

Cohabitation

Southern Acres Christian Church Position Paper

Southern Acres Christian Church considers the Bible the inspired Word of God and therefore our guide in matters of sex and marriage. The Bible says that the only proper place for sexual expression is marriage (Exodus 20:14; Deut. 22:21-22; Heb. 13:4). Marriage is defined as being between a man and a woman who have committed to a lifelong relationship (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5-6; please see our position paper, “Marriage and Divorce,” for more information about marriage). Any sexual relationship outside of marriage – whether premarital, extramarital or homosexual – is considered a sin. Therefore, Southern Acres Christian Church does not permit a church member to live with someone to whom he or she is not married when such a relationship could result in the temptation to sexual sin or the appearance to others that a sexual relationship exists.

Even when a cohabiting relationship is intended to be platonic, we would advise against an unmarried, unrelated man and woman living together. (Likewise those tempted toward homosexuality would be wise not to cohabit with those of the same sex and should instead elect to live alone or with close family members. Please see our position paper on homosexuality.) It is our position that a heterosexual cohabiting relationship, even when celibacy is intended, invites too much temptation (1 Cor. 6:18), and does not properly avoid the “appearance of evil” (1 Thes. 5:22, KJV).

Cohabiting couples are welcomed to attend services at Southern Acres Christian Church. When someone in an inappropriate cohabiting relationship expresses a desire to commit to Christ a minister, elder or deacon will interview the individual to determine if the candidate sincerely wants to make changes in their life and accept Christ. If the candidate is found sincerely interested in change they will be allowed to be baptized, but membership will be withheld until they are separated or until a marital commitment is complete. Any person willing to refrain from inappropriate cohabiting and commit to sexual purity can be accepted into membership. If a Southern Acres member is found to be in an inappropriate cohabiting relationship, he or she will be asked to separate himself or herself from the relationship by taking residence elsewhere until marriage. Any cohabiting couple desiring to be married at Southern Acres or by one of the Southern Acres ministers will likewise be instructed to separate until the wedding ceremony.

Studies of cohabiting couples have proven the wisdom of God’s Word. Brad Wilcox, assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Virginia, has done extensive research on the family and has verified the following regarding cohabitation:

- Individuals who cohabit before they marry face a significantly higher chance of getting divorced than those who do not cohabit. Married couples where both spouses have cohabited are between 33%¹ and 50%² more likely to divorce than married couples where neither spouse has cohabited.

¹ Andrew J. Cherlin. 1992. *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage* (revised). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

² Edward Laumann, John Gagnon, Robert Michael, and Stuart Michaels. 1994. *The Social Organization of Sexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Long-term cohabiting couples are much more likely to break up than married couples.³
- Women in cohabiting relationships are more likely to suffer physical and sexual abuse than women in marriage relationships.⁴
- “Cohabiting couples are less satisfied than married spouses with their partnerships, are not as close to their parents, are less committed to each other, and, if they eventually marry, have higher chances of divorce.”⁵

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³ Julie Brines and Kara Joyner. 1999. "Principles of Cohesion in Cohabitation and Marriage." *American Sociological Review* 64: 333-355.

⁴ Jan E. Stets. 1991. "Cohabiting and Marital Aggression: The Role of Social Isolation," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53: 669-680 and Linda Waite. 2000a. Chapter on marriage. In Linda Waite, ed., *The Ties that Bind*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

⁵ Steven L. Nock. 1998. *Marriage in Men's Lives*. New York: Oxford University Press.