Cornerstone Ministries

Wedding Policy

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Your Wedding

Congratulations! We at Cornerstone Ministries are excited that you plan to be together for life by committing yourselves to each other in a Christian worship service celebrating God's gift of marriage. In the following pages, you will discover material that will help make your wedding at Cornerstone Ministries a worshipful and memorable celebration.

The family is God-ordained (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:6; Ephesians 5:31), the cornerstone of a stable society. Therefore, we affirm that marriage is a lifetime commitment between one man and one woman to bring about God's plan and purpose in life.

General Marriage Preparation Policies

1. Initial Interview

To ensure adequate time for marriage preparation, couples planning to marry need to contact the church six months before the provisional date for the wedding. The initial interview is to take place at least four months before the provisional date of the wedding. Each engaged couple is to have an initial interview with a pastor as soon as feasible at or after the first contact.

The interview is for:

a. Determine the eligibility of the engaged couple according to civil law.
b. Determine eligibility according to the Scriptures.
    - Both the man and the woman must meet the spiritual qualifications for marriage in the church. Both must have a consistent testimony of living faith in Christ and true conversion. (1 Corinthians 6:14-7:1).
    - Cornerstone Ministries will not host nor officiate weddings in violation of the Scriptural guidelines for marriage. This includes but is not limited to the marriage of a homosexual couple and a practicing Christian with a non-Christian.
c. Explaining the Cornerstone Ministries marriage preparation process.
d. Setting a provisional date for the wedding.
e. Scheduling premarital assessment and counseling after the interview.
f. The couple must have some legitimate connection to Cornerstone Ministries to be wed on a property of Cornerstone Ministries. Legitimate connections include:
    - The man and/or the woman are church members or former members.
    - The man and/or the woman have been regular Cornerstone attendees for at least six months.
    - The man and/or the woman's parents are church members.

2. Marriage Preparation

a. Marriage preparation is to be experienced by both parties together.

b. Marriage preparation includes a premarital assessment and approximately 10 hours of premarital counseling.
c. Premarital counseling should be completed 30 days before the wedding.
d. The couple's refusal to participate in a premarital counseling program raises several pastoral concerns. It warrants a re-evaluation of their readiness for marriage and a meeting with the pastor performing the ceremony.
e. If the pastor has concerns believing that the couple is not capable of upholding the necessary commitments of Christian marriage (e.g., a history of violent behavior or chronic addiction), they must take the responsibility of halting the process at this point and do their best to pursue an appropriate course of remedy for the individual or couple.
f. The State, as well as the Church, is interested in your marriage. Since the Wedding Service is binding in the eyes of civil and ecclesiastical law, there are specific legal requirements with which you must comply.
    - You must apply for a marriage license at the office of the Register of Wills (Westmoreland County).
    - You must be at least 18 years old.
    - If previously married, a divorce decree is in effect 30 days before applying for the marriage license.
    - Marriage licenses are valid for 60 days from the date of issuance. Note: There is a 3-day waiting period from the applicant's appearance in the Register of Wills Office.

Biblical Perspective on Entering Marriage

1. The Christian Wedding

There is a difference between Christian and civil ceremonies. A Christian wedding involves:

- Vows taken before God
- Scriptural teaching and references which pertain to Christian conduct and responsibilities
- A time of testimony to the bride and groom's faith in Christ
- A commitment to building their marriage upon biblical teachings

In a Christian wedding, the vows and covenant a couple makes to God are as important as the vows and covenants they make to each other and before witnesses. Just as Believers try to live out their faith in all aspects of life, in a Christian wedding, a couple must intentionally desire to build their marriage on their faith in God and upon the teachings of His Word.

If you are confused or uncertain about what a personal commitment to Jesus Christ means, the pastor will be eager to discuss these things with you. We are growing in our faith; none of us have entirely "arrived." The critical question is, "Have you

begun, or are you willing to begin, the journey of faith and govern your life according to God's revealed will?" If not, then a civil ceremony might be every bit as meaningful for you as a religious ceremony.

2. Sexual Purity

God designed the gift of physical intimacy to be expressed within the context of marriage. The expression of sexual love was designed to enhance a couple's emotional, relational, and spiritual bond. This bond culminates in a physical expression of love and passion.

Many couples have chosen to honor God by abstaining from sexual intimacy before marriage. While sexual intimacy is God's design for marriage, some find themselves not wanting or willing to follow this biblical pattern. For those living outside of God's pattern who desire to have a marriage that honors Him, a pastor will meet with the couple and evaluate each wedding request individually.

