

East Richland Evangelical Friends Church Policy on Marriage

A. Purpose and Biblical Authority for Marriage

East Richland Evangelical Friends Church (EREFC) believes the Bible teaches that marriage was instituted by God. Our joy and conviction is ***“To help create Christ-Centered families.”*** In light of this, we believe the following to be true about marriage:

1. ***Marriage is between one man and one woman.*** Genesis 2:24 says, *“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”* The only human members of the marriage relationship are one man and one woman, therefore, the term *marriage* has only one meaning: the uniting of man and woman in a single, exclusive union as delineated in Scripture (Gen. 2:18-25).
 - a. ***We believe that God wonderfully foreordained and immutably created each person as either male or female in conformity with their biological sex.***
 - b. ***These two distinct, yet complimentary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (Gen. 1:26-27). Rejection of one’s biological sex is a rejection of the image of God in that person.***
2. ***Marriage is a covenant.*** In Matthew 19:6, Jesus says, *“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”* God interacts with man under His own authority through covenant relationships (*Genesis chapters 9, 12, 15, 17; Galatians 3*). Therefore, when Jesus says, *“what God has joined together”*, it is a statement of the authority of God infused into the marriage relationship. In light of this, marriage is not simply a contract but a permanent, covenant relationship.
3. ***Marriage is a representation of Christ’s relationship with the church.*** Ephesians 5:23 says, *“For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.”* We believe that a healthy marriage relationship will strive to mirror the relationship that Christ has with the church.

B. EREFC’s Position on Cohabiting and Same-Sex Relationships

NOTE: It is expected that couples who fall under the circumstances described in subsections b and c below will participate in the comprehensive counseling and mentorship as laid out in section D-5 of this policy.

1. ***Marriage is not to be preceded by cohabitation.*** Galatians 5:19 introduces what Paul calls *“the acts of the flesh”* where he writes, *“The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, ...”* He also writes in Ephesians 5:6-7, *“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.”* We believe that cohabiting couples cannot honor God by living together prior to marriage. No wedding dates will be reserved on the EREFC calendar for a couple that is currently cohabiting. Our desire is to come alongside these couples, as long as they are willing, and help them change not only their living situation, but also help them understand the following:

- a. ***The sexual union between a man and woman is a sacred, God-ordained union.*** As shown above in Genesis 2:24, the union of a man and woman in the marriage relationship clearly precedes the action of the man and woman “*becoming one flesh*” through sexual union.
 - b. ***If a couple is cohabiting they must choose to live apart until they are married.*** We desire to help a cohabiting couple understand the danger of living together prior to marriage. If the couple comes to the realization that they are not honoring God and the marriage covenant by living together and truly repent of this, EREFC will consider the following pending final approval by the Elders:
 - i. ***An EREFC pastor will marry the couple immediately (within 10 days of meeting with a pastor) through a small, private ceremony. After the ceremony, EREFC will then reserve an available date for a formal ceremony in the future upon the couple’s request.***
 - ii. ***If the couple does not desire to be married immediately, EREFC will reserve an available date on the church calendar AFTER the couple has begun to live in separate residences.***
 - c. ***If a couple is cohabiting with children involved, they need to remedy this living situation by getting married immediately (within 10 days of meeting with a pastor).*** The desire of EREFC is to come alongside couples who genuinely want to honor the Lord with their lives and who want to correct their living situation and show that they honor the covenant of marriage. Hebrews 13:4 says, “*Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*” If a cohabiting couple with children is truly repentant and wants to honor God by getting married, EREFC will consider marrying them upon approval by the Elders.
2. **Same-sex unions are not condoned in Scripture.** Leviticus 18:22 says, “Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.” Additionally, Romans 1:26-28 says, “*Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.*” These verses clearly prohibit same-sex unions, therefore, EREFC will respectfully decline to perform marriages between same-sex couples. EREFC will respectfully decline requests to use any of its property or facilities to host or otherwise participate in same-sex unions or any gatherings of celebration thereof. Attempts will be made to come alongside these individuals in a loving manner to help guide them to the truth of Scripture.

(Faith & Practice, pg. 15, par. 306: “*Evangelical Friends believe that same sex marriages violate God’s Word. Temptation to sexual relations outside the marriage covenant of man and woman – husband and wife – may be overcome by the grace of God.*”)

C. EREFC's Position on Remarriage

God, the Creator of the marriage covenant, clearly intended marriage to be a lifelong union of one man to one woman. This is demonstrated in Mark 10:6-9, *"But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."* Because of the effects of sin, EREFC understands the reality that some marriages end in divorce. Scripture reveals that God is the God of reconciliation, and EREFC's desire is to help restore broken relationships where possible.

