

Preparing for Marriage at Midland Free

Congratulations! We rejoice with you about your future marriage. It is our desire to help you start your marriage well and flourish for a lifetime. We take marriage relationships seriously. At the same time we know how much fun this is: growing together, experiencing new things, and loving another person enough to make public vows of commitment and a spiritual covenant before God.

Please read through this entire document. It contains:

- Biblical Guidelines for Marriage
- Experiential Guidelines
- Steps in the Marriage Process at Midland Free
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
- Wedding Application

Remember Paul's admonition to the Corinthians:

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ^{or} rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a)

Our desire is for you to experience the love of Christ and express love to each other and the people involved in helping you. We want the best for you both.

PS: If you have questions or concerns, we are always open to talk, discuss and seek God's guidance with you. Call us or email us.

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Biblical Guidelines for Marriage

We believe the Bible provides clear guidelines that protect and enrich marriage for a lifetime. These guidelines define our process:

Who can be married at Midland Free?

We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person male or female. We believe marriage is the original and foundational institution of human society designed, instituted, and ordained by God in Scripture as a sacred, one-flesh, exclusive and covenantal union between one man and one woman, which reflects the relationship between Christ and His Church. (Genesis 1:26:27; Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:21-33. From Midland Free Constitution Article V). Only such marriage or marriage like ceremonies (and related activities such as receptions) as stated above in the definition of marriage may be conducted or hosted on church property or officiated or performed or solemnized by the staff at Midland Free. Guest pastors and the couple being married must fully abide by all Midland Free guidelines, including the above description of marriage ceremonies that are permitted to be performed on church property.

1. Can an unbeliever and a believer marry?

We believe the future bride and groom must be spiritually and emotionally compatible. We will not schedule a wedding unless a couple is spiritually and emotionally compatible.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

2. What if one of us is divorced?

Our God values the permanence of marriage. To honor marriage and the covenant made we will not marry divorced persons except where Scripture allows. Midland Free believes that there are only two situations where the Bible allows for remarriage after a divorce.

A. If adultery (sexual sin) has occurred within a relationship by the other party.
"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:31-32)

B. If a non-Christian abandons a Christian.
But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. (1 Corinthians 7:15)



Beyond these two circumstances, Midland Free pastors will not participate in remarriage weddings after a divorce due to the sanctity of the marriage covenant, and visiting pastors will not be permitted to do so on church property.

3. What if we are sexually active?

God speaks clearly through His Word: there are benefits and blessings of self-control and obedience. We require both of you to remain sexually pure until your wedding day.

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. (Hebrews 13:4)

4. What if we are living together?

We believe couples should not cohabit prior to marriage and will not schedule a wedding for couples who are living together. We believe engagement is a time to work on the non-physical aspects of the relationship: emotional, spiritual and intellectual closeness. Couples who are cohabitating have a higher divorce rate after marriage. God wants marriage to be a true commitment, not a trial run.

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:18)



Experiential Guidelines

Because of our experience working with couples and successfully preparing for marriage, we have developed the following guidelines:

1. Overview of Requirements

Approval Process: Completed Wedding Application, completed *PREPARE* and/or Symbis assessment, meet with a pastor, wedding application affirmed, complete pre-marital counseling. See steps below in the Marriage Process.

Adhere to Preparing for Marriage Counseling Covenant (accountable to officiating Pastor and mentor couple)

Recommended Reading

Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts by Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott

The Five Love Languages by Gary Chapman

Intended for Pleasure by Ed Wheat M.D. & Gaye Wheat

Preparing for Marriage by Dennis Rainey

Love and Respect by Emerson & Sara Eggerich

Complete Financial Guide for Young Couples by Larry Burkett

His Needs Her Needs by Willard F. Harley, Jr.

2. If divorced, how long should we wait before remarrying?

We believe that a new relationship should not be pursued until the potential of a healthy reconciliation has been exhausted and time for personal recovery has passed. We encourage at least two years to have elapsed from the time the divorce was made legally final. We encourage a divorced person to participate in counseling sessions that address recovery from a divorce, as well as to explore the possibility and/or wisdom of reconciliation, remarriage, and singleness.

When children are involved we move carefully forward.

3. How long do we have to be a couple before we consider marriage?

We recommend at least six months of dating and six months of engagement.

We call this the "Test of Time." Marriage is one of the most important lifetime decisions and commitments a couple will ever make. Take time to truly know each other, make the proper preparations and undertake the relational work that needs to be completed prior to saying "I Do."