> *"God wants you to live a pure life. Keep yourselves from sexual promiscuity. Learn to appreciate and give dignity to your body, not abusing it, as is so common among those who know nothing of God."* (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

> *"There must not be even a hint of sexual immorality…or impurity."* (Ephesians 5:3)

3. Cohabitation

Cohabitation presents significant concerns to couples wishing to enter marriage and for the church desiring to honor and remain faithful to God's Word. Cohabitation is often the accepted norm and a socially acceptable alternative to marriage. Couples cohabitate for various reasons; "trial marriage," economic security, fear of long-term commitment, avoiding divorce, cultural conformity, and rejection of the institution of marriage. Regardless of the reasons, research statistics in the social sciences have shown cohabitation as a strategy for marital success is prone to failure. Cohabitation before marriage increases the risk of divorce by 50%.[1]

Cohabitation is a direct attack on the institution of marriage. It contradicts the meaning of a sexual relationship in marriage as the total gift of oneself in fidelity, exclusivity, and permanency previously mentioned. A Christ-follower is called to be a light to the world. People watch what we do and often form opinions about God according to our actions. If we live a life contrary to God's Word, we dishonor God and offer those around us little hope of a better way of life.

[1] "Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples | USCCB."

The biblical standard for sexual activity outside the bonds of marriage is clear,

> *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, …For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit."* (I Thessalonians 4:3, 7-8)

Because we want God's best for our marriage and family, we believe it is God's will for our lives and marriages to be set apart for pure and holy living. Cohabitating couples seeking God's blessing and sanctifying their union, therefore, must acknowledge their transgression of God's ways and repentance by agreeing to abstain from sexual intimacy until the exchange of marriage vows. We encourage you to seek and trust God, and honor him by upholding his parameters of sexual intimacy within the context of marriage. We believe that your obedience to God's will regarding sexual purity will incredibly bless you and your relationship by His power working through you.

Cornerstone Ministries pastors have an ethical duty, obligation, and responsibility to remain loyal and faithful to God's Word. Therefore, this responsibility is sacred and incumbent on the officiating pastor not to celebrate or solemnize a wedding where couples knowingly and willingly violate God's commands or biblical teachings. Pastors can recommend a civil service to the couple if this is the case.

4. <u>Divorce and Remarriage</u>

God's design for marriage is a commitment for life between one man and one woman. We understand that we live in an imperfect world that sometimes results in broken relationships. For this reason, the Bible allows for divorce and gives guidelines for remarriage. God's grace is available for those who have experienced the pain of divorce. Since every situation is different, please discuss remarriage with an officiating pastor.

> *Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.* (Matthew 19:8)

God looks at us as broken people whom He can make anew. With His forgiveness, we can start over again as we ask God to forgive us through Jesus. He will see us as a completely new couple.

> *But if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing.* (1 John 1:9)

Planning the Wedding Service

The first step in scheduling a wedding at Cornerstone Ministries is to complete a wedding application and submit it to the Caring Department. Though Cornerstone Ministries is not a public facility for rent, we open our doors to couples desiring to unite in Christian marriage. Ensuring that any marriage ceremony performed by the officiating pastor will honor God is essential. Therefore, you will work closely with one of our pastors and the wedding coordinator. The wedding coordinator and their team will work closely with you regarding facility needs, necessary arrangements, and rehearsal.

We ask you to give at least **six (6) months' notice** so that we can be diligent in our desire to be a ministry to you and not just a facility for you. Once your wedding has been approved, couples may plan to use the Loft or the Fireside Chapel for the ceremony. Reserve these facilities as soon as possible. No weddings or receptions will be scheduled during the week of Easter or Christmas. We will do our best to accommodate your wedding date.

Weddings must be **finished by 3:00 p.m. on Saturdays so the building can be ready for weekend services. The building will be open and available to the wedding party two hours before the ceremony's scheduled start and at an agreed-upon time for the rehearsal. The use of alcohol in or surrounding the church is strictly prohibited. Smoking is not permitted in any part of the building.** Throwing rice, confetti, birdseed, etc., is not permitted inside the church building or on church property.

Officiating Pastors

Pastors from Cornerstone Ministries will provide premarital counseling and officiate your wedding. No fee is established or expected; however, an honorarium is appreciated. Please note that our Senior Pastor does not typically do weddings.

If you wish to invite the pastor or his spouse to attend the rehearsal dinner and reception, please extend the invitation well in advance. The pastor will respond to your invitation.

Music & Equipment

Please be prepared to list your music selections for the ceremony. Music needs (pre-recorded and live) must be made known to the Audio Director one week before the rehearsal date. Please leave a message with your contact information for the administrative assistant in the Caring Department. If you want to use a guest musician, please consult the pastor and receive approval. It is your responsibility to arrange for vocal soloists and guest musicians if they are desired. Direct questions relating to music, piano, and sound equipment should be directed to the wedding coordinator. Please be advised that the officiating pastor will approve all musical selections.

Please list all musical selections for the ceremony to the Audio Technician one week before the wedding rehearsal. There is a fee for using the sound/lights, video system, and sound technician. Only approved church personnel will operate the sound system.

