FELLOWSHIP

WEDDING GUIDE

Congratulations on your engagement and upcoming wedding!

THIS GUIDE

Our desire is to help you prepare your wedding to be the most meaningful celebration possible. In order to do that, we must first look at God's design for covenant marriage and to consider its sacredness as a lifelong relationship. This guide will also answer specific questions about pre-marriage requirements, counseling, ceremony planning, and to provide information about our facilities, resources, and their associated costs. Visit fellowshipknox.org/weddings for more information.

MARRIAGE MATTERS

As the Body of Christ, we are committed to assisting you in laying a solid foundation for a God-honoring, Christ-exalting, and Spirit-empowered marriage that:

- Is built on the biblical view and values of covenant marriage
- Is edifying to our church and community
- Equips and enables you and your future spouse to fulfill your mutual call to minister to one another

There are several foundational truths that are important for you to understand as you prepare for covenant marriage:

1. **Marriage is God's design.**
   According to Scripture, covenant marriage is not a human invention (Genesis 2:1-24, Ephesians 5:21-33). It has been instituted by God Himself. As the Designer, God knows best how marriage can and should work.

2. **Marriage by design is intended for one man and one woman for life.**
   Genesis 2:24 says, "Therefore a man (singular male) shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife (singular female), and they shall become one flesh." In Matthew 19, Jesus quoted this verse and added that such a divine union should not be dissolved by men. Symbolically, two become one flesh physically, but more importantly spiritually. No other marriage union can honor Him.

   Marriage is a covenantal relationship between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24, Malachi 2:14, Matthew 19:4-6). A covenant is simply a solemn agreement, oath, or promise. Covenants are different than contracts. A contract ensures that all parties involved fulfill their word but provide an escape clause should the terms be broken. A covenant, however, is a promise to fulfill one's word irrespective of the other party and is made to last regardless of the circumstances.

   We have a covenantal relationship with God that is not based on whether we can perfectly keep our end of the bargain. God has promised He will keep His word whether or not we keep ours. This is the standard for marriage as well. Wedding vows represent a covenant commitment to stay faithful to each other in all circumstances until separation by death. Making a covenant commitment declares one's intent to keep these vows whether or not your spouse does. This is the Biblical idea of husband and wife united to one another in a lifelong commitment.

3. **Marriage is God's gift.**
   Few events in life create anticipation, expectation, and joy like a wedding. The ceremony is an initiation of the gift of covenant marriage and a beautiful reminder of the relationship between Christ and His Church. It is a celebration of the gift of manhood and womanhood and their union before God.

REQUIREMENTS

Here are the basic requirements for covenant marriage at Fellowship Church and/or officiated by a Fellowship pastor:

1. **Personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord**
   Since covenant marriage has been designed by God for one man and one woman for life, it is important that both you and your fiancé/fiancée are pursuing a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Understanding and growing in your identities in Christ are critical building blocks of a healthy relationship and marriage. While not referring exclusively to a marriage relationship, 2 Corinthians 6:14 warns of being unequally yoked with someone who is not of the same spiritual mind, worldview, and values. This spiritual compatibility is crucial. If you and/or your fiancé/fiancée have not yet begun a relationship with Jesus, we would be honored to explore this most important matter together.

   One year of active membership or participation
   You or your fiancé/fiancée should be active members or regular participants in Fellowship's worship service and/or ministries for a minimum of one year. Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis.

2. **Pre-marriage education & counseling**
   We believe that adequate preparation of the couple's hearts is crucial to laying a strong foundation and a healthy start to the marriage. We require couples who are married at Fellowship Church or by one of its pastors to successfully complete a *PREPARE* assessment and *Marriage Innovators: Foundations* (6 sessions). Information and registration for *Marriage* Innovators can found at fellowshipknox.org/care. Substitutions of an equivalent pre-marriage resource offered by another church must be approved by our pastoral team. In addition, couples will receive a minimum of 4 hours of personalized pre-marriage counseling and planning, ideally facilitated by the officiating pastor (requested or assigned). Otherwise, pre-marriage counseling may be conducted by someone else within our Spiritual Formation & Care team or pastoral team. Outside counselors and/or officiants must be approved by our pastoral team.

