicts while pursuing the goal of reconciliation and restoration.

LAPM Relationship with the Couple's Church(es)

LAPM recognizes, honors, and encourages the biblical authority granted to the local church. Therefore, the couple's pastor or other designated church official must agree (based on the church's policy on separation or divorce) that a separation/divorce situation is appropriate for LAPM's counseling or conciliation services. Essential benefits of such an agreement are the resulting accountability and encouragement of the couple as the church exercises its appropriate authority over its members. Accordingly, the undersigned parties grant permission to LAPM and any staff members to speak with pastors or designated church officials prior to, during, and following services. It is always the desire of LAPM to invite and include a pastor or designated church official in the mediation process to serve in a spiritual oversight and encouragement role. Unless the couple revokes permission at the time of signing the Memorandum of Understanding (detailed report of the agreements reached by the couple throughout the mediation process), a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding is provided to the pastor or designated church official by the parties or LAPM upon request.

Moreover, LAPM believes that conflicted couples benefit from the counsel and encouragement of mentors or mentoring couples prior to, during, and following counseling and conciliation services. Accordingly, the undersigned parties grant permission to LAPM and any staff member to work with the couple and their local church(es) to identify and enlist the services of mentors and/or mentoring couples to best serve the couple's needs.

Signature of Husband

Date

Signature of Wife

Date

Signature of Church Official

Date