

§ 214-3. Family worship, which should be observed daily by every family, consists in prayer, reading the Scriptures, and singing praises; or in some other form of outspoken recognition of God.

CHAPTER 15

Christian Marriage

§ 215-1. Since marriage is a divine institution, established by God in creation, the Church solemnizes marriage in holy worship, with prayer and blessings, bearing witness to its nature, and also requires vows concerning their obligation to God from those who engage in it.

§ 215-2. As they are enjoined to marry in the Lord, Christians should have their marriage solemnized by a lawful Minister of the Word, ordinarily in the building set apart to the worship of God and in the presence of God's people.

§ 215-3. The intent to marry should be announced sufficiently in advance of the solemnization of the marriage. Before the marriage it is the duty of the Minister to see (1) that the parties obey the proper laws established by the civil commonwealth to regulate marriages; (2) that the parties are of such years of discretion as to be capable of making their own choice; and, if they be under age, that the consent of parents or guardians be previously obtained and certified to the Minister; (3) that the parties' understanding of and commitment to Christian marriage is such as to give promise of God's blessing upon their union; (4) that special instruction is given to prepare them for entering into their new relation in the Lord.

§ 215-4. The Minister should instruct those planning marriage in this Church's understanding of marriage as set forth in Chapter XXVI of the Confession of Faith and in this chapter of the Directory for Worship. He may counsel with them on all important aspects of marriage, especially those where problems may arise. He should assist them to lay firm foundations for the establishment of a Christian home, and should encourage them to develop the Christian graces of understanding, patience, gentleness, repentance, and forgiveness as the basis of harmony within their union.

§ 215-5. The Minister should take as a vital pastoral responsibility the task of preventing, so far as he can by wise and prayerful counsel, the hasty or ill-considered separation of any couple committed to his care. Divorce can rightly be sanctioned by the Church only where a continuation of the legal union would endanger the physical, moral or spiritual well-being of one or both of the partners or that of their children.

§ 215-6. In all cases where remarriage after divorce is sought, the Minister's decision should turn not so much on what the applicant has done as on what the person by God's grace has now become, and what, with God's help, he (or she) honestly intends and hopes to do in the future.

The Session of a church may appoint a committee to advise on such cases at the request of the Minister; and the Presbytery may appoint a similar committee to which Minister or Session may refer such cases.

§ 215-7. If the Minister is not in conscience convinced of the complete propriety of the marriage under the laws of the civil commonwealth and of Holy Scripture as interpreted in the Standards of this Church, he shall not perform the ceremony.

§ 215-8. The order for a marriage service shall include a statement of the nature of Christian marriage as set forth in Scripture, prayers for the parties and for their new estate, the undertaking of the covenant between them, a declaration that the parties have been joined in marriage, and the Minister's pronouncing the benediction of God upon their union.

Any further elements of the order shall be at the discretion of the Minister, who shall have entire responsibility for the direction of the service. Such music as accompanies the service should be to the glory of God who sanctifies marriage, to which end the use of hymns by the congregation is appropriate.

§ 215-9. The Minister shall comply with all requirements of the civil commonwealth for the proper performance and registration of the marriage. He shall also see that the church maintains an adequate record of marriages within the congregation by having notice of all such marriages included in the minutes of the church Session. He shall also keep a personal register of all marriages he performs, including the time, the names of the parties, and the civil authority issuing license to marry.