3. **Pursue purity by abstaining from sexual intimacy and living or sleeping together**
   Sex is a gift from God and is exclusively designed for the covenant marriage relationship between one man and one woman. This is clearly implied in the "one flesh" imagery of the marriage union. Therefore, we should trust in and follow God's design regarding our sexuality despite the cultural norms we may encounter. Likewise, cohabitation places an engaged couple in a difficult environment to pursue a life of sexual purity. Upon entering pre-marriage counseling and preparation, couples are required to live separately and abstain from sexual intimacy until entering covenant marriage. Couples are also expected to be proactive in their decision and actions to comply with this requirement.

4. **In the event of a previous divorce (either party)**
   In the event of a previous divorce (either party) that was based on biblical grounds, we ask couples not to pursue a new relationship until all reasonable steps toward biblical reconciliation have been exhausted and adequate time for personal recovery and healing has passed. The marriage preparation process at Fellowship, therefore, is usually not begun until at least two years has elapsed from the time the divorce was made final legally. Our counseling & care ministries and pastoral team are available to assist in helping you walk in health toward your future proposed marriage. We require those who have gone through divorce to participate in the Divorce Care group at one of Fellowship's partnering chapters in town. This care group is designed to help a divorced person process his or her own loss and pain and to explore the wisdom and possibility of reconciliation, remarriage, or singleness. This requirement could also be met by attending a divorce recovery program at another church.

   In the event of a previous divorce (either party) that was not based on biblical ground as described in our position paper on Marriage, special counsel and permission must be sought from Fellowship's Congregational Care Team before marriage preparation or wedding planning through our church can begin.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the requirements on the previous page, we strongly recommend the following:

1. **A face-to-face, biblically-based relationship for one year before marriage**
   There are no shortcuts to building intimacy, trust, and communication in a relationship. While some people have the maturity and skills that enable them to build a healthy, intimate relationship faster than others, we believe that a one-year relationship of courtship or dating is wise considering the permanent nature of a covenant marriage relationship.

2. **A pastor from Fellowship Church to officiate your wedding ceremony**
   Covenant marriage is a spiritual matter, therefore the officiating pastor bears a spiritual responsibility. Our pastoral team is equipped and authorized to conduct a ceremony that is biblically-based, theologically and practically sound, and legally recognized by the State of Tennessee. Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis. Any outside officiant requested must be licensed and/or ordained to conduct religious weddings in Tennessee as well as from a Christian church or denomination that is in general agreement with Fellowship's doctrinal statements. See our Statement of Faith and position paper on Marriage for more information. **The fee for a pastoral officiant from Fellowship is $500 unless otherwise agreed.** See #2 below for more details.

NOTE: Any exceptions or variations to these requirements and recommendations must be submitted in writing and approved by Fellowship's Congregational Care Team. Exceptions are made infrequently and on a case-by-case basis.

PROCESS & PLANNING

We advise you to begin your marriage preparation and wedding planning as soon as possible after your engagement. Submitting your request at least 6 months prior to your preferred wedding date is highly recommended. A minimum of 4 months prior is required. Pastoral and facility availability for your requested date are not guaranteed, but we will work with you. Here's how to get started:

- ❑ After reading this Wedding Guide thoroughly and agreeing to its contents, complete the Wedding Request form found online at fellowshipknox.org/weddings.
- ❑ If you have questions about the **requirements, recommendations, or process aspects** of the Wedding Guide, contact our Spiritual Formation and Care Team at care@fellowshipknox.org or 865-245-9881.
- ❑ If you have questions about the **facility and Middlebrook campus event planning aspects** of the Wedding Guide, contact our Coordinator of Events at events@fellowshipknox.org.
- ❑ Register for an upcoming session of *Marriage Innovators: Foundations* at fellowshipknox.org/care. Exceptions may be requested for scheduling difficulties or similar pre- marriage education resources.
- ❑ Complete your *PREPARE* assessments (link will be provided upon registration for *Marriage Innovators: Foundations*).

Regarding Pastoral Officiants:

1. **Invited or Requested.** If you would like to invite a specific pastor to officiate, it is expected that you confirm the pastor's availability and secure their commitment prior to listing them on your Wedding Request form. If you would like to request a Fellowship pastor, we will make every effort to assign you one, but we cannot guarantee availability for your preferred date.

