

**North Georgia Annual Conference  
United Methodist Church  
Clergy Divorce Policy**

Read the policy, the online through Data Services at <https://data.ngumc.org> sign and save the policy.

**Preamble:**

The nurturing community exists with the potential to restore healing amid challenge and/or crisis. The church must be on the forefront supporting marriage through faithful and mature support. Premarital, marital and post-marital counseling are invaluable resources for sustaining healthy marital relations. Even with such support, there are situations in which couples find themselves estranged without reconciliation. Divorce is typically a painful alternative amid emotional, spiritual, relational and economic brokenness (Book of Discipline 2016, para 161).

District superintendents care for pastors deeply, however their role during a potential or actual clergy divorce must be supervisory and not pastoral. The DS must ask the difficult questions regarding circumstances leading up to considerations for divorce. The DS must ascertain whether any inappropriate or immoral behavior has occurred on the part of the clergyperson involved that would result in a chargeable offense (Book of Discipline 2016, para 2702). Therefore, a supervisory response must occur. One key component of the supervisory response is ascertaining whether the clergyperson has maintained fidelity in marriage. The DS encourages the clergyperson and the spouse to maintain trusted pastoral relations during the process of divorce and divorce recovery.

It is the clergyperson's responsibility to notify the DS if a divorce is being considered. The DS is notified prior to the engagement of an attorney or the filing of a divorce through a court of law. The superintendent is also responsible for managing information for the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the congregation regarding potential divorce. Situations become more difficult when family members or congregants notify the DS prior to the clergyperson involved. Congregations may also feel that congregational life is threatened secondary to the divorce. Failure of the clergyperson to notify the superintendent in a timely manner is inappropriate and irresponsible.

The District Superintendent supervises the church and its leadership during a pending clergy divorce, to assess and determine best practices for maintaining worship, missions and other ministries. The DS discerns whether the clergyperson has sufficient objectivity to lead the congregation during the season of divorce. The congregation is likely to feel broken and in need of healing. The current and future health of the congregation should be ascertained, managed and protected.

1) All clergy are encouraged to engage in counseling, individually and as a couple, towards maintaining health and wellness. When a clergy marriage is facing difficulty, counseling is

especially needed. Clergy may receive guidance in connecting with Behavioral Health Services through the North Georgia Benefits Office, as well as the Center for Clergy Excellence.

2) The clergyperson shall promptly notify his/her District Superintendent (DS) when either they or their spouse are considering divorce. This notification should occur prior to engaging an attorney or filing for divorce through a court of law. Timely notification reflects the clergy persons consideration of the marriage, the ministry, the congregation and the conference, as well as his or herself.

3) The DS shall convene a supervisory meeting with the clergyperson. The spouse is encouraged to attend this meeting, if possible. The clergy person will provide contact information for the spouse. A second DS, selected by the clergyperson, must be present during the supervisory process. (The second DS will focus on taking the minutes for the meeting and offering feedback when solicited.) The clergyperson, spouse and superintendents shall discuss the following:

- a.) Circumstances leading to consideration for divorce. Perspectives will include both parties if both are present.
- b.) Whether there has been any immoral or inappropriate behavior on the part of the clergyperson which leads to the decision to divorce.
- c.) What options are present for the care and healing of this immediate family?
- d.) Referral of the clergy and spouse to the Conference Benefits Officer to discuss benefits after divorce, as well as updates to essential information (e.g., next of kin/beneficiaries for life insurance and pension).

4) The clergy person shall submit a plan for personal and family healing no later than three weeks after the meeting. The DS will work collaboratively with the clergyperson to finalize a covenant of personal and family healing. Special considerations should be for the spouse and any children who, in addition to divorce, may also suddenly have no church home.

5) The clergyperson shall refrain from dating or entering a love relationship until after the divorce is final. He or she shall be advised to avoid dating a parishioner.

6) The superintendent will meet with the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) of the local church to discuss the divorce and healing options of the congregation. If the clergy is in an Extension Ministry, the DS meets with the personnel committee or a group identified by a board of directors.

7) Options for healing to the clergyperson and family:

- a.) Therapeutic Counseling
- b.) Financial Counseling through Ernst and Young (GBPHB).
- c.) Spiritual Growth Leave
- d.) Financial/credit counseling through a non-profit consumer credit counseling service.
- e.) Voluntary Leave of Absence

8) Options towards healing of the Local Congregation

- a.) A pastoral counselor to work with the SPRC and other key leaders to design a process of communication and conversation towards healing for the local church in the experience of divorce.
- b.) Ongoing consultation for the SPRC by the DS; in order to monitor the church's response, healing and adjustment to change as a result of the clergy person's divorce.

9) The clergy person must engage a follow-up meeting (in-person or digitally) with the two DSs, six to eight months after the initial meeting and/or prior to the next appointment-making season of the cabinet, to discuss progress made towards healing and the impact of the divorce on the local church.

10) The DS shall write a progress report to be placed in the clergy person's supervisory file. Documentation shall include a copy of the covenant for healing and updates on completion of the program for healing.

**Be sure to save your changes at the end of the form.**

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Covenant for Healing**

Online through Data Services at <https://data.ngumc.org> you will select the appropriate response for each of these commitments, filling in additional information for counseling and prayer partners. At the end of the online form, you will be asked to e-sign and save your form.

**Commitments**

I have attended and/or will attend a Supervisory meeting to discuss my divorce with my DS and another DS of my choosing.

I commit to counseling.

*Enter the name of your counselor and a minimum of # sessions*

I commit to meeting with a prayer partner, or a group of clergy for a covenanted time of accountability, support, conversation and prayer for my healing.

*List name(s)*

I commit to time of daily spiritual discipline.

I commit to a day off each week for renewal.

I commit to work with a financial counselor on a personal/family budget, and a process of debt reduction (if needed).

I commit to talking with my child(ren) and ex-spouse regarding our participation in divorce recovery.

I commit to refraining from dating until my divorce has been final for 12 months (date of divorce).

**Be sure to save your changes at the end of the form.**