

## **Seventh-day Adventist Position on COHABITATION**

*Miroslav M. Kiš*

Cohabitation may be defined as a living arrangement of any unmarried heterosexual couple who share common residence and sexual intimacy. There exists a great variety of configurations in this form of relationship. Some appear as virtual marriages shy only of formal, public contractual vows, while others are short-term episodes for the sake of convenience.

The most frequently mentioned advantages of cohabitation are:

- Opportunity to try out the partner before marriage
- Freedom to begin or end the relationship at will
- Financial advantages
- More relaxed sexual controls
- Combination of the autonomy of singleness with the emotional and sexual closeness

similar to marriage

Seventh-day Adventists maintain the biblical stance on human intimacy. Marriage is the only context where true and complete closeness can be achieved with the most benefits and security. (Genesis 2:24) Here are some of the troubling points of cohabitation:

1. The Back Door Syndrome The key ingredient of cohabitation is the open door to leave without the messy consequences of a divorce. But some consequences of cohabitation can be worse.

a. All through the relationship the partners keep sending double messages. On the one hand they say, "I love you, and I desire to live close to you," and yet the initial agreement says, "Don't get too close, because I might be gone one day...any day." Such an arrangement creates a deep sense of insecurity.

b. The recurring irritations of daily living are treated as trivial, due to the lack of motivation to invest in a temporary relationship. As a consequence, few learn to adjust and acquire the skills of conflict resolution so much needed in marriage.

c. True, deep love requires total and permanent commitment (Song of Solomon 6:3, 8:6,7). It is impossible to develop such a love in a temporary, insecure setting.

2. Absence of vows Marriage vows are implicit in the biblical concepts of betrothal (Matthew 1:18) and permanent commitment to one's partner (Malachi 2:15,16). Their function is to make the intentions of the couple public, thus safeguarding the sanctity of marriage. While the marriage vows promise faithfulness for both the present and the future, cohabitation is a private arrangement concerned only with the present.

3. Community Concerns According to the Bible, marriage is not just a private event (Genesis 24). It unites families. The community offers the couple a certain protection and expects some responsibilities as well. In this way marriage becomes the solid foundation of every community. Cohabitation, on the other hand, ignores community and is itself too unstable to lend support to a larger society.

4. Absence of Union of Lives The union of lives is one of the most essential roles assigned to sex, according to Scripture (Genesis 2:24). Cohabitation engages a life-uniting act

without a life-uniting intent. Such a lifestyle proves to be destructive of inner integrity of human personality.

5. Children The Bible mandates that children be raised in an environment of permanent love, constant care, and unfailing security (Genesis 4:1, 2; Ephesians 6:1- 4). Yet, cohabitation's intent is to avoid such lasting responsibilities, because it considers them as constraints on the freedom and autonomy of each partner.

In conclusion, the Seventh-day Adventist Church echoes the biblical disapproval of any arrangement other than the institution of marriage. It recognizes that the emergence of cohabitation often signals deeper needs. Frequently the partners who seek refuge in such arrangements carry the wounds of repeated marital failures, infidelity, abuse, selfishness, or many other tragedies. For that reason, the Church seeks to minister to each individual, while upholding the biblical standard of conjugal union as the only legitimate form of cohabitation.