# ECOB Marriage ministry

## OVERVIEW

We are delighted that you desire to have your wedding at our church! It is an honor to share in this chapter of your lives. The process that follows reflects our commitment to Christ-centered marriage. It also reflects our commitment to you and the success of your marriage. Please take the time to look through this document. It is specifically written for those who are discerning whether to use the building, staff, and ministry of ECOB to begin their marriage. We desire to walk with you and we believe, in walking together, your marriage will be strengthened and encouraged.

## Marriage Ministry Focus

The Marriage Ministry of the Ephrata Church of the Brethren is designed for persons who are centered in Christ and active members and/or participants of the congregation. Exceptions are made on a case-by-case basis; however, are very rare in nature.

## Officiating Clergy

All weddings performed at the Ephrata Church of the Brethren will be conducted by an ordained pastor from ECOB. Other clergy may participate if mutually agreed upon by the ECOB officiating pastor and the couple – and approved by the Lead Pastor of the Ephrata Church of the Brethren.

We believe that community is important in building and sustaining a couple’s marriage. Because of this, outside pastors are not allowed conduct weddings at ECOB by themselves. An ECOB ordained/licensed pastor is to be a part of the process and wedding, in some fashion, in order to seek that connection with the couple after the wedding ceremony.

ECOB does not allow couples who are not regular attendees of ECOB to use the facility for their wedding ceremony. If a couple desires to be married at ECOB, they must be attending regularly for a minimum of 6 months. Extreme circumstances can be discussed with the Lead Pastor for possible movement exemptions.

## Biblical Foundations

The Ephrata Church of the Brethren affirms Christian marriage as an expression of God’s covenant relationship with humankind. This divine institution focuses on the following:

1. A Covenant with God.
	1. Three parties are joined in a service of marriage: the bride, the groom, and Christ. This covenant experience is marked by holiness - in that it emulates Christ’s relationship with the Church.

“Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless.” Ephesians 5:25-27

1. A Covenant with God’s People
	1. Christianity is not a solo experience – but a commitment lived out in community. Thus, persons seeking marriage are to be in covenant with God’s people – rooted in a congregation, specifically at ECOB. Only in this context and the extended relationship it affords - can couples receive the love, support, mentoring, and accountability needed for an effective relationship.

"Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing -but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 10:25

A commitment to God’s covenant leads to several basic understandings.

1. Union with Christ

As noted earlier, three parties are joined in Christian marriage: the bride, groom and Christ. For this reason, affirmation of Jesus Christ, as Lord, by both bride and groom, is a needed benchmark so that integrity undergirds the marriage covenant (2 Corinthians 7:14-18).

1. The Permanence of Marriage

The biblical image of one flesh (Ephesians 5:32) - underscores the permanence of marriage from God’s perspective. Thus, every effort is made - with existing, new and potential couples - to underscore the life - long commitment represented in the marriage covenant (Malachi 2:14).

1. Sexual Purity

Throughout both the Old and New Testament God calls persons to sexual purity and sanctity (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8). Such reality is achieved within a covenant relationship sealed in the presence of both God and His church.

1. Heterosexual Union

The Book of Genesis establishes God’s order for creation (Genesis 1:27-28). This order provides for union between man and woman, in the covenant of marriage, i.e. the experience of becoming ‘one flesh’ (Genesis 2:20-24). It is our intent to draw people toward these understandings. We do so through a ministry of love, conviction, grace, and mentoring. It is our intent to walk with persons as they discover a deeper level of obedience to Christ and His Word.

# MARRIAGE MINISTRY PROCESS

The Ephrata Church of the Brethren Marriage Ministry Process is designed to be a continuum of care. This process begins prior to the wedding day and continues for the months and years that follow.

The items that follow detail the various components of this process — normally requiring six months to implement. Persons are expected to participate in each aspect of the process. Exceptions are made on a case by case basis.

*Please note: special provisions/arrangements will be made for non-resident participants/members to allow for full participation in the process.*

## PREPARATION

### Initial Inquiry

Preparation for marriage begins with an initial inquiry with the Lead Pastor. Couples are asked to read the congregation’s Marriage Ministry Guidelines prior to the Pastoral Interview. If in agreement, the couple may call and schedule an appointment with the pastor of their choice.

