

Marriage in the Mountains

“We’d like to get married in the mountains and we’re wondering if we can get married in your church.” Pastor Pete would often get requests like this from out-of-towners who wanted to get married in this beautiful resort community nestled in the Colorado Rockies. He quickly realized that the church needed a wedding policy to guide his answers to these requests.

The church had no desire to become a Las Vegas-style wedding chapel. While the church welcomed tourists, the focus of the church’s ministry was on the local population, a commitment reflected in the church’s mission statement. Additionally, Pastor Pete believed that Christian marriage should be grounded in a worshipping body of believers, and so he had reservations about couples who wanted to get married outside their local church (if they even had one). He wondered if this fit with a theologically grounded understanding of Christian marriage.

The church was a non-denominational evangelical church which had been started about 25 years earlier. About 75 people attended the worship service on an average Sunday and most of the people in the church were under 45. In addition to Pastor Pete, the church staff included a 20’s/30’s pastor and a husband-wife team who worked with the church’s youth programs. On things like a wedding policy, the Church Board would willingly engage in a discussion of the issues, but Pastor Pete had a lot of freedom to develop the theological and structural pieces as he saw fit before taking them to the Board for final discussion and approval.

The wedding policy that Pastor Pete developed and then refined with the help of the Church Board (see attached) had several guidelines that were of specific relevance for the situation Pastor Pete was about to encounter. The policy stated that the couple desiring to get married should be regularly attending worship services at this church or at another church. The policy also required six sessions of premarital counseling which needed to begin at least four months before the wedding date. The policy framed marriage as the context for sexual intercourse and asked that if a couple was living together, they would arrange to live separately and practice sexual abstinence until after their wedding. The policy proved to be a good tool for helping Pastor Pete and the church field the requests that came in.

Then one day Pastor Pete got a phone call from Ben Gomez. Eight years earlier Ben had been in the youth group that Pastor Pete had worked with back in Illinois. Ben’s parents were long-time active members of the church in Illinois and Ben had been active in the youth group. In addition to his consistent involvement in the weekly activities of the youth group, Ben had gone on several trips which Pastor Pete had helped to lead. Ben and Pastor Pete had spent a lot of time together over a three-year period. They had not kept in touch over the years and it was a nice surprise for Pastor Pete to hear from Ben.

Ben was now also living in Colorado, about 90 miles away. The reason he was calling was that he and his girlfriend wanted to get married and he was wondering if Pastor Pete would do the ceremony. As they caught up on the news from the past few years, Pastor Pete heard a couple things that created tension in him. He learned that Ben had drifted away from the faith and didn’t consider himself a Christian anymore, though he wasn’t hostile to Christianity. He also learned that Ben and his girlfriend were living together.

Pastor Pete assumed that there were at least two reasons Ben was interested in having a pastor perform the wedding ceremony. Based on Ben’s upbringing, Ben seemed to have a sense that this was the “right” thing to do. And knowing Ben’s parents, Pastor Pete knew it would really hurt Mr. and Mrs. Gomez if Ben didn’t get married in the church, something he assumed Ben was acutely aware of too.

As the phone conversation continued, Pastor Pete’s mind was racing. On the one hand, he felt that pastors should be very clear about the Christian nature of their calling. He believed that the pastor’s role is *not* to serve as chaplain to society, to show up at momentous events to validate or bless the events by his/her presence. He held that a pastor needs to shrewdly avoid embracing roles and activities that dilute the gospel by blessing that which does not conform to

the way of Christian discipleship. The same reasons he would not perform “cultural” baptisms seemed relevant to this situation. He believed that a pastor should always be reaching out to those outside the church, but should retain a keen sense of the difference between the church and the rest of the world. If a couple wanted a minister of the gospel to marry them, then they should understand and embrace the Christ-centered nature of Christian marriage. If their conception of marriage was not Christocentric, then they should not expect a Christian pastor to do the ceremony. Additionally, though no one in his church had insinuated this, Pastor Pete felt that he was hired to serve the local church, and doing outside weddings took time and attention away from this. This wasn’t a major issue for him, but it did come to mind.