4. If widowed, how long should I wait before marrying?

We believe that a new relationship should not be pursued until the time for personal recovery has passed. We encourage at least two years to have elapsed from the time the loved one passed away. We encourage those who are widowed to participate in grief counseling sessions.

When children are involved we move carefully forward.

5. How long does it take to prepare for a wedding?

At least one year is highly recommended due to the process and the need for advanced booking of outside reception halls. We advise you to come into our *Preparing for Marriage* process as soon as you are thinking seriously of being married or well before your desired wedding date.

If a couple breaks their vow of purity (covenant) it is the officiating pastor's discretion to postpone or terminate the wedding plans.



Steps in the Marriage Process at Midland Free

Getting Started

1. Complete the Wedding Application and *Preparing for Marriage* Counseling Covenant (completed upon first meeting with Mentors/Pastor). Submit application and payment online, or a paper copy to Care Ministries Assistant at the Midland Free church office with a check for \$35.00, payable to Midland Free to cover online assessments- a premarital counseling tool. (Submitting application triggers step #2). Please contact Pastor Gib Giblin for the necessary forms at ggiblin@mefchurch.org.
2. Complete online assessment (email addresses required). The assessment will be emailed to you directly. Results are sent to the church to be used by mentors and the pastor involved in preparation. (Completing #2 triggers #3)
3. Interview Appointment – After the Wedding Application has been received by a Pastor, they will contact you to set up your initial interview. During the interview, the Wedding Application, and the Marriage Counseling Covenant will be reviewed. The assessment will be reviewed later with your pre-marital mentors. This is a two-hour appointment.
4. Pastoral Evaluation - The officiating Pastor will meet with another Midland Free pastor to either approve the wedding application and reserve the date on the church calendar or request more information from the couple.
5. Church office will contact the couple when the wedding application has been approved. Facility reservations and fees will be discussed. The Wedding Coordinator will contact the couple to discuss ceremony and rehearsal details. A *Facility Request Form* must be completed at this time.
6. The most valuable and extensive time in the *Preparing for Marriage* process is meeting with various individuals committed to helping create a successful marriage. These individuals are:

The Pastor: The Pastor performing the ceremony will oversee the *Preparing for Marriage* process. He will lead the couple through a series of meetings where Biblical guidelines for marriage, parenting, and other practical matters will be discussed. He will be evaluating the couple's ability to make a commitment. All assignments must be completed prior to marriage. (The last assignment is the outline of the ceremony due two weeks prior to the wedding. See #7 below)

The *Preparing for Marriage* Mentors: The couple and pastor will discuss mentor relationships and decide what is appropriate for the couple. The mentor couple



will help discuss similar issues as the Pastor. They work on the marital relationship and day-to-day issues such as roles, family, living arrangements, work issues, communication and finances. The mentors will work in conjunction with the Pastor and will be asked for a final assessment at least a month prior to the marriage date.

7. Meet with the Pastor to plan wedding ceremony. All readings, music, vows and other specifics must be discussed. (This must be done no later than two weeks prior to the wedding date).



Frequently Asked Questions

When can we start?

Start as early as possible. You do not have to be engaged. If you would like help in the decision to be married, feel free to contact the Care Ministries office. We would be glad to assist you! The prospective bride or groom must be a regular attender of Midland Free for at least three months prior to starting the *Preparing for Marriage* process.

When should we book a reception hall?

Please do not reserve an outside reception hall until your wedding and date have been scheduled and confirmed at the church.

What happens after the wedding has been approved?

Notification will be sent to the couple verifying that a date has been reserved on the church calendar for the rehearsal and wedding ceremony. The *Preparing for Marriage* process will be outlined. A *Facility Request Form* must be completed listing specific needs and set up for the facility. (Best done in conjunction with Wedding Coordinator). Rooms can be reserved for receptions when available. All weddings and receptions must end no later than 8 p.m. on Saturdays. We do not perform weddings on Sundays. A wedding date will not be guaranteed until 12 months prior to the wedding.

What if we want a Pastor that is not on the Midland Free staff to marry us, but we want to be married at Midland Free?

Some couples have a Pastor that they identify with from their hometown before transitioning to the Midland area and request him to officiate their wedding. We acknowledge the fact that this is important for the couple, and will accommodate this request only if the Pastor is of like faith and belief, including our beliefs about marriage as stated in Article V of our Constitution. A Midland Free Pastor must be part of the ceremony if the church campus is used. He can be available for the welcome, a reading or prayer and will be present for the entire ceremony.

Couples will still be required to adhere to the *Preparing for Marriage* covenant to be married at Midland Free.