1. **EREFC seeks to be compassionate toward and come alongside those from broken marriages.** We recognize that many who are divorced desire to once again be married. The policy of the Evangelical Friends Church – Eastern Region regarding remarriage is as follows:

(Faith & Practice, pg. 15, par. 310: *"Evangelical Friends ought not to marry divorced persons, except where divorce was granted on grounds of adultery and abandonment. We ask our ministers to consider the circumstances carefully, perhaps in consultation with the leaders of their congregations, before deciding whether to perform the ceremony."*)

Every wedding request made to EREFC where at least one party has been divorced will be thoroughly evaluated by the Pastors and the Elders before any date is set on the calendar or any participation by EREFC is committed.

2. **The following will be considered regarding remarriage:**

- a. **In instances where adultery occurred resulting in divorce:** EREFC will consider remarriage of divorced persons by looking to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19:9 where He says, *"I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."* While this is not a command, nor is it God's will, Jesus gives instruction that divorce is permissible in this circumstance.
- b. **In instances where abandonment occurred resulting in divorce:** EREFC will consider remarriage of divorced persons by looking to Paul's instructions in I Corinthians 7:10-11 where he writes, *"But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace."* When a person is left in a state of physical or emotional abandonment by their spouse, it is clear that there can be a release from that relationship.

D. EREFC's Requirements for Performing Wedding Ceremonies

NOTE: All decisions regarding the reservation of dates for EREFC facilities, EREFC ministers, EREFC representatives, or any participation by EREFC in any capacity, in any wedding, are at the discretion of the Elders who have the final decision in all instances.

Any couple who wishes to be married in EREFC facilities, by EREFC ministers, or have any affiliation with EREFC, will agree to the above biblical tenants regarding marriage. Additionally, the couple will agree to participate in the following **Marriage Preparation** process which will take approximately 6 months to complete:

1. **Each person must demonstrate their personal trust in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.** The couple interested in being married at EREFC will meet with one of the pastors to discuss their personal relationship with Christ and who He is to them. In our conviction "To help create Christ-Centered families", our desire is to participate with couples in obedience to II Cor. 6:14 where Paul writes, "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. **If applicable, the couple will be asked to commit to abstain from any sexual activity until they are married.** Given EREFC's desire to come alongside couples who wish to marry, it is in the best interest of the couple to ask for a commitment to stop any sexual activity. I Thessalonians 4:3-4 says, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable" God desires a life that is marked by holiness, therefore, EREFC desires to help couples move in that direction with sensitivity and encouragement.
3. **At least one member of the couple should regularly attend EREFC.** EREFC's desire is to be available to all members and regular attenders of EREFC who wish to be married here. We understand that occasionally it is not possible for either member of the couple to attend EREFC on a regular basis due to living out of town. At this point, we would ask that they demonstrate their commitment to regular attendance in a local, Bible-believing, Bible-teaching church wherever they happen to live.
4. **EREFC will consider performing weddings for relatives of an active member who agree to the EREFC Policy on Marriage.** If a requested date is in conflict between an active member and the immediate *relative* of an active member, preference will be given to the active member over the immediate *relative* of an active member.
5. **The couple will participate in comprehensive premarital counseling with a trained mentor couple.** This is perhaps one of the most valuable facets of marriage preparation at EREFC. Each engaged couple will be connected with a mature, mentor couple who has been selected and trained to take them through counseling in areas such as lifestyle adjustments, extended family issues, communication, finances, intimacy, and spiritual health. In this mentoring process, the mentor couple will spend time regularly with the engaged couple to help them with godly council, encouragement, and candid discussions of what marriage is like in real life. This mentor relationship will be maintained throughout the entire marriage preparation process.

We have read the above EREFC Policy on Marriage and agree with the biblical principles set forth in the policy. Additionally, we agree to follow the requirements for being married at EREFC and/or by EREFC ministers. We understand that final approval of our request for EREFC's participation in our wedding is at the discretion of the Elders. Our questions have been answered, and we commit to complete the Marriage Preparation process with a mentor couple.

Couple's Signatures:

Date: _____

Elder Approval by:

Date: _____