

Marriage and Pre-Marital Counseling



Four Oaks Community Church

Dear Couple:

Greetings from the pastoral staff and elders at Four Oaks Community Church! If you are reading this, it may be that you are considering marriage and want to know more about the marital process at our church. This booklet will hopefully answer any questions that you have and clarify the steps you need to take if you are seeking out a Four Oaks pastor to officiate your wedding and/or to be involved in your pre-marital counseling process.

We consider marriage to be a high calling of eternal significance and thus we take the marital process very seriously before the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God has entrusted us as leaders with an incredible stewardship and responsibility to care for and walk alongside those who are considering marriage. Our desire is to be able to have a clear conscience before Him that we have biblically prepared couples with the wisdom and tools necessary to walk righteously before him in their new lives together.

Please read over the enclosed materials carefully. You will find a philosophy of marriage and the church; a step by step pre-marital process; a qualifying questionnaire; and guidelines for the pre-marital process. If you still have questions after reading through the materials or want to talk further about them, please contact one of our pastors at the church office to set up an appointment.

We hope and pray that God will be at work in your relationship during this most crucial season of preparation, and that you will avail yourselves of the resources God has provided you here. We look forward to walking alongside you through this marital process.

For Marriages That Will Honor Christ and Build His Church,

The Pastoral Staff at Four Oaks Community Church

Marriage and Pre-Marital Counseling at Four Oaks Community Church

It is our church's policy that in order for a member of our pastoral team to marry a couple, a couple must entrust themselves to a pre-marital process under the authority of our local Body. It is through this process that the church leadership comes alongside of a couple and affirms the work of God in bringing the couple together and the biblical health of the proposed marriage.

Our position on pre-marital counseling flows from a biblical framework for understanding the role of the church in a believer's life. The tendency for some to view the religious and secular areas of life as separate and distinct often reveals itself in a couple's decision about how and where to marry. For example, couples may want to marry in a church and to have a pastor preside over their vows, while at the same time being reticent to have the church play more than a cursory role in determining the biblical health of their relationship and whether it is wise or biblical that they marry at all.

The crucial decision that we have made as a pastoral team is that we want to discourage this tendency for people to keep their personal lives distinct from the church. Instead, we want couples to embrace the God-ordained role of the church in helping to steward people's marriage relationships. To this end, we believe that our church must play a vital role in marriages within our own fellowship through the personal involvement of our pastors and elders in counseling, mentoring, and holding accountable young couples.

Marriage is a creation mandate that is to be enjoyed by both believer and unbeliever alike, and thus should not be denied to those who want to be married through the civil authorities. However, for those believers who are asking the church to preside over their vows, a greater responsibility is placed upon the church for faithfully stewarding this awesome responsibility that has been entrusted to it. It is in this context that pre-marital counseling finds its rightful place.

The pre-marital process at Four Oaks Community Church includes several elements that are presided over by the pastoral leadership of the church (see the enclosed Pre-Marital Protocol document). It is through this process that we pray that God will reveal his will to a couple about their proposed marriage and that the pastors can in turn affirm this decision by performing the marriage ceremony.

The Pre-Marital Process

1) Membership

The Four Oaks pastoral team generally officiates ceremonies and conducts pre-marital counseling only with those who are members of Four Oaks Community Church. Thus, a couple either needs to be members of Four Oaks church, or moving towards membership, before entering into the pre-marital process. Attending the Welcome to the Family class is the first step in becoming a member; information can be found at www.fouroakschurch.com

2) Complete Qualifying Questionnaire

Each couple should complete the enclosed Qualifying Questionnaire which gathers all of the pertinent information related to the proposed marriage, relational history of the couple, the couple's relationship to Christ and the church, and other details. This questionnaire should be brought to the initial meeting with the pastor

3) Initial Meeting with a Pastor

The couple needs to first prayerfully consider which pastor they would like to marry them and then contact the Four Oaks church office at least 6 months before the wedding to set up an initial meeting. (Please keep in mind that the pre-marital process will vary slightly from pastor to pastor and situation to situation. In addition, it is up to each individual pastor to determine their availability to counsel and marry a couple depending upon personal and ministry circumstances.)

