



**KEEP YOUR
CHURCH
OUT OF
COURT** 
SEMINAR

**Section 6
Facilities, Weddings
& Funerals**



KEEP YOUR CHURCH OUT OF COURT



SEMINAR

Section 6

Facilities, Weddings & Funerals

Section 6 Outline.....	129
Policy Issues Summary	133
Facility Use Policy & User Agreement.....	137
“Churches Are Not Places of Public Accommodation”	143
by Harvard Law School Journal on Legislation	
Service & Comfort Animals Policy.....	147
Transgender Guidelines	151
Definition of Marriage.....	153
Covenant Marriage Summary	157
Covenant Marriage Position Paper	159
Wedding Handbook	165



Section 6 Outline

Facilities, Weddings & Funerals

Policy Issues Summary* 133

- Abuse Prevention Policy – As church leaders, we have the high calling and duty to safeguard the minor kids and students entrusted to us. This requires a robust abuse prevention policy to provide for the safety of everyone in our care. See Section 3
- Minor Participation Policy – As a matter of policy, churches should require a minor participation and consent to emergency medical treatment form for all special and off-campus activities. See Section 4
- Social Media Policy – Social media policies generally address the positive (and negative) roles played by social networking in advancing the church’s mission.
- Staff Team Policies – Staff team employee policies include a range of issues, including sabbaticals, work habits, proper handling of church-owned equipment and church-provided services.
- ADA Compliance – The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides guidelines for what is necessary for organizations to provide accommodation to individuals with disabilities. While churches must comply with portions of the ADA, churches are exempt from the ADA as it relates to public accommodation.

Facility Use Policy

- Facility Use Policy & User Agreement* 137

A Facility Use Policy establishes rules for the use of church facilities by outside groups and organizations.

- Purpose – Church facilities are for Christ-centered purposes and reflect the church’s desire to be good neighbors in its community.
- Scope & Statement of Faith – The Facility Use Policy imposes limits on the use of church facilities. **Any activity must conform to the church’s adopted policies and doctrinal beliefs. A summary statement of faith is included in the Facility Use Policy to remove any ambiguity about the church’s doctrinal positions.**
- Scheduling Priority – Church events and member use for special occasions take first and second priority, respectively, in scheduling.
- Procedure & Application – Outside groups and organizations must complete the attached User Agreement in order to use church facilities.
- Fees & Insurance – Rental and maintenance fees, damage deposits and certificates of insurance requirements are outlined in the Facility Use Policy.



- Prohibited Activities – Any purpose inconsistent with the goals, purposes, policies or teachings of the church are prohibited. Other specific disallowed activities are also detailed here.
- Cancellation – The church reserves the right to cancel any event up to thirty days prior to an event.
- User Agreement – The User Agreement is confirmation that that the outside group or organization will use church facilities in accordance with the church’s goals, purposes and teachings.
- **“Churches Are Not Places of Public Accommodation”** 143
by Harvard Law School Journal on Legislation*
The ADA provides guidelines for what is necessary for organizations to provide accommodation to individuals with disabilities. While churches must comply with portions of the ADA, churches are exempt from the ADA as it relates to public accommodation.
- **Service & Comfort Animals Policy*** 147
Define how the church will facilitate and support the use of both service animals and comfort animals within church facilities. It can be argued that because service animals support individuals with disabilities, every effort should be made to accommodate them. It may be appropriate to more tightly regulate the use of comfort animals in order to minimize disruptions to church events and services.
- **Transgender Guidelines*** 151
Providing clarity for transgender individuals in several areas is important. Consider communicating a summary of these key items:
 - Sincerity in our love for transgendered individuals and our warm welcome to everyone
 - Provision for kids and an invitation to attend corporate worship
 - Attending gender-specific events for your naturally born sex only
 - Attending small groups while transitioning or after a transition
 - Church doctrine and conviction regarding transgendered individuals
 - Restroom limitations or special provisions

Weddings

- **Definition of Marriage*** 153
Churches must define biblical marriage and clarify what marriages may be conducted on church property and be performed by the church's ministers and pastors. Position papers and executive summaries of the church's doctrinal and theological perspective and policy on marriage and divorce can be a useful exercise here.