*Please note: A wedding date cannot be finalized until the pastor has determined that the couple is ready for marriage. If the wedding applicants have already selected the date, it is understood that, at any time, the officiating pastor can discern to either not participate in the wedding or encourage the couple to seek additional counseling.*

### Pastoral Interview

During this session, the couple’s readiness for marriage preparation is determined. It is during the Pastoral Interview that the pastor agrees to work with the couple as they begin to prepare for marriage.

### Application for Wedding

At the pastor’s discretion for counseling readiness, the couple will be asked to complete the Application for Wedding. Upon signing the application, the couple agrees to participate in every aspect of the Marriage Ministry process, including (but not limited to): completion of the PREPARE Inventory; participation in a marriage Life Group, connection with a Marriage Mentor Couple. The officiating pastor will not sign the application until he/she feels the couple is ready for marriage.

Following the submission and final signature of the officiating pastor of the Application for Wedding, a confirmation letter is sent indicating agreed upon dates and times for the wedding rehearsal and ceremony, and other related activities and events. After receipt of this letter, a Wedding Coordinator will initiate contact with the couple to establish dates for further wedding preparation and planning.

*Please note: At any point, the officiating pastor may change or amend the Application for Wedding based on his/her discernment and discretion.*

### PREPARE Inventory

To help with marriage preparation, couples complete the PREPARE Inventory. This inventory measures strength and growth areas, providing a basis for the couple to discuss issues in their relationship during the pastoral counseling. The couple contacts the officiating pastor will arrange the completion of the inventory – most likely online. A small fee (see amendment for fee schedule) covers the cost of compiling the results of the PREPARE Inventory and will be paid by the couple.

### Pastoral Counseling

Pastoral counseling begins several months prior to the wedding service and enables the officiating pastor and couple to realistically assess their readiness for marriage.

*Please note: Since pastoral counseling is the means by which the pastor determines readiness for marriage, a wedding date is confirmed during this stage of the process. To assist the couple with wedding planning, a finalization of the wedding date can typically be determined after 3-4 counseling sessions. However, in some cases, the pastor and the couple may mutually agree to postpone a weddings date to allow for additional pre-marital counseling or for individual counseling, when warranted.*

### Marriage Life Group

[Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts (SYMBIS)] This multi-session learning experience complements counseling offered by the officiating pastor. Conducted in a group setting (with other engaged or recently married couples), this class focuses on necessary skills for effective relationships and Christian marriage. To accommodate scheduling needs:

1. SYMBIS may be completed at any time prior to or during the couple’s first year of marriage.
2. An equivalent course may be completed through another church when a couple resides out of the area. Attendance must be verified by your officiating pastor.
3. There may be other Life Groups available like, “Art of Marriage” that may be offered for couples to participate in.

## Wedding Ceremony

The wedding ceremony is a worship experience. It is jointly planned among the couple, the Wedding Coordinator, and the officiating pastor/s. To that end, please look of the following considerations.

