

Marriage Guidelines for H2O Church

The pastors and ministers at H2O count it a privilege and a joy to officiate weddings. It is an honor to be a part of your big day! As a church we have established guidelines that we want to make clear to engaged couples. God has given us the covenant of marriage and our church is committed to help couples enjoy all the blessings that come with a Christ-centered marriage. Because we view marriage as a sacred relationship intended to mirror God's covenantal love for His people, we have established the following expectations for couples who request an H2O leader officiate their wedding.

The couple will need to be committed followers of Jesus.

We believe that the foundation of a godly marriage is a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus. Walking in the Spirit and seeking to walk in the will of God is crucial to enjoy all the blessings of marriage that God intended. For this reason, if one of the people is a Christian but the other is not, an H2O pastor or minister would not be able to officiate the wedding.

The couple will need to receive premarital counseling.

Relationships are not easy! And every relationship has strengths and weaknesses. Premarital counseling will address these dynamics within and outside of the couple's relationship. The sessions could range anywhere from 3-6 in total and will cover areas critical to health in a marriage. Couples may also be encouraged to read books together and/or use the *Prepare & Enrich* premarital assessment tool, at the discretion of the pastor or minister leading their counseling. In some cases, due to distance or dynamics present in the relationship, H2O may encourage the couple to meet with another clergy member or licensed counselor.

As a result of each person's discipleship to Jesus, we expect the couple to live with integrity and character. Below are specific expectations related to character:

The couple will not live together prior to marriage.

While respecting specific financial situations or personal convictions, H2O is not comfortable with a couple cohabiting before marriage. The temptation for immorality and the witness of their actions are too high of a cost for a couple striving to honor God in their relationship. If the couple is already living together, one of the people in the relationship would need to move out prior to the wedding.

The couple will be committed to sexual purity in their relationship.

Sex and sexual activities are clearly reserved for married couples that have already taken their marriage vows before God, family, and friends. H2O does not view couples as "married in the eyes of the Lord" without an official ceremony. Couples will be encouraged to repent from and abstain from sexual immorality before their wedding. We expect each person in the relationship to have friendships (outside of their fiancé) where the pursuit of purity is discussed in a transparent manner and support can be given.

The couple will have the blessing of their parents.

If either set of parents has strong opposition to the marriage, it will be difficult for H2O pastors or ministers to conduct the wedding. While there are exceptions to circumstantial factors, our overall posture is to strongly encourage a couple to honor their father and mother by seeking the blessing of their parents. Parents and in-laws are a major factor in the success of any marriage, so we would counsel a couple to work diligently and humbly to gain the support of their parents.

The couple will be in a healthy financial position before marriage.

Financial burdens can create a very difficult set of challenges early in a marriage. While we intentionally do not set specific standards for personal finances, we do know that significant debt combined with little income is a recipe for financial strain. While family members may be committed to help couples, the principle of 'leaving and cleaving' will be discussed. School debt and housing debt are often viewed as typical financial burdens. However, if a couple has substantial credit card debt or other consumer debt with little ability to pay it off in a reasonable amount of time, more conversation will be needed before a pastor or minister agrees to be involved in the wedding. Each person will be encouraged to get into a financially stable situation before marriage.

The couple will consider compensating the staff member tasked with leading their premarital counseling and officiating their wedding.

Since weddings are not a normal part of our pastors' job descriptions, any time spent officiating ceremonies and doing premarital counseling comes in addition to their already full schedules. We are happy to serve in this way! We believe something that takes such a significant amount of time should be followed with some type of investment by the couple to cover time and related expenses. The standard compensation for officiating the wedding ceremony and rehearsal the night before is \$250 unless there is another agreement with the pastor.

After reviewing this document, please let us know if you have any questions or concerns you would like to discuss with us. Thank you and congratulations on your engagement!