You may use the projection screen during your ceremony. Please inform the wedding coordinator that you wish to use it. All church equipment must be operated by trained church personnel *only*. Provide your program to the officiating pastor or wedding coordinator two weeks in advance for review and approval. We suggest the use of flash drives using PowerPoint. Page setup in PowerPoint must be (width 10.7 and height 6), and the font should be Times New Roman. Limit your program to three to five minutes. Questions concerning this system should be directed to the wedding coordinator.

Rehearsal

The pastor and wedding coordinator will work with you and the bridal party to ensure everyone understands their role.

Please arrange the time of the rehearsal and wedding with the officiating pastor. Begin the rehearsal promptly at the scheduled time, usually the evening before the wedding day.

Please bring the marriage license to the officiating pastor before the rehearsal!

Dressing and Receiving Areas

Rooms will be made available to the wedding party. We do not recommend leaving your bridal attire overnight at the church. Please bring it with you on the wedding day to ensure its safety. Please plan to remove all items from these rooms upon completion of the ceremony. The church is not responsible for any items lost or left unattended.

Wedding Coordinator

The duties of the Wedding Coordinator are to assist the bride and groom with wedding décor and planning relative to Cornerstone's facilities. We do charge a fee for our church wedding coordinator. The wedding coordinator is a valuable resource for your wedding to function smoothly.

Flowers, Candles, and Other Decorations

While fresh flowers add to the beauty of the wedding atmosphere, we would ask that all floral arrangements be removed following the wedding. There are no other restrictions on the number and size of the arrangements.

The church provides two large brass candelabras for the ceremony. If desired, a unity candleholder and communion cups are provided. Please inform the pastor and wedding coordinator if you wish to utilize either.

The church also provides decorations for your use. These include silk floral arrangements, ivory tulle swags, bows, plaster pedestals, Christmas lights, hurricane lamps, floral rings, screen partitions, and faux palm trees. All church-supplied decorations are ivory in color. Please let us know if you plan to use these items. The wedding party must help with decorating and should make arrangements with the wedding coordinator to schedule decorating.

Other items, such as aisle runners, kneeling pillows, and unity candles, are not available from the church but may be obtained from your florist. The use of nails, screws, and wire in decorating is not permitted in any room in the church. If you have questions, please contact the wedding coordinator.

Musical instruments and décor are not removed from the Loft or Fireside Chapel. Instead, we arrange decorative screen partitions before any equipment to conceal its appearance.

We do charge a fee for our church wedding coordinator. The wedding coordinator is a valuable resource for your wedding to function smoothly.

Photography/Video

Upon arrival at the church, the photographer and the videographer need to check in with the officiating pastor for instructions. The officiating pastor will communicate guidelines.

Miscellaneous

If you desire programs for the ceremony, make arrangements with the wedding coordinator.

The building must be vacated for Saturday weddings by 3:00 pm on Saturdays.

Typical Wedding Costs

We do not consider weddings to be a source of revenue. However, there are estimated costs involved when hosting weddings and receptions. Wedding fees will be paid in advance and submitted with the application upon approval.

Sound/Lights/Video..... $200
Maintenance..... $150
Wedding Coordinator(s) Services..... $350
Prepare/Enrich Inventory and Premarital Counseling..... $35

I agree to the terms and conditions outlined in these policies and guidelines by signing the document below.

Bride:

_____ Date:_____

Groom:

_____ Date: _____

CORNERSTONE
MINISTRIES

FACILITY USAGE CONTRACT

Individuals:

I, _____, am interested in using the facility at Cornerstone Ministries temporarily, as outlined on the attached Cornerstone Ministries Wedding Policy Form.

Cornerstone Ministries, its members, officers, employees, and agents are not responsible for any liability, damages, or injuries to any person or property relating to or resulting from our use of the facilities provided.

I agree to hold harmless and indemnify Cornerstone Ministries, its members, officers, employees, and agents from and against all claims, losses, liabilities, damages, costs, and expenses (including reasonable attorney's fees) resulting from or relating to the use of the facilities.

I understand that Cornerstone Ministries may cancel or request that our group change the time or date of our event with 48 hours notice should a ministry priority arise.

I may cancel this contract up to one week before the event. A $25 cancellation fee will be charged to cover administration costs.

As the responsible adult, I acknowledge that I will adhere to this agreement as outlined, will be responsible for all persons involved in this event, and will ensure that all contributions will be payable as follows:

_____ _____

Signature Date

Please Print Name _____

==========Official Use Only==========

Accepted (Yes/No) _____ Date: ____/____/_____ By: _____

COI Received (Yes/No/NA) _____ Date: ____/____/_____

Payment Received (Yes/No) _____ Date: ____/____/_____ Amount: _____