2. **Officiant Fees.** Your pastoral officiant will contact you to arrange for your initial pre-marriage session. **The fee for a pastoral officiant is $500** and includes planning, rehearsal, ceremony, and submission of all marriage documentation. There is no separate charge for pre-marriage counseling. If your ceremony is beyond 30 miles from your Fellowship campus location, personal expenses (meals, lodging, etc.) and travel expenses (at the standard federal reimbursement rate of $0.72/mile) need to be covered in advance unless otherwise agreed. Such additional

expenses should be estimated and agreed to prior to the week of the wedding ceremony and included with the pastoral officiant fee. **NOTE:** All fees are payable to Fellowship Church and due no later than the day before the wedding ceremony. Fees for off-campus officiants may be turned in directly to your pastor. Fees for on-campus officiants are included with and collected as part of your contracted financial agreement.

MIDDLEBROOK FACILITY GUIDELINES

SCHEDULING

- Your wedding will be placed on the master calendar as *pending* only after all forms are completed, turned in, appropriate fees received, and approval has been granted by pastoral staff.
- If, during the course of pre-marriage counseling, a Fellowship pastor recommends the postponement or cancellation of the wedding, the reservation for facility use will be cancelled and all deposits will be refunded.

FEES

- The balance of all fees is due no later than the day before the wedding rehearsal.
- Please have your wedding party be respectful to our facility as damage done to the building, grounds or church equipment will result in additional charges and will be billed after the wedding.
- We ask that your function begins and ends at the time you have reserved the facility. For example, we must know all hours you hope to set up and decorate. If your function times are not kept, you will be charged $35.00 for each additional hour.
- Please note that if your wedding is planned outside of normal building hours there could be additional fees. For example, weddings or receptions that end after 6:00pm on Saturday will be charged an additional fee.

FACILITY USAGE

- We will not schedule more than one wedding per day unless both wedding parties are in agreement.
- We require that all weddings in the Worship Center be performed in front of the closed stage curtain.
- We highly recommend the use of a Wedding Coordinator to care for the day and the wedding party.
- Alcohol is not permitted on Fellowship Church property.
- Only dripless candles may be used.
- Rehearsals are limited to 90 minutes due to Fellowship personnel.
- No animals are allowed in the building for any reason at any time (except for service dogs).
- Requests for church-owned worship equipment, piano, etc., must also be included on your request form so that approval can be given from our Worship Department.
- All leftover food must be removed the day of the wedding.
- Wedding parties should come equipped with all needed supplies for decorating (scissors, tape, safety pins, etc.). The facility crew will be glad to supply a ladder if it is listed on the Wedding Planning form.
- Should you find that you need to make changes to your setup or have additional needs, you must contact our Coordinator of Events at events@fellowshipknox.org so they can be facilitated if possible. The final charges for the wedding will also be adjusted. Any last-minute changes or additions to setup may incur additional fees based on specific request.

NOTE: A facilities crew person will be on the premises throughout decorating, rehearsal and the wedding ceremony. They are there to ensure that everything is ready for you. They may not be able to accommodate last minute changes.

POLICIES FOR OUTSIDE SERVICES

It is the responsibility of the bridal party to see that each outside service understands these policies. All decorating and set-up times need to be specified on request form and strictly adhered to due to facilities personnel scheduling.

FLORIST

- Do not move any furniture, artwork, equipment without permission from a Facilities team member.
- Only dripless candles may be used.
- For the departure of the bride and groom, we request bubbles only (no sparklers, birdseed, rice, etc.). Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis.
- No flowers are to be stored in the refrigerator due to health regulations.
- The church will not be responsible for damage to plants, candelabras, etc.
- If plants, candelabras, or any other decorations are to be left for a Monday pick-up, there will be an additional fee charged for storage.

CATERER

- Only dripless candles may be used.
- Please wipe spillage from countertops and floors.
- Kitchen utensils and dishware are available for use. If you bring your own personal items (utensils, dishware, etc.) or supplies, please label clearly.
- Please do not leave food in the refrigerator or freezer after the conclusion of your event.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

- Photos may be taken of the wedding party during the processional and recessional.
- No flash photography during the ceremony. Non-flash photos may be taken from the rear of the bridal party unless otherwise agreed upon.
- The location of video cameras must be approved by the Worship and Tech Team in collaboration with the Coordinator of Events.

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