

Basic Standards for Church Weddings

A SAMPLE CHURCH BOARD POLICY STATEMENT TO PROSPECTIVE COUPLES

“It is quite obvious to everyone that the major crisis facing us today is the breakup of the family. This is front-line Christian work. It is one of the most urgent tasks and highest priorities of the Church.” — Chuck Colson —

NEARLY THREE-FOURTHS OF ALL AMERICAN WEDDINGS ARE PERFORMED BY EITHER PASTOR, PRIEST OR RABBI, YET 55% OF THEM WILL END IN DIVORCE OR SEPARATION. Too many churches are simply “blessing machines” or “wedding factories.” Our concern is to foster lasting marriages under God, to establish successful spiritual families, and to reduce the divorce rate in our community.

As a Church Board, it is our responsibility to set minimum requirements in order to raise the quality of commitment in those whom we marry. We believe that those who seriously participate in premarital preparation at Church will have a far better chance for permanence. As agents of God, acting on His behalf, it must be our responsibility to encourage couples to set aside time for marriage preparation, rather than concentrating only on the wedding ceremony. A wedding is only a day, but a marriage is for a lifetime.

The Church has a continuing responsibility to help couples maintain the vows they exchange at the wedding. It is our firm belief that existing marriages can be strengthened, deeply troubled

marriages can be saved, and those who are separated can be helped to reconcile.

We should be deeply troubled by America’s destruction of marriage. If divorce was a physical disease, it would be ten times greater than the epidemic of AIDS, yet we seem not to recognize the simple, yet profound remedies available to us to diminish this relational epidemic.

Saving marriages is a job for the Church of Jesus Christ! Chuck Colson put it this way: “It is quite obvious to everyone that the major crisis facing America today is the breakup of the family. What is being done about America’s divorce culture? The government can’t. The schools aren’t. The media won’t. You and I have to, as the Church. It ought to be equipping people for strong marriages. This is front-line Christian work. It is one of the most urgent tasks and highest priorities of the Church.”

We want our church to be a part of the thrilling results of countering Americas divorce culture that has its insidious tentacles wrapped around its families.

1. We strongly believe that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is

absolutely crucial for marriage. A couple is committed to living a lifestyle that is in accordance with scriptural principles, that is, maintaining sexual abstinence; living in separate residences; and having the same spiritual commitment.

The pastor performing your ceremony will address these and other concerns with you.

2. We encourage first-time couples to have a minimum dating relationship of one year before the wedding.

There is no shortcut to building intimacy, trust, and communication. While some people have skills and maturity which enable them to build an intimate relationship faster than others, we believe that a one-year dating relationship is a minimum amount of time when considered in light of the permanent nature of a marriage relationship.

3. We encourage you to select one of our pastoral staff as the Ceremonial Pastor of your wedding.

However, if you choose to use clergy other than our staff, that person will have to be approved by the senior pastor.

Having outside clergy does not oblige you of the required inventory, class sessions, and any necessary private feedback sessions.

4. We provide a Marriage Preparation Introductory Packet

When you make an inquiry to

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the church office about your wedding, you are sent a packet. The packet contains basic information and a confidential questionnaire. Once the questionnaire is returned completely filled out, you are informed when the next set of required classes begin.

You will notice that the questionnaire asks for three wedding and rehearsal dates: your first, second and third choices. A firm date will be decided upon after the first feedback session of the inventory mentioned in number five.

Return the questionnaire to the address on the confidential envelope.

5. We require all couples to take the PREPARE or PREPARE-MC inventory and attend Marriage Preparation Class sessions.

You both fill out the computer-generated inventory separately. It is invaluable in giving you an objective analysis of your strength and growth areas from 15 marriage categories.

There is a processing fee for this inventory, to be paid at the time you take the inventory.

Class sessions will be centered around typical marriage themes such as: communication, conflict, esteem, forgiveness, and spirituality.

You will be given private dialogue assignments between sessions based on Growth Areas suggested in your returned inventory.

Marriage Prep Classes are offered three times a year: Fall, Spring, and Summer. Call the church office or watch for the dates on the church’s web site.

Absence from a class session requires that you make it up in a private session at the convenience of the class leader. There are fees charged for make-up sessions and all sessions must be made up.

The pastor performing your

ceremony will want to conduct at least one private feedback session with you, based on your inventory scores. He will be looking for Growth Areas plus Christian commitments to sexual abstinence, spiritual maturity, emotional stability, relational intelligence, and marital compatibility.