Can a Midland Free Pastor marry us off-site?

Yes. All *Preparing for Marriage* requirements are still in effect. Compensation for travel expenses, gas, food and other expenses need to be addressed and provided for the Pastor and his wife/family. Note: If you are getting married out-of-state make sure the pastor has authorization or a license to officiate a wedding ceremony in that location.

Who will help us in planning for the wedding ceremony?

The officiating Pastor can assist you in planning for your wedding ceremony. The order of worship for the ceremony needs to be discussed and approved by the officiating Pastor no later than two weeks prior to the wedding date. We reserve the right to



approve music, reading and other content for all ceremonies. The Wedding Coordinator will be contacted by a staff person when a wedding has been approved. The couple is responsible for contacting all musicians, readers and other participants in the wedding.

What does the Wedding Coordinator do?

Couples wishing to use Midland Free for their wedding service may coordinate their wedding plans through our Wedding Coordinator. She will work with you and discuss details specific to your wedding day and rehearsal time. Her objective is to be sure that your wedding service is well orchestrated and memorable. You will find her services and experience to be invaluable during your planning.

Can we have our wedding reception at Midland Free?

There are specific locations in the facility that can accommodate receptions. These spaces can be considered when reserving the wedding date on the church calendar. If you will be using the Midland Free kitchen for your reception, you will be expected to leave it in the same condition as you found it. If you need instruction on how to use any of the kitchen equipment, it is recommended that the person(s) who will be using it set up a meeting ahead of time with Midland Free staff to go over the procedures. General clean-up after the wedding is expected to be done by the couple getting married or whomever they designate for that duty. This includes removal of decorations, flowers, trash, etc., and all activities must end no later than 8 p.m. if on Saturday. All receptions held on the church campus should reflect a nature that is consistent with a Christian event and should not bring into question the character of our Christian testimony. There will be no alcoholic beverages served on the church grounds. The wedding service, rehearsal and reception should honor and bring glory to our Lord. All music that is chosen for either the wedding ceremony or the reception should be of Christian nature. There is no smoking allowed inside the facility on the Midland Free campus. No throwing of rice, confetti, birdseed, or glitter inside or outside the facility. No liquids with red or colored dyes are allowed in the facility.

Does Midland Free offer childcare?

Neither childcare nor our nursery area is available during the wedding rehearsal, the wedding or the reception. There are two comfort rooms that can be used for restless children during the wedding ceremony. Children must be supervised at all times.

Once we complete the wedding application and take the *PREPARE/ SYMBIS* inventory, can we go ahead and secure a reception off campus?

No, completing the Wedding Application and taking the *PREPARE/SYMBIS* inventory does not guarantee approval of your wedding and the date you're requesting. We recommend couples wait and complete the *Preparing for Marriage* process. This assures that your wedding is approved, and the rehearsal and ceremony have been secured on the church calendar. We highly recommend that couples start the *Preparing for Marriage* process with us as early as possible.



How and when should we secure a marriage license?

A marriage license can be secured in the county in which you reside. Each county has certain requirements; a valid driver's license, birth certificate, and a small fee. In most counties the marriage needs to be solemnized within 30-33 days of application with a waiting period of 3-5 days. If couples reside in Michigan they do not have to be married in the same county they secured their marriage license but out-of-state residents must.

My fiancée (or both of us) lives a long distance from Midland Free, how are we to participate in the *Preparing for Marriage* process?

Some couples are faced with this issue. Since the Wedding Application and the *PREPARE/SYMBIS* inventory are online, we can receive vital information that will aid in determining the status of your relationship for marriage without a fiancée being present. We do require that premarital counseling, comparable to that at Midland Free, be completed with a Pastor at another church in your local area prior to the wedding.

Are there any circumstances where Midland Free would refuse to marry us?

There are some cases in which indicators denote areas of concern to proceed with a wedding. The Pastor will review these "major" concerns with the couple during a consultation and request a postponement of marriage while offering an extended preparation plan. If the couple is willing to work on specific areas of their lives and relationship, we are willing to walk with them in their journey to prepare for a lifetime of marriage. We will marry a couple after they successfully work through the extended preparation plan designed for them and their situation at that time otherwise meets the Biblical Guidelines for Marriage.

What are the Fees for Weddings?

Required Fees

Sound Technician – ask for pricing

Optional Fees

Wedding Coordinator – ask for pricing

Big Screen - Technician – ask for pricing

Lighting Technician (if there are lighting changes during ceremony) - ask for pricing

Pastor Honorarium -ask for pricing

