

Gum Branch Baptist Church

8590 Highway 196 West

Hinesville, Georgia

912-876-3630

Effective November 1, 2014

Pastor's Policy for Conducting and Approving Wedding Services

I. The Decision to Have a Church Wedding

- A. A couple may enter into the wonderful relationship of marriage in two ways: through a church service or through a civil ceremony. A civil ceremony is conducted by an official of the state of Georgia as part of, or as a privilege of, holding public office. A judge and justice of the peace are two examples.
- B. A church service on the other hand, is conducted as part of the religious program of a local church, such as Gum Branch Baptist Church.

II. Respect For Our Heritage of Faith

As Pastor of Gum Branch Baptist Church, I am responsible for conducting or approving all wedding services in our church. I will ensure that all weddings held in our facilities honor the Lord Jesus Christ, remain faithful to the Bible, respect the heritage and uphold the reputation of Gum Branch Baptist Church, and follow the guidelines approved by the church.

III. General Statement on Marriage

- A. *Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.*

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-

given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.¹

- B. The policy of Gum Branch Baptist Church is to affirm love and compassion to all. This love and compassion, however, does not condone the homosexual lifestyle, same-sex marriages or unions, and/or transgender activity/lifestyle. Therefore, no marriages or unions of this sort will be allowed or conducted on Gum Branch Baptist Church property or by any of the staff or laity.
- C. Though marriage has the potential for bringing immeasurable joy into the lives of two people in love, it also holds the potential for untold misery. What a couple experiences in their relationship between these two extremes will depend upon them; i.e., their commitment to each other, their willingness to be challenged and to grow, their depth of maturity, communication and knowledge, as well as their relationship with God. A successful relationship is not easy, but it is more than worth every effort.
- D. I, therefore, hold the honor of uniting two people in marriage as a wonderful privilege from, and a solemn responsibility to, both the couple and God.

IV. Guidelines: With these thoughts in mind, I have established the following guidelines for my performing weddings at Gum Branch Baptist Church.

- A. *Commitment:* The couple is approaching the marriage as a life-long commitment to each other and to a continually maturing relationship.
- B. *God:*
 - i. The couple recognizes God's authority in their lives and over their marriage, i.e. they view their commitment as recognized and blessed by God, and empowered through their individual and joint relationship to God. The couple desires a church wedding as a statement of the lordship of Christ in their lives and is not merely seeking a beautiful building or the socially preferred ceremony mentioned in etiquette books.

¹ The Baptist Faith and Message 2000. <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>

- ii. Regular participation in worship services is a strong indication of the authority which God holds in the lives of the couple. Circumstances may vary, but in most cases I will have personal knowledge of their dedication to God through regularly seeing them in worship.
 - iii. I have learned from experience that the obvious often needs stating: a couple who is living together is not honoring God. Such conduct is sin. It is hypocritical to enter church and ask God's blessing on a marriage while living in clear disobedience to Him. Therefore, I will not perform a wedding service while a couple is living together or living in separate households but engaging in sex activity. A couple must first confess the sin to God, repent in their heart, and reverse their actions. The good news of the Gospel is that Christ died to forgive sin and to restore the repentant sinner.
- C. *Pastor*: The couple needs to understand my concern for each of them as a pastor and friend. They must also be confident in my competence as a counselor and clergyman. These are the primary reasons the couple is inviting me to take part in their wedding.
- D. *Counseling*: The couple is willing to meet with me for counseling in preparation for their marriage. Since circumstances and people vary, the number of times we meet in advance of the wedding service will vary. The better the counseling, the better prepared the couple will be. I prefer a minimum of four meetings beginning at least six months prior to the wedding and involving both members of the couple. However, adjustments may be made based on particular situations.
- E. *Outside Preparation*: The couple is willing to complete outside assignments (reading, listening to podcasts or compact discs, viewing videos, discussions, etc.) I make as part of counseling. By "outside" I mean outside the counseling sessions.
- F. *Previous Marriage*: This should be the only marriage in the life of both the bride and the groom; the exception being in the case where a spouse has died. As the general statement and the statement on commitment indicate, I hold that "what God has joined together no man should put asunder." I will discuss exceptions where Matthew 5:32 (adultery) or 1 Corinthians 7:15 (desertion by an unbelieving spouse) apply.
- G. *The Service*: All the law requires from me to join a couple in marriage is my signature on the Marriage Certificate. Anything else is included to make the

occasion an especially meaningful event for the couple and their families. The format of the service will be planned by the couple and me during counseling and will follow their desires as far as possible. I do have two stipulations: first, that the content of the wedding vows parallels those in the traditional wedding service; second that all portions of the service are done in "decency and in order", befitting a service in Gum Branch Baptist Church.

- H. *Cancellation of the Service:* I will not conduct or proceed with the Wedding Ceremony Service if the Marriage Certificate/Documents are not given to me *prior* to the start of the ceremony – No Exceptions. Also, I reserve the privilege to withdraw from participation in the service at any time that I feel continuation would be detrimental to the couple or Gum Branch Baptist Church, or would constitute a breach of personal conviction. Should this become necessary I promise to explain what I believe would be the damage caused by continuing.
- I. *Post-Marital Counseling:* My role as a counselor, pastor, and friend does not end at the altar. I am available and would like to meet with the couple in the months and years following the service. The couple will agree to keep this option open and will meet with me at least once during the first year of their marriage.

V. Approving a Wedding Conducted By Another Clergyman

A Clergyman, in good standing and authorized to performing weddings in Georgia, may, at the invitation of the couple, conduct marriage ceremonies at Gum Branch Baptist Church. However, I will not approve a wedding that I, in good conscience, would not conduct myself. Therefore, such services must also meet the guidelines mentioned above.

VI. Scheduling a Wedding

To set up an appointment to discuss a wedding and to schedule the sanctuary, a couple should call 912-876-3630 or visit me at the church.

-Gabe Gill
Senior Pastor