It is at this meeting that the pastor will talk to the couple about their relationship, have them share their Christian and relationship testimonies, determine the exact nature & duration of the pre-marital process, work through specifics of the wedding and marriage plans, and determine his own availability and suitability for counseling and marrying the couple.

4) Pre-Marital Inventory

Couples will then take and complete the pre-marital PREPARE inventory which assesses a couple for its relational strengths and weaknesses. The results of the test will comprise much of the background for the particular issues that will be discussed in counseling. Pre-marital sessions will commence once the test has been taken, sent away for processing, and returned to the church. This usually takes about two weeks.

5) Pre-Marital Sessions

Typically, the number of sessions completed by the couple with a pastor will range anywhere from 6-8, depending upon the situation and issues that arise. A variety of topics and issues are addressed, including the biblical purpose of marriage, biblical roles in marriage, communication, finances, sexuality, and family history issues. Please see the attached "Pre-Marital Counseling Sessions" for an example of the sorts and types of issues that are covered. Keep in mind that this is only a sample and that the timing and topics of the pre-marital sessions can and will vary.

6) Conclusion of the Process

The couple and pastor will confer together to determine the appropriate time to terminate the pre-marital process in light of the issues covered and progress that has been made. It will ultimately be the prerogative of the pastor to determine if he feels the couple is ready to marry and whether or not he will perform the ceremony based upon that readiness. Not often, but on occasion, the pastor may recommend that the couple postpone or cancel their marriage ceremony due to biblical, compatibility, or other issues that arise.

7) The Wedding and Marriage Ceremony

At the conclusion of the pre-marital process, the pastor will work with the couple on planning the actual wedding ceremony. All aspects of the ceremony need to be cleared and approved by the pastor, including the participation of other pastors or officiants in the ceremony.

Pre-Marital Process Guidelines

The Issue of Church Membership

One of the primary responsibilities of a pastor is to shepherd the flock of people that God has entrusted to him. This means that biblical relationships of authority and accountability take place within a covenant relationship expressed through membership in the local church. The decision to marry is one of the most important decisions a person can make, and for Christians this needs to happen within that context of the local body and pastoral oversight. Please see the enclosed, "Marriage and Pre-Marital Counseling at Four Oaks Community Church" for a more detailed explanation of this issue.

Pre-Marriage Counseling Cost

The cost for the entire pre-marital process is \$275, which includes the PREPARE Inventory fee, cost of the 2 books and materials, and the 6-8 sessions of pre-marital counseling. This fee should be paid to "Four Oaks Community Church" at the outset of the pre-marital process. Keep in mind that that this fee is charged in part because of the nature, intensity, and duration of the counseling process that typically goes beyond the normal ministries and services provided for by the church. Compared to the cost of a wedding, \$275 is a small price for spiritually preparing oneself for marriage and thus should be considered a necessary part of the wedding costs. If there is a financial hardship involved, please discuss this with your pastor.

Honorarium for Performing the Ceremony

The suggested honorarium for the minister performing your ceremony is \$150-\$300. This should be paid directly to your pastor. We have found that couples are often confused about how to honor a pastor who marries them, and this fee is meant to standardize the decision making process.

Out-of-Town Weddings

Some pastors will perform out of town weddings and others will not. You must discuss this with your pastor. Please keep in mind that if the wedding ceremony is taking place outside of Tallahassee, that you need to make arrangements and financial provision for travel, lodging, and food for the pastor. This should be discussed in detail before the ceremony. Please understand that an out of town wedding is a significant commitment on the part of the pastor!

Church Members Who Have Moved Away

It is understood that there are a variety of personal situations that do not fit neatly into the pre-marital process. Ultimately, it is each pastor's prerogative to assess these situations and to make a personal decision about whether to be involved in the marriage ceremony or not. Discuss your own situation with one of the pastors. Keep in mind that your pastor may ask you to travel back to town periodically for pre-marital sessions or pursue counseling within another context.

