

# Marriage Policy of Constance Evangelical Free Church

(Adopted by the Elder board 04/26/2006) (Rev 3/28/2009) (Rev 11/2015)

*Constance is committed to helping couples build Christ-centered marriages that will last a lifetime – “A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:12b)*

It is the desire of Constance Evangelical Free Church that marriages within our church body be all that God intends for marriage. Marriage is not a human created institution – marriage is God-designed between one man and one woman. Since God designed the marriage relationship, He knows best how to build a marriage that will last a lifetime. Since we are committed as a church to building healthy marriages, we present the following biblically based policies for marriages at Constance Free Church, officiated by a Constance Pastor:

- 1) **Regular Attenders - Constance will only marry couples who have a strong connection to the Constance church body** – Weddings at Constance are part of the life of the church. It is the church as community, involved with the couple being married, that affirms the couple’s decision. Since a wedding is performed in the context of the life of the church, only members or regular attenders for at least six months will be approved.
- 2) **Premarital counseling** – Every couple that desires to marry at Constance must complete the following:
  - a) A marriage seminar offered by Constance or a designated provider
  - b) A “Prepare” Inventory – in addition to a group-based marriage seminar, each couple must complete a Prepare Inventory that covers such topics as: personality, marital expectations, communication, conflict resolution, sexual expectations, children/parenting, family of origin, friends, role relationship and finances
  - c) A meeting to discuss the results of the Prepare Inventory. ***Note: To allow adequate time for the counseling process, couples must begin the counseling process at least 4 months prior to their wedding date.***A pastor is also available for a 6 month to 1-year post marriage assessment and consultation.
- 3) **Unequally Yoked** - Constance will not marry couples if they are “unequally yoked” spiritually. “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (2Cor 6:14) Spiritual compatibility is critical in building a lasting marriage. Constance will marry a believer to a believer, and will marry a seeker to a seeker, but will not marry a believer to a non-believer, for the sake of that couple.
- 4) **We recommend a minimum of a one-year dating relationship before marriage** – Even though some people have the skills and maturity to build a committed relationship sooner than others, there are no shortcuts to building intimacy, trust and

communication.

- 5) **Divorced persons may be considered for marriage at Constance**, provided they meet one of these biblical criteria:
- a) The former spouse is now deceased. (Romans 7:2, 1 Cor 7:39)
  - b) The divorce occurred prior to one's conversion to Christ. (2 Cor 5:17)
  - c) The divorce occurred because of sexual unfaithfulness by former spouse. (Matt 19:3-9)
  - d) Desertion by an unbelieving former spouse. (1 Cor 7:15)
  - e) The former spouse initiated divorce and has remarried. (Romans 7:3)

If none of the above criteria apply to a couple's situation, they may arrange a meeting with a pastor to consider their individual case in consultation with the Elder Board. We acknowledge that there are often other extenuating circumstances related to divorce. Persons who are divorced should read the "Statement on Divorce" brochure prior to meeting with the pastor.

Additionally, remarriages after divorce of a spouse will be performed only after one year has passed from the time the divorce is finalized. A divorce recovery program must be completed either at Constance or another church. We encourage divorced persons to pursue the potential for a healthy reconciliation and allow time for significant healing to take place.

- 6) **Remarriage following the death of a spouse** – We recommend a minimum of one year between the passing of a spouse and remarriage. Widows, widowers and their fiancé(e)s must attend a grief recovery class or attend individual counseling before they consider marriage again.
- 7) **Couples must abstain from physical intimacy**- Sex is a gift from God. He is the one who created it! Therefore, we must follow God's directions alone regarding our sexuality. The Bible gives us clear instructions for sex within the parameters of the marriage relationship (2 Corinthians 6:3) God's Word also gives us clear warnings and consequences when sex is used outside of the marriage. While many couples come to Constance honoring God by abstaining from sexual intimacy, some do not. Couples who are physically intimate are asked to covenant with God, with the support of the church, to abstain from their sexual relationship until their wedding day. If they are living together, we ask that they also move apart until their wedding day.
- 8) **Cohabitation** – Some couples cite economics, convenience or compatibility testing as rationale to cohabit monogamously prior to marriage. While there may be short term economic or other benefits from cohabitation, an abundance of research indicates those who cohabit have a much higher risk of marriage failure than those who do not. Consider these biblical principles:
- a) We are called as Christians to flee temptation: "Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord

- out of a pure heart” 2 Tim 2:22 (NIV) Also see James 1:13-18. Living together in private, close proximity creates enormous opportunity and temptation to engage in physical intimacy. Couples should not subject each other to such temptations.
- b) We are called to Holy Living. “But among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these things are improper for God’s holy people.” Eph 5:3 (NIV). Living together implies physical intimacy in our society and brings discredit to God’s name. Also see Romans 12:1 (living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God), and Col 3:1-17
  - c) We are called to be Examples of Holy Living to Others. “Do not cause anyone to stumble”. 1 Cor 10:32 (NIV) “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing”. 1 Thess 5:11 (NIV) How we live our lives can be an enormous testimony to others. We can either spur another on to holy living, or we can further justify a life-style that is less than God designed for us.

Cohabitation weakens our testimony, subjects our loved ones to temptation and can hinder strong marriages. Therefore, we ask couples who are living together to move apart until their wedding day.

When couples are living together with children, we recognize that the request to move apart may have a damaging impact on the children. In these situations we offer a Pastor-performed private wedding in the short that would allow the couple to begin living within God’s design, to be followed by a public wedding celebration. Alternatively, the couple may instead choose to abstain from physical intimacy until their wedding day even though they may continue to live in the same home. Couples living together with children should include a formal repentance/restoration observance as part of their marriage ceremony.

**9) No Pastor on the Constance staff will marry a couple if another Constance pastor has refused to perform the ceremony.**

In conclusion, this policy has been created based on Constance Evangelical Free Church’s belief in God’s plan for marriage, and is meant to encourage, protect, and strengthen the couple’s commitment to Christ. Due to the complex nature of interpersonal relationships, there may be some exceptions to these guidelines. These exceptions are determined on an individual basis by the pastoral staff, who may seek consultation for an exception with the Elder Board.