

CHURCH MARRIAGE POLICY PROCESS

Establish a church developed and affirmed intentional wedding policy. This policy has to be the work of the congregation in order to remain in force when church staff come and go. This goes much deeper than facility use and fee structure. This policy must focus on the couple, their relationship, and the church's valuing of their marriage. A wedding is for a day but a marriage is for a lifetime. The church should value the marriage more than the wedding. Pre-marital counseling or marriage preparation should be included in this policy.

WHERE TO BEGIN

1. Present this proposal to the Senior Pastor and Staff.
2. Based on their approval, present the proposal to the governing body of the congregation then to the church body.
 - The following procedures should be addressed at each of the levels of presentation.
 - Prior to your presentation, gather data related to the number of weddings and divorces in your congregation and community. Try to assess the ratio of weddings to divorces within both arenas.
 - Gather information from other churches in your community as to their processes and procedures regarding weddings in their church.
 - Contact the Covenant Marriage Office for additional assistance with support materials, as well as, wedding and marriage policies.

PRESENTATION

1. Ask your church to define what they believe about marriage.
2. Provide an opportunity for as much of the church as can, to share their beliefs about marriage.
3. Ask the church to share what they believe the church's view of marriage should be.
4. Share information regarding the state of marriages in your church, community, and state.
5. Ask what the role of the church should be in the community regarding marriage.
6. Discuss the value of a Church developed and approved marriage policy.
 - Establishes a standard for God's people
 - Shifts the responsibility for marriages onto the shoulders of the church family
 - Affirms the church's commitment to couples and their families.
 - Strengthens the body life of the church.
 - Relieves the ministers from having to make decisions based on outside pressures.
 - Ministers come and go but the church remains as a testimony in the community

CHURCH MARRIAGE POLICY

1. What should the marriage policy include or address?
 - Requirements for placing a Wedding Date on the Church calendar
 - Marriage Preparation Requirements
 - We encourage this marriage preparation to take place at least 8-12 months prior to the wedding date. Wedding dates should not be placed on the Church calendar less than 8 months out.
 - Time Requirements for Marriage Preparation
 - Provide at least 6 marriage-preparation sessions in addition to the ceremony planning. We encourage you to use a personality inventory during these sessions to help couples communicate specific concerns that may arise.
 - Use of personality assessment tools
 - Two such inventories are *Prepare* and *Foccus*.
 - *Prepare* is a secular personality assessment instrument which has been used by clergy for several years.
 - *Foccus* is a personality inventory produced by the Nebraska Arch Diocese of the Catholic Church. They have several versions, one of which is a Protestant version. This instrument has a greater emphasis on the individual's faith and is designed to be used as a tool for discussion between the partners.
 - Enrichment Expectations
 - Churches should provide between 2-4 additional sessions with the married couple during their first year of marriage. These sessions should focus on the areas in the relationship where adjustments need to be made. This expectation needs to be established from the beginning and followed through on by the ministerial staff of the church.

THE CONGREGATIONAL COVENANT

1. Provide marriage preparation for all couples being married in the church or by a minister of the church addressing each element of the statement,

"Believing that marriage is a covenant intended by God to be a lifelong fruitful relationship between a man and a woman, we vow to God, each other, our families and our community to remain steadfast in unconditional love, reconciliation, and sexual purity while purposefully growing in our covenant marriage relationship."

2. Provide an ongoing ministry to married couples which helps couples adhere to the above covenant and grow in their covenant marriage. This ministry should include elements of prevention, enrichment, intervention, and outreach.
3. Provide a sermon series on relationships-marriage-family (at least 4 messages). The focus of these messages should be on biblical teachings-life application for establishing/enhancing relationships; building strong families; and growing as Christian families in ministry-missions.
4. Provide media resources such as books, magazines, tapes, videos, and interactive learning resources. These could be checked out and/or purchased.
5. Provide a mentoring ministry for newlywed couples for the first two years of their marriage. The mentoring couples should be well founded in their faith and their marriage.
6. Provide an ongoing prayer ministry for nearly and newly married couples. Enlist individuals and couples to pray once a week for each couple beginning when they request to be married and running through their first year of marriage.
7. The couple can share specific needs with their prayer couple. If appropriate, the couples can meet for a fellowship and prayer together once a quarter.
8. Provide ongoing youth studies in developing healthy relationships, dating, choosing your mate, and marriage (at least 4 sessions). These studies need to be designed to guide young people in exploring these key life decisions from a biblical perspective. They could be implemented in a retreat format as well.
9. In addition to your in-church actions you need to be aware that God is pulling together congregations of various denominations and religions in their respective communities to offer a unified commitment to strengthen marriages and families. These congregations are initiating community marriage policies or community marriage covenants that prohibit couples from getting married in their churches that have not taken the necessary steps to prepare for marriage.
10. God is also raising the awareness of state policy makers to the reality that God's original design for marriage and family is still the best design. Louisiana, Arizona, Arkansas have initiated an optional Covenant Marriage Law in their states. This law requires a couple to attend at least 6 marriage preparation sessions and prohibits a couple from getting a divorce until after a 2 year waiting period during which time they must seek reconciliation or some variation of it. Find out what your state legislators are doing to strengthen marriages and families and support their efforts. You can help raise the awareness in your community without taking a political stance in support of any particular politician.
11. Lastly God is raising up His people to stand together in support Of Covenant Marriage. He has brought together over 45 denominations, institutions, and ministries to raise His voice for Covenant Marriage. The CMM is a movement of God, not man! We are simply being obedient to His call to join Him.

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