

Pre-Marital Covenant Agreement

- We have read and agree to fulfill all of the general wedding policies set forth by East White Oak Bible Church.
- We agree to submit to the pastoral direction given to us.
- We agree to actively participate in the believing community now and after our marriage.
- We agree to maintain a standard of sexual purity throughout the time of our courtship.
- We agree to make a vow to God for a lifetime covenant of marriage.
- We agree to enthusiastically engage in the pre-marital preparation and counseling process.

Signed _____
(Groom)

Signed _____
(Bride)

Signed _____
(Parent of Groom)

Signed _____
(Parent of Bride)

Upon receipt of this signed covenant, the wedding can be placed on the church calendar. Our pastors retain the right to end the pre-marital process and cancel East White Oak's participation in the wedding if this agreement is not sincerely fulfilled.

Weddings at East White Oak Bible Church

At East White Oak Bible Church, marriage is viewed as a sacred covenant made with the living God. The bride and groom vow to become husband and wife and are joined by God. This begins a life-long covenant that can only be broken by death. It is imperative that couples do more than merely plan a wedding ceremony, they must prepare for a lifetime of marriage. In fulfilling the responsibilities of Christian marriage and building a Christian home, a couple ensures positive consequences that will have tremendous impact, in their own lives and in the lives of others. As we begin the process of establishing a Christian marriage, we make the first steps toward building a godly heritage.

The Wedding Process at East White Oak

- 1. Receive information on policies and procedures.**
- 2. Make steps to conform to all requirements set forth in the policies.**
- 3. Meet with a pastoral staff member to review information concerning the policies and procedures.**
- 4. Sign premarital covenant.**
- 5. Wedding is scheduled on the church calendar.**
- 6. Schedule meeting(s) with Wedding Coordinator as needed.**
- 7. Engage in premarital counseling with staff pastor.**
- 8. All fees are payable two weeks prior to wedding date.**
- 9. Wedding rehearsal and wedding event.**

Given all the necessary preparation it is obvious that several months will be needed to move through this process. Couples should fix a wedding date that permits this process to be completely and sincerely fulfilled.

General Wedding Policies

We ask that every couple married at East White Oak Bible Church conform completely to the policies set forth in this document. In return we offer you our pastors, who will guide you as you prepare to establish a Christian home, our wedding coordinator, who will make planning much easier for you, our church fellowship, who will nurture you in your marriage, and our beautiful church facility, which will wonderfully adorn your wedding day.

1. Because of the scope of the East White Oak ministry weddings are restricted to members and **regular** attenders.
2. When weddings include a reception in the church fellowship hall, the wedding should begin no later than **2:00 PM**.
3. Wedding parties are responsible for returning the church facility to the condition it was found, immediately at the conclusion of the event. The Wedding Coordinator should be given the name(s) of those responsible for clean-up.
4. No rice or birdseed in the facility please. No use of tacks, nails, staples or other decorating items may be used which could cause damage to the facility. The Wedding Coordinator should be consulted on all decorating matters, including when the facility is available for decorating. Candles that are used **must be dripless**.
5. No alcohol or smoking is permitted on church property. Please refrain from any activity during the wedding events which may be objectionable to Christians.
6. Since weddings are worship services, all music used at weddings and receptions must be Christian music. Please submit all music to the Wedding Coordinator as early in the process as possible or have it approved in advance.
7. Tables, chairs and other property normally used at church events are available. Some restrictions may be placed on kitchen items. Decisions of the Wedding Coordinator on these matters are final.
8. The church does not have any candelabra for platform area, "white ornamental lights", or aisle runner.
9. The church has a table that may be used for the unity candle, kneeler bench, and pew bow hangers for center aisle.

10. Lost or damaged items are the responsibility of those using the facility.
11. Fee Schedule (includes building reservation, custodial services, Wedding Coordinator services, facility and property use, sound technician). It does not include services rendered by musicians, soloists, pastors, etc. Fees are due two weeks prior to the wedding. Make checks payable to **“East White Oak Bible Church”** and give to Wedding Coordinator.

\$250 Worship Center and Fellowship Hall (Deduct \$50 if either the Worship Center or Fellowship Hall is not used.)