- Covenant Marriage Summary* 157
Three states—Arizona, Arkansas, and Louisiana—offer covenant marriage as a legally distinct kind of marriage. Prior to entering into a covenant marriage, a couple must attend premarital counseling sessions and sign a statement declaring that a covenant marriage is for life. Typically, a spouse in a covenant marriage desiring a divorce is required to attend marital counseling with a legal divorce occurring only in specific situations. This would include:
 - A spouse who has committed adultery
 - A spouse who has committed a felony
 - A spouse who has engaged in substance abuse
 - A spouse who has physically or sexually abused the spouse or a child
 - Situations where two spouses have lived separately for one or two years (depending on the law of the state)
- Covenant Marriage Position Paper* 159
- Wedding Handbook* 165
Key components of a Wedding Handbook include the church's definition of marriage, statement of faith, guidelines for officiants and ministerial participation, wedding logistics and direction, scheduling, fees and available venues, rules of decorating and other details.

Funerals

- Potential Area of Future Litigation – Churches should detail how and when funeral and memorial services will be conducted on church property and conducted by the church's ministers and pastors. Well-written policies offer legal protection from potential lawsuits seeking damages for policy or doctrinal positions unevenly applied to both members and non-members. Once again, this illustrates the importance of a clear definition of the responsibilities and requirements of church membership.
- Funeral Policy Development
 - Facility Use Policy – Any activity on church property must conform to the church's adopted policies and doctrinal beliefs.
 - Is there a Membership Requirement? How Inclusive Will the Church Be? – Under what circumstances are non-member funeral and memorial services? Churches have a sincere desire to serve their communities and so it's important to balance litigation risk management with missional objectives.
 - What Content Is Permissible? – Detail an approval process for service elements and content, especially when broadening the scope of possible memorials and funeral services out into the community.
 - Who Officiates? – Clarify the role of the church's ministers and pastors in services conducted on church property.

* Document Attached

Policy Issues



[STEWARDSHIP](#) ▾
 [BUDGET](#) ▾
 [STAFFING](#) ▾
 [TEAMS](#) ▾
 [MULTIPLICATION](#) ▾
 [LOGISTICS](#) ▾

Abuse Prevention Policy

Any abuse—whether it be sexual, physical or any other criminal act—should be reported to local police without delay. If a crime has been committed, the first responsibility is to notify local law enforcement authorities. Taking merciful and attentive care of any alleged victims and their families is also a primary responsibility.

After these steps have been taken, the church must conduct pastoral care and church discipline work. This process starts with an incident report and ongoing caring ministry to any alleged victims, parents and family.

As church leaders, we have the high calling and duty to safeguard the minor kids and students entrusted to us. This requires a robust abuse prevention policy to provide for the safety of everyone in our care. Among many provisions, an abuse prevention policy might include the following items:

- **Two Workers Rule** – Always staff two or more workers per classroom or group. No worker should ever be alone with a child or a group of children. Make this rule a matter of policy for all ministries and organizations attached to the church.
- **Active Supervision** – Ministry staff, ushers or church security should make frequent visits to areas and hallways used for preschool, children and student ministry.
- **Open Doors** – During ministry events and activities, no classroom door in utilized areas should be locked. Auto-lock doors should be removed from areas used by minor children, unless required by law or for safety considerations.
- **Windows** – Classroom doors and preschool nursery areas should have windows.
- **Bathrooms** – For single-occupant (non-public, non-multi-occupant) preschool or child bathrooms, doors should be kept cracked whenever a child is taken to the bathroom by an adult worker.
- **Limit Abuse Opportunities** – Think through activities, camps and events with an eye for abuse opportunities and potential landmines. Do not allow or ask workers to be alone with a child or student.
- **Environment** – Create an environment where it is virtually impossible for sexual abuse to occur on church property during church ministries and events. Abuse prevention policy, guidelines, training, audits, awareness, security and video surveillance all play a role in creating this environment.
- **Video Surveillance** – Consider the use of video cameras in all areas used by preschoolers, children and students. Video surveillance can be passive, meaning that recordings are made and kept for a specific period of time, without active viewing of archived material except in cases

of alleged abuse or an incident.

Minor Participation Policy

As a matter of policy, churches should require a minor participation and consent to emergency medical treatment form for all special and off-campus activities. Defining which activities require this form is a gray area, but, in general, all recreation, sports, off-campus, overnight and church-provided transportation activities should require a notarized release for minor participation and emergency medical treatment.

Some churches may choose to require a notarized release annually or semi-annually. Age-division ministries can maintain releases on file so that parents don't have to submit one for each special activity in a given time period.



Liability Waiver – Minor (Fillable PDF)



Liability Waiver – Minor

Social Media Policy

Social media policies generally address the positive role played by social networking in advancing the church's mission. A positive opening statement about the need for its responsible use is an appropriate way to begin:

The church understands that social media can be a fun and rewarding way to share your life and opinions with family, friends and co-workers around the world. However, use of social media also presents certain risks and carries with it certain responsibilities. To assist you in making responsible decisions about your use of social media, we have established these guidelines for appropriate use of social media.

