

Here's a plan that usually works well in churches when the leadership has a settled conviction but the body isn't all in the same place yet.

1) Start with clarity: what you're saying and what you're not saying

Make it explicit (in writing and verbally):

- **We are not changing our view of marriage's seriousness.** Divorce is grievous; Jesus' words stand.
- **We are not "lowering the bar."** The bar remains *above reproach*, character, household leadership, etc.
- **We are saying:** a prior divorce is **not automatically disqualifying in every circumstance**, and the man's current life is being evaluated under the full set of qualifications (1 Tim 3; Titus 1), not a single phrase in isolation.

That framing lowers fear.

2) Do a “teaching + listening” sequence, not just an announcement

If you only announce, you force the whole conversation into the hallway and parking lot.

A healthier sequence:

- a. **Teach** the qualifications carefully (1 Tim 3 + Titus 1, and “above reproach” as the umbrella).
- b. **Explain** why “one-woman man” is commonly understood as marital faithfulness/sexual integrity and reputation, not merely a marital-history statistic.
- c. **Listen** in structured settings (Q&A forum; open elder office hours; small-group shepherding conversations).

Your goal isn't unanimity; it's that people feel heard and know the elders are sober-minded and biblical, not reactive.

3) Apply a higher pastoral standard than “permitted”

Even if the elders believe it's allowed, you're still responsible to ask, “Is it **wise right now** for this church?”

A good “wisdom grid”:

- Is the divorce **morally clear** (e.g., he was sinned against vs he sinned grievously)? If he bears responsibility, what does repentance/repair look like?
- Is there **ongoing fallout** (relationships, children, former spouse, bitterness, litigation, public scandal)?
- Is his current marriage **demonstrably healthy** over time, and does his wife affirm this path?
- Is his reputation in the church and community genuinely “above reproach,” or is this going to create a long-term credibility wound?

Even if “lawful,” it may not be “helpful” yet.

4) Use a transparent “elder-in-training” path with real gates

If you already have an “elder intern” concept, lean into it as a shepherding tool:

- **Define the role** publicly: “He will not make final decisions, will be mentored, and will be evaluated.”
- Put **time** on it (e.g., 6–12 months) and **clear evaluation points**.
- Invite **specific feedback** (not rumor): “If you have concerns about biblical qualifications or character, please bring them to the elders directly with specifics.”

This communicates patience and humility.

5) Protect consciences without making them vetoes

Some members may never be comfortable. You can respect that without letting a small group functionally become a permanent veto.

Practical ways:

- Encourage Romans 14 style charity: don't despise; don't judge motives.
- Ask members: “Is your concern **biblical** (you believe Scripture forbids it) or **prudential** (you fear division/optics)?” Those are different conversations.
- If the concern is biblical, engage it with open Bible and time.
- If the concern is prudential, take it seriously—but don't let “optics” become the new qualification.

6) Communicate in a way that doesn't embarrass the man or his family

Be very careful with details. The congregation needs enough information to trust the process, not the private story.

A helpful line is:

- “The elders have examined the circumstances carefully, including repentance, current marriage health, and reputation, and we are convinced he meets the qualifications.”

If there are *known public facts* that need acknowledging, keep it brief and dignified.

7) Have a unity “off-ramp” ready if the temperature stays high

If, after teaching/listening, you discover this will likely fracture the body, the elders can still decide:

- **delay** (not deny) for the sake of shepherding timing, or
- proceed but with a slower on-ramp and more care.

Delaying can be wise without surrendering conviction—if you communicate it as shepherding, not fear.

A simple recommendation I'd give you

Proceed only if you can honestly say all three:

- a. The elders are biblically persuaded,
- b. the man is genuinely “above reproach” with no ongoing relational wreckage, and
- c. you have done enough teaching/listening that even dissenters would say, “I disagree, but the elders handled this carefully and biblically.”