### General Planning

1. Wedding Coordinator/s
	1. The Wedding Coordinator is an important resource. The Wedding Coordinator assists with logistical detail and use of the church building. The Wedding Coordinator is required for all weddings occurring within the church. Couples have the option – in addition to the church’s Wedding Coordinator – to utilize an ‘outside’ wedding consultant. The involvement of this individual, however, does not replace the role of the church’s coordinator. Your Wedding Coordinator will:
		1. Assist you with general arrangements for ceremonies;
		2. Direct the wedding rehearsal;
		3. Prepare the sanctuary for the wedding ceremony;
		4. Organize and guide your wedding party and ushers to assure that all aspects of the service proceed in an orderly and worshipful manner;
		5. Facilitate use of the church facility (i.e. opening and closing the building, maintenance, use of candelabra and other supplies).
		6. Assist you in planning a reception at the church, if desired. In this regard, the Wedding Coordinator works in partnership with the Kitchen Klassics, which may be able to provide both rehearsal dinners and receptions;
		7. Assist you in the placement of flowers and floral arrangements as needed;
		8. Assist you in securing a list of organists and soloists available for weddings.
		9. It is important to maintain close contact with your Wedding Coordinator throughout the marriage preparation process to ensure that all details are arranged as you prefer. For larger weddings, a Wedding Assistant is required as well.
2. Obtaining A Wedding License
	1. A wedding license must be obtained.
	2. Either the bride - or groom – must apply for and obtain the license from the Clerk of the Court and brought the day of the wedding
3. Wedding Music
	1. The wedding ceremony is a service of worship, and music appropriate for worship should be used. Secular and popular music can be more appropriately used at the wedding reception.
4. Still and Video Photography
	1. Flash pictures are not permitted during the wedding ceremony. Flash pictures may be taken in the sanctuary before and following the wedding service. Photographs using available light without flash may be taken from the back of the church and in the isles. A buffer of 20 feet is expected around the bride/groom/clergy area to not disrupt the service itself.
	2. Video recording is permitted during the service; however, no closer than 20 feet to the bride/groom/clergy.
5. Church Rehearsal Dinner; Wedding Reception
	1. If a rehearsal dinner or wedding reception at the church is desired, please notify your Wedding Coordinator as soon as possible to make arrangements.
6. Use of Church Facilities
	1. For a detailed description for use of our facilities, please consult the Ephrata Church of the Brethren Facility Manual, available upon receipt of your application from the Administrative Assistant of Operations

## Follow-Up

### Pastoral Follow-Up

Approximately six months after the marriage service, the officiating pastor contacts the couple. This contact is an opportunity to ‘check in’ regarding the couple’s experience early in their marriage. Appropriate counsel and encouragement are provided.

### Life Group

Married couples are encouraged to participate in a life group. The purpose of participation in such a group is for support and encouragement during the formative year(s) of the marriage.

### Marriage Mentors

The couple will be introduced to their mentors 6 months prior to their wedding. Typically, a mentor couple has been married for 5 years or longer and has experienced many of the challenges that you will face in your life together. Following your wedding day, you will continue to meet with your marriage mentors for 6 months after your wedding. They will serve as an important part of your support network during those first few years of marriage by providing support, counsel, prayer, and encouragement. Mentors and couples will meet quarterly at a minimum.

# Wedding Fees & Honorarium

### Facilities

The church facilities are available to members and active participants without charge. Fees and honorariums related to services rendered follow:

1. Pre-Martial Ministry Services
	1. Prepare/Enrich - $ 35.00 (online)
	2. SYMBIS - Marriage Preparation class - $ 75.00
2. Wedding Fees
	1. The Wedding Fee Document can be sent upon request – after the initial application process.
	2. Payment for wedding services are arranged through the Wedding Coordinator. All wedding service fees and honorariums are to be paid, checks made out to ECOB, one month prior to the rehearsal. The church will then distribute to designated parties.

### Honorariums and Fees

1. Wedding Fees cover required wedding expenses; Wedding Coordinator, Custodian and A/V tech. Please note:
	1. Fees for large weddings are higher, since they require the use of an Assistant Wedding Coordinator.
	2. If the bride and/or groom are regular attendees of ECOB there is no charge for the use of the ECOB facility. If the bride and/or groom are not regular attendees, the facility cost will follow that of the Building Usage Guidelines. Please remember, that no weddings are done for those outside of ECOB – except under special permission from the Lead Pastor.
	3. There is no charge for the services of ECOB pastors. Often, however, couples provide a ‘love gift’ as a token of appreciation for a pastor’s ministry. Love gifts vary in range and asking the pastor can feel intimating and/or awkward. A guideline to follow is for the couple to take into consideration is the time spent for counseling, preparing and performing the service and rehearsal, and the location/travel needed to do the ceremony. A pastor may take between 10-20 hours to serve a couple during their wedding preparation. Use that information to determine a possible ‘love gift’.
	4. Wedding fees do not cover honorarium for any musicians a couple wishes to utilize. Couples are asked to contract directly with the musicians of their choice. This includes, an organist (Wedding Coordinator can help with that), instrumentalists, and soloists.

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