Confidentiality

Please keep in mind that the legal rules of confidentiality that govern therapeutic relationships in a private therapy or counseling context do not apply to the church. While we give couples assurances of "reasonable confidentiality", these rules do not apply in cases of intent to harm self or others, elder abuse or neglect, or unrepentant sin. In these first two cases, the proper legal authorities are notified; with the third, the biblical process of discipline as outline in Matthew 18 is followed.

Duration of the Process

A "typical" pre-marital process might be one that takes place over the course of 2-3 months, with bi-weekly meetings of 1-2 hours, although this can vary. Couples are given readings, homework, and assignments to complete in between meetings.

Different Pastors For Pre-Marital Counseling and Officiating the Ceremony

This is generally discouraged, as it can make for a confusing pre-marital process. It is important that the pastor on staff marrying a couple be able to give good account and stewardship for the decision to officiate a ceremony for a couple.

Wedding Licenses

Each couple is responsible for securing and paying for their own marriage license. In the state of Florida, couples receive a discount on the cost of their license if they complete a pre-marital process by an authorized agency or counselor. Four Oaks qualifies as one of these agencies. You will receive a counseling certificate at the end of the pre-marital process that you should present at the county courthouse when purchasing your license.

Wedding Venues

Four Oaks does not own a church facility suitable to conduct wedding ceremonies. The responsibility for finding this space depends upon you. Be mindful that certain churches have restrictions concerning officiating ministers, so make sure to verify their policies and to make arrangements for sound/audio-visual/custodial issues.

Wedding Rehearsal and Reception

The pastor will generally conduct the wedding rehearsal at the agreed upon rehearsal time. Regretfully, pastors are not always able to attend rehearsal dinners or receptions. It is our sincere hope that such inability is not taken as an offense.

Other Resources

As part of the pre-marital process, the pastor might ask the couple to seek counseling help with someone else outside of the church to supplement the marriage process. Or, the pastor might recommend that the couple be assigned to an older mentor couple that can meet periodically for counsel, prayer, and accountability.

Materials and Supplies

In addition to the PREPARE inventory, you will read through 1-2 books related to marriage (*The Marriage Builder*, by Crabb; *Intended for Pleasure*, by Wheat). These books are provided to you at the outset of the pre-marital process.

Sample Pre-Marital Counseling Sessions

Introductory Session

- Relational History
- Explanation of Pre-Marital Process
- Role of the Church
- Distribution of Testing Materials

Session #2

- Relational Inventory – Strengths and Weaknesses
- PREPARE Results
- Problem areas to focus upon/Goal Setting

Session #3

- A Portrait of Marriage – Christ and the Church, Eph. 5
- Intimacy vs. Isolation – Soul oneness
- Leaving and Cleaving – Genesis 1
- Family History and Dynamics

Session #4

- Crabb's The Marriage Builder
- Biblical definition of Love
- The Call and Purpose of Marriage – Ministry
- The needs of men and women
- A portrait of ministry

Session #5

- Man and Woman in biblical perspective
- Headship and Submission – Eph. 5
- Leadership = Responsibility
- Finances and Budget

Session #6

- Man and Woman in biblical perspective, Part II
- Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory Results
- Personality Issues
- Biblical Sexuality

Session #7

- Planning the wedding ceremony

**Pre-Marital Qualifying Questionnaire
Four Oaks Community Church**

Each person should fill out the following questionnaire and return it to the pastor prior to your first meeting with the pastor you are asking to perform your ceremony.

To be completed by the Groom

Groom's Full name _____ Date of birth _____
Home address _____
Telephone (home) _____ (work) _____ (cell) _____
Occupation _____ Student _____ Email _____

Bride's Information

Full name _____ Date of birth _____
Home address _____
Telephone (home) _____ (work) _____ (cell) _____
Occupation _____ Student _____ Email _____

Wedding Information

Wedding Date _____ Where _____
The Pastor whom you would like to officiate your wedding _____
Why have you chosen to be married by the church rather than a justice of the peace? _____

Couple Background

Briefly explain your history as a couple (when you met, how long you have been dating, when you got engaged etc.)