If both you and the pastor are comfortable that your preparation process should continue, then it is possible that your wedding date could be set at this time.

However, the pastor may want additional feedback sessions with you before a date is firm on the calendar.

For example he may want to:

1. Deal with additional issues gleaned from the Inventory.
2. Administer the Meyers-Briggs Personality Inventory.
3. Refer you to a subject-matter expert if there is a glaring deficit in a specific area.
4. Refer you to a credentialed Christian counselor at your expense.

The Inventory **PREPARE** is administered to first-time couples, **PREPARE-MC** is administered to couples who will have children living at home.

6. We assign all first-time couples to a mentor couple.

Premarital preparation has more value and integrity when there is a follow-up strategy by a trained lay mentor couple. Therefore, at least two pre-marriage and one post-marriage sessions will be a part of the preparation strategy.

7. A six-month notification in advance of the desired wedding dates is required.

As previously mentioned, the Marriage Preparation Questionnaire asks you to provide a first, second, and third choice of

dates.

We ask that you respect the church's notification requirement. This will allow you enough time to complete and return the questionnaire, complete the Inventory, attend the Marriage Prep Classes, or Divorce Recovery Seminar, or Blended Family Seminar, and to meet with the Ceremonial Pastor.

These steps may raise issues that will require time to process and work through to a healthy resolution.

In terms of second marriages, we believe a new relationship should not be pursued until the potential of a healthy reconciliation has been exhausted. Divorce is a process and so is its recovery. A time of grieving and healing is necessary before considering remarriage. Finishing that process and resolving the issues will set the stage for a healthy new relationship.

8. We require a separate premarital inventory and preparation process for those getting married for the second time or more.

Marriage has been established by God as one man, one woman, and one lifetime. We believe this sacred union is meant to be kept whole and pure. However, because of fallen human nature, we recognize the brokenness of divorce. It is a difficult issue. Divorce is never easy, never clean, never sinless, and never victimless. It is not God's design, but comes by human prerogative.

There are times when divorce seems the only choice left. Difficult and dangerous situations often leave us difficult choices.

There is a healing process for divorce centered on the forgiveness and restoration of Jesus Christ. Since statistics show 60%

More Marriage Prep Links

[Sample Bride & Groom Questionnaire](#)

[“Twenty Reasons Why Not to Cohabit Before Marriage”](#)

[Sample Brochure: “We are excited about your wedding plans”](#)

[PREPARE/ENRICH http://www.lifeinnovations.com](http://www.lifeinnovations.com)

of second marriages fail it seems most people bring unresolved relationship issues into their next marriage. We recognize that those contemplating another marriage are even more fearful than before. No one wants to see another divorce. This means issues need to be resolved and healing needs to be as complete as possible before another marriage is established.

9. Attendance at the Divorce Recovery Seminar is required for those seeking remarriage.

10. Attendance at the Blended Family Seminar is required for those who will have children living at home.

The two seminars (numbers 9 and 10) are designed to help a divorced couple evaluate and process their own loss and pain.

11. We support our Pastor and his/her passion for strong, life-long marriages.

Due to the individual nature of interpersonal relationships, there may be some exceptions and waivers to these standards.

The Pastor will have the option of being flexible as he deals with you on these matters. We choose to support our Pastor, and therefore completely trust his/her judgment on waiver issues.

In summary:

1. We believe a couple should have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This is absolutely crucial for marriage.

2. We strongly encourage couples getting married for the first-time to have a minimum dating relationship of one year before the wedding.

3. We require that you follow through with all of the prerequisites even if you use clergy other than our pastor.

4. Responding to the **Marriage Preparation Introductory Packet** is required.

5. We require all couples to take either the **PREPARE** or **PREPARE MC Inventory** and attend all Marriage Preparation Classes.

6. We assign all first-time couples to a mentor couple.

7. A six-month notification in advance of your date is required.

8. We require a separate premarital inventory and separate preparation process for those getting married for the second time or more.

9. Attendance at the **Divorce Recovery Seminar** is required for those seeking remarriage

10. Attendance at the **Blended Family Seminar** is required for those who will have children living at home.

11. We support our Pastor and his/her passion for strong life-long marriages. We ask that you follow through completely with our recommendations and guidelines to help you build the marriage God intended it to be.

This sample can be adapted, edited, or changed to fit the unique needs of your local church strategy of preparing couples for life-time marriage.

If you have questions, you are invited to contact Dr. Jim Pettitt jpettitt@nazarene.org who developed and implemented this policy in a local church.