On the other hand, this was different than all the times total strangers called to ask about getting married. Pastor Pete had a relationship with Ben, a relationship Ben put at least some value in because he had chosen to call Pastor Pete at this time. Pastor Pete also thought that pre-marital sessions (if these could be arranged given the distance) and the wedding itself could provide the opportunity to speak of Christ in a way that clearly communicated God’s desire to be at the center of this marriage. So Pastor Pete felt he might be able to effectively witness to Christ by doing this wedding. By doing it, he might provide a conduit for God’s redeeming grace to reach Ben and his girlfriend. And if Pastor Pete *didn’t* agree to do the ceremony, would this simply offend Ben and push him further away from the church?

This request didn’t seem to fall within the general intentions of the church wedding policy, but then the policy recognized that not all situations fit neatly within its guidelines and so exceptions were possible. Pastor Pete found it fairly easy to decide whether or not to say yes to most wedding requests, but not this time.

All these thoughts were swirling in his head in the last few minutes as he talked on the phone with Ben. The conversation had now reached a point where Pastor Pete had to say something about where things would go from here.



Marriage Preparation Guidelines

Breckenridge Christian Ministries

Thank you for asking about the possibility of being married at Breckenridge Christian Ministries. We believe that marriage is a holy union set up by God and so we are committed to fostering healthy, God-honoring marriages.

Because of this commitment, couples who want to be married here at BCM are asked to agree to certain foundational principles, go through pre-marital counseling in the months leading up to the wedding ceremony, and participate in follow-up counseling in the months after the wedding ceremony. We want to do all we can to help you prepare well for the life-long commitment and celebration that is marriage!

We ask couples wanting to get married here at BCM to agree to the following guidelines:

1. Christ is the key to a rich, God-honoring marriage. We ask that couples wanting to be married at BCM be believers in Jesus Christ with a faith that is reflected in their lifestyles, **or** a couple must be open to discussing what it would mean for them and their marriage to become believers in Jesus Christ.
In keeping with biblical teaching (e.g., 2 Corinthians 6:14-16), we are not able to perform the wedding of a Christian to a non-Christian.
2. Christians are instructed to meet together regularly to worship God. Worshipping together forms us into who God wants us to be – as a community, as individuals, and as married couples. Therefore, a couple wanting to be married here at BCM is asked to regularly attend our weekly time of worship (or to attend worship in your own church if you are currently attending one).
3. All wedding ceremonies will be conducted as a Christian celebration which will include prayer, scripture reading, and reference to God's plan for marriage. Musical selections, vows, poetry, and all other aspects of the ceremony need to be consistent with the nature of a Christian celebration.
4. The couple needs to have known each other for a substantial amount of time, preferably at least one year.
5. Six sessions of premarital counseling are required and need to begin four months or more before the wedding date. This is to be arranged with the person performing the ceremony. A follow-up session will take place 6-12 months after the wedding date in order to do what we can to nurture your new marriage.

6. Sexual intercourse is the physical expression of the spiritual bond in marriage. Violating God's design damages this spiritual bond which is required for a healthy marriage.

We believe that God designed sexual intercourse solely for the context of marriage between a man and a woman. Couples wanting to be married at BCM are expected to practice sexual abstinence until after their wedding.

If a couple has been living together, we ask that they arrange to live separately until after their wedding.

7. Marriage has been established by God as a permanent union that is never to be disrupted. At the same time, the Bible recognizes that we humans are imperfect. As a result of this human sinfulness, divorces occur.

We deal with each case of divorce and remarriage on an individual basis, taking into account both God's view of divorce and God's inexhaustible capacity to forgive human sinfulness and to heal broken lives.

All attempts to reconcile with a former spouse should be exhausted before remarriage is considered.

We understand that a couple may find themselves in a situation that doesn't fit neatly into the above guidelines; we are open and willing to discuss each relationship on an individual basis.

If after thoughtful consideration, both of you are comfortable with these guidelines, then we would look forward to helping you prepare for your wedding and the adventure of marriage. Please call and make an appointment with us to begin the process!

Before you set your wedding date, please meet with the officiant to be sure all guidelines are understood and to be sure that the officiant is available on the date you desire.

We have read the BCM guidelines for marriage and, as an investment in our marriage, willingly agree to abide by them.

Signature of the Bride Date

Signature of the Groom Date

Name-Printed

Name-Printed

Address

Address

Phone #

Phone #