Have either one of you been previously married? _____

If this is not your first marriage, and if you are divorced, was your divorce Biblical (on the grounds of adultery or the willful desertion by your unbelieving partner)? Have you sought reconciliation with your former spouse? _____

Are you currently under discipline from another church body regarding this divorce or any other matter? Are you free to remarry at this time? _____

Any children? _____

Are you currently living together? _____ If so, are you willing to live separately and abstain from sexual relations until your wedding? _____

Briefly explain your current financial situation (debts, obligations, job, income) _____

Have you both personally placed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? When and under what circumstances? _____

Please share why you believe that God is leading you to be married _____

Motives for Marriage

Do your parents approve of the marriage? If not, what do you think of their reasons? _____

Do either of you feel pressure to get married? _____

Is there some other reason for getting married that we need to speak about (pregnancy, pressure from others, citizenship issues, etc) _____

Make a list of qualities you see in the other person which make you want to marry him/her. _____

What fears do you have about marriage or about your impending marriage? _____

Relationship to Church

Are you currently attending Four Oaks Community Church? _____ Are you a Member? _____

If you are not a member, are you willing to become one? _____

Describe your involvement at Four Oaks _____

Are you willing to submit your relationship to the authority and leadership of the local church even if it means a pastor might recommend that you delay, postpone, or reconsider your decision to marry? _____ (Explain if necessary)

Are you willing to pay the \$275 Pre-Marital Counseling Fee? _____ (Please bring payment to first meeting)

**Pre-Marital Qualifying Questionnaire
Four Oaks Community Church**

Each person should fill out the following questionnaire and return it to the pastor prior to your first meeting with the pastor you are asking to perform your ceremony.

To be completed by the Bride

Groom's Full name _____ Date of birth _____
Home address _____
Telephone (home) _____ (work) _____ (cell) _____
Occupation _____ Student _____ Email _____

Groom's Information

Full name _____ Date of birth _____
Home address _____
Telephone (home) _____ (work) _____ (cell) _____
Occupation _____ Student _____ Email _____

Wedding Information

Wedding Date _____ Where _____
The Pastor whom you would like to officiate your wedding _____
Why have you chosen to be married by the church rather than a justice of the peace? _____

Couple Background

Briefly explain your history as a couple (when you met, how long you have been dating, when you got engaged etc.)

Have either one of you been previously married? _____

If this is not your first marriage, and if you are divorced, was your divorce Biblical (on the grounds of adultery or the willful desertion by your unbelieving partner)? Have you sought reconciliation with your former spouse? _____

Are you currently under discipline from another church body regarding this divorce or any other matter? Are you free to remarry at this time? _____

Any children? _____

Are you currently living together? _____ If so, are you willing to live separately and abstain from sexual relations until your wedding? _____

Briefly explain your current financial situation (debts, obligations, job, income) _____

Have you both personally placed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? When and under what circumstances? _____

Please share why you believe that God is leading you to be married _____

Motives for Marriage

Do your parents approve of the marriage? If not, what do you think of their reasons? _____

Do either of you feel pressure to get married? _____

Is there some other reason for getting married that we need to speak about (pregnancy, pressure from others, citizenship issues, etc) _____

Make a list of qualities you see in the other person which make you want to marry him/her. _____

What fears do you have about marriage or about your impending marriage? _____

Relationship to Church

Are you currently attending Four Oaks Community Church? _____ Are you a Member? _____

If you are not a member, are you willing to become one? _____

Describe your involvement at Four Oaks _____

Are you willing to submit your relationship to the authority and leadership of the local church even if it means a pastor might recommend that you delay, postpone, or reconsider your decision to marry? _____ (Explain if necessary)

Are you willing to pay the \$275 Pre-Marital Counseling Fee? _____ (Please bring payment to first meeting)