\$100 Add if platform tear-down is required

\$ 50 Deduct if sound system is not used

Pastoral Policies

Every couple seeking a wedding at East White Oak Bible church should ask themselves a question: "Are you merely seeking a wedding ceremony or are you seeking to prepare for the responsibilities of Christian marriage and building a Christian home? Couples should recognize that the calling of the pastors of East White Oak Bible Church is such that we are focused on the latter. Consequently, our policies are in line with this objective.

1. Both parties must demonstrate a genuinely submissive spirit to the pastoral guidance they receive.
2. Approximately five pre-marital counseling sessions will be required including testing and assigned reading.
3. The couple will be expected to understand and embrace a biblical covenant of marriage (a commitment for life, vowed before God).
4. Both parties must give evidence of saving faith in Christ. This is more than nominal Christian faith. Both couples must be born again of the Spirit, having personally trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation.
5. Given the clear statement of Scripture, our pastors cannot marry a believer to one who is not yet a believer.
6. Given the importance of the nurture of Christian marriages, couples must evidence a commitment to active participation in the believing community.
7. As God's Word states that sexual purity before marriage is the only acceptable standard, couples are required to establish such a standard in their relationship.
8. Couples who are living together will be expected to establish separate residences and maintain sexual purity for the duration of the preparation process.
9. If there is divorce in the background of either party, this should be made known immediately to the pastor. These couples will be referred to a separate handout, "Divorce and Remarriage at East White Oak Bible Church".
10. Couples will be asked to sign a premarital covenant agreement. Only after this step is sincerely taken will a wedding date be confirmed on the church calendar.

Weddings and the Christian Faith

Pastor Jeff VanGoethem

Many couples approach East White Oak Bible Church with a desire to be married. They call the church office to see about dates and want to get moving toward the BIG DAY. After all, there are plans to be made, services to be secured, halls to be reserved. We understand all that. However, the Bible presents a larger concern than all of these plans, as important as they are. Although there is a natural, human right to be married, the Bible speaks clearly to Christians about a matter which is of utmost importance which can upset marriage plans.

Specifically the Bible commands Christians to marry *in the faith*, as Paul advised in 1 Cor. 7:39. One is to marry “in the Lord”. And there is the broader prohibition in the New Testament against entering into a close union (like marriage) with someone who is not a believer (2 Cor. 6:14-18). A believer is not to be “unequally yoked” with a nonbeliever. The union of a born again Christian with one who is not is unthinkable for many reasons. First, there will be no true spiritual unity in the marriage. Do you think it is wise to start a marriage with a fundamental disunity between the partners? There are plenty of forces tearing couples apart today – how can a union thrive over the long term starting out with this kind of division?

Second, the foundation of the home ceases to be wholly Christian. Even if one of the partners is not “against” the faith, there are countless decisions, practices, and aspects of daily life that will be in conflict when one spouse is a Christian and another is not. Third, any children born to the marriage will be born into a compromised home. They will live with mixed messages every day of their lives. This is not God’s will. God desires that children be raised fully in the training and admonition *of the Lord* (Eph. 6:4). And finally, the partner who marries someone who is not yet a believer almost always ends up with deep regret. The realization comes at some point that they have done something they cannot undo and the tears begin to flow. Believe me, I have seen it many, many times. This regret flows from a failure to obey God for the sake of the temporary feelings of emotional love and attraction. Many find out later that this is not enough upon which to build a marriage and family.

So it should not surprise anyone when our pastors look past the wedding date, the hall that needs to be reserved and all the rest to focus on the spiritual condition of the couple that seeks a wedding. That is first and foremost. It is our calling to counsel according to the teaching of God’s Word and to give to others a clear sense of what God’s will is. So we will want to know right at the outset where each potential partner stands with Christ. This is mentioned prominently in the East White Oak wedding policy documents.

If a couple comes to us for a wedding and to the best of our ability, we discern that things are not yet what they should be, it is our duty to give some gentle but pointed counsel. We certainly cannot perform a wedding in good conscience when we believe one or both of the partners do not genuinely know Christ as Lord and Savior. We will share the Gospel with such partners, we will encourage them to seek learning and understanding within the ministry of our

church, but we will not set wedding dates and agree to unions that God does not approve of. Couples are to marry “in the Lord” even if this means postponing a decision about marriage for a time and even if this means parting from a potential partner after a long, serious relationship.

Here are a few typical scenarios that we encounter when applying this rule of Scripture to couples seeking weddings:

Mary and John come to a pastor to seek a wedding. Mary testifies to born again faith, having been saved as a child. John testifies that he likes coming to church with Mary, but doesn't see things exactly the same way as Mary. He sees the Christian faith as one way of salvation among many. When pressed, he acknowledges that he does not accept other aspects of Christian doctrine, such as the doctrine of Jesus' uniqueness as the Son of God, the doctrine of hell, and the infallibility of the Bible. Mary seems to think this is OK because “he comes to church and is fully supportive of me coming and our children being raised in the church.” Plus, she argues, John is a good and decent man.

Is this couple in the will of God? More specifically, is Mary in the will of God? Most assuredly not. In such a case the pastor will present the Gospel to John, perhaps send him home with some reading to challenge his thinking and will certainly advise the couple that they should not marry until John truly comes to faith in Christ and a full surrender to the Bible as the Word of God. Mary would be admonished that she is on the verge of a tragic mistake.

Pete and Sue come to a pastor to seek a wedding. Pete is a born again member of the church and gives a clear testimony of salvation in Christ alone. Sue is a nice woman from a different Christian denomination. Her answers regarding personal faith in Christ reveal confusion – she claims to believe in God and wants to “be a good person so I can go to heaven”. It appears that she does not have a complete understanding of biblical salvation and has never experienced the new birth. The pastor outlines the gospel clearly but the confusion does not immediately lift. Pete desperately wants Sue to say the right words but they just don't come. Sue professes that she is open to further teaching and wants to be part of Pete's church.

Should this couple go ahead and get married? Most certainly not. Perhaps Sue will come around at some point and God will open her eyes to see the truth of the Gospel. But she is not there yet and until she does, she is outside the faith and lost. In such a case the pastor will counsel the couple to get involved in church ministries in order to study out the things of salvation and perhaps come back and see the pastor again after a time. But it is not time to make wedding plans.

Alice and Rob come to a pastor to seek a wedding. Alice has been attending the church for several years but gives a very weak testimony of saving faith in Christ. In fact, the pastor has to labor to gain some insight into her spiritual condition. Rob has a nominal Christian background but can offer nothing further than “I believe in God”.

Again the pastor outlines the Gospel and at the end both of them assent to it and say, "Oh, yes, that is what we meant to say". Is this couple ready to be married?

Not really. First of all, this may be a case of a couple telling the pastor what they think he wants to hear. And the larger evidence suggests that neither of these two are really born again. Second, this couple obviously has only the shallowest understanding of the faith and Christian marriage. So the pastor will again counsel the couple to wait on wedding plans until the matter of their spiritual unity and depth can be settled.

Barry and Marsha come to a pastor to seek a wedding. Marsha is a born again member of the church. Barry attends church elsewhere and does not give a real clear testimony of faith in Christ. The pastor presents the Gospel and also urges them to begin to attend church together to begin to develop a sense of spiritual unity. The couple resists this because they do not feel they need to do that and are not "ready" to do that.

Should this couple be married? Certainly not. Until, at least, a great deal changes about their view of things. First of all Barry's faith is somewhat uncertain. Remember, nominal Christian faith does not meet the test of Scripture. Nominal Christians are still outside of Christ, despite the fact that they have some semblance of a Christian heritage. Secondly, they are not even in agreement as to their future plans regarding church affiliation! How can a proper Christian home be established when that is the state of things?

What everyone must understand is that our church is in the business of building Christian homes and families. We will do weddings as a service to those who also share this goal. Otherwise, we are not in the wedding "business". For those whose understanding is such that they have yet to embrace this goal, we counsel them that it is not time yet to plan a wedding. For those who really do not share this goal, we say a polite no and pray God may change their hearts. For those who are in clear violation of biblical injunctions, we present some gentle, biblical correction. Hopefully, sincere couples will accept this pastoral guidance.

So, there is a higher concern than setting the wedding date. At East White Oak Bible Church, we are determined not to lose sight of that higher concern – saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are deeply concerned that both parties to a wedding know Christ as Savior and want to establish a Christian home. All couples seeking a wedding at East White Oak Bible Church should bear this concern in mind.