This policy applies to all pastors, staff members and employees who work for the church, or one of its auxiliary ministries in the United States.

Social media policies typically address several other areas of concern:

- **General Guidelines** – General guidelines define what social media is, including blogs, web sites, chat rooms, social networking and any other form of electronic communication.
- **Employee Rules** – Employee rules cover inappropriate posts, discriminatory remarks, harassment, threats of violence or other inappropriate or unlawful conduct.
- **Respect for Others** – Fair and courteous behavior towards fellow workers, church members, suppliers and vendors is covered here. Appropriate conflict resolution procedures are emphasized over public complaints via a social media outlet.
- **Honesty & Accuracy** – Confidentiality of church and member information is covered here, as is a respect for financial disclosure laws. In addition, employees cannot misrepresent their own opinions as those of the church.
- **Using Social Media at Work** – Employees are asked to refrain from using social media while on work time unless it is work-related. Since social networking is becoming a widely used ministry tool, supervisors and employees should discuss appropriate parameters for its use.
- **Retaliation** – Employees are prohibited from taking negative action against another worker, including posts on social networking sites.



Sample Social Media Policy

Sample Social Media Policy excerpted from “OM 12-59 Report of the Acting General Counsel Concerning Social Media Cases” from the National Labor Relations Board.

Staff Team Policies

Staff team employee policies include a range of issues, including sabbaticals, work habits, proper handling of church-owned equipment and church-provided services.



Sample Sabbatical Policy



Sample Sabbatical Policy



Sample Digital Equipment Policy



Sample Digital Equipment Policy



Sample Telecommuting Policy



Sample Telecommuting Policy



Sample Employee Counseling Policy



Sample Staff Childcare Policy

ADA Compliance

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides guidelines for what is necessary for organizations to provide accommodation to individuals with disabilities. While churches must comply with portions of the ADA, churches are exempt from the ADA as it relates to public accommodation.

“It’s Title III, Section 36.102 (e) that provides that the provisions of this title shall not apply to religious organizations,” Attorney John Anthony explains. “The statute basically has a blanket exemption for public accommodation for religious organizations or entities controlled by religious organizations.”

A ministry is not required to comply with ADA standards in its treatment of service animals unless it receives public funding or hosts a publicly funded event.

Even a ministry that is under no legal obligation to admit service animals may choose to use a set of guidelines, such as the ADA, as a guideline for its own service animal policy. By definition, churches are welcoming place and most will voluntarily comply with the ADA in as many ways as possible.



Sample Service & Comfort Animal Policy



Sample Service & Comfort Animal Policy

FIRST WEST | Facility Use Policy

1. **Purpose.** First Baptist Church of West Monroe, Louisiana (the “Church”) offers its facilities for Christ-centered activities that bring glory to God and reflect the Church’s desire to be good neighbors in our community.
2. **Scope.** This Facilities Use Policy (the “Policy”), approved by the Trustees of the Church, applies to the use of all facilities located on the Church’s campus or under the Church’s operating authority (the “Facilities”). It applies to the Church’s trustees, deacons, employees, volunteers, and members, as well as members of the general public seeking to use the Facilities. This Policy imposes limits on the use of the Facilities so that the Facilities can fulfill the Church’s religious, educational, and charitable purposes, and in order to abide by the adopted policies, doctrinal beliefs, and teachings of the Church, governed by the Church’s Constitution and Bylaws. The Trustees reserve the right to modify or amend this Policy at any time as it may deem necessary from time to time.

All events at First West facilities must abide by the Church’s Statement of Faith as codified in the Church’s Constitution as the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. A general summary of this Statement of Faith includes the following doctrinal positions:

God

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He eternally exists as one essence in three co-equal distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. [Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 6:4; Ephesians 4:6; John 14:16-17; John 1:1-18]

Creation & Care

God created the universe and guides history for His purposes. [Genesis 1:1; Romans 8:28]

Christ

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is co-equal with the Father. Jesus lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on a cross. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to Heaven’s glory and will return again someday to Earth to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. [John 1:1, 14; 20:30-31]

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. He is the one who inspired men to write the Scriptures. He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts of sin. He calls men to the Savior, and effects regeneration. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the assurance of God to bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service. [Genesis 1:2; Psalm 139:7; Matthew 28:19; Luke 11:13; John 4:24; 2 Timothy 1:14; Revelation 22:17]

Humanity

People are made in the spiritual image of God, to be like Him in character. People are the supreme object of God’s creation. Although every person has tremendous potential for good, all of us are

marred by an attitude of disobedience toward God called sin. [Genesis 1:26-30; John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 1:21-31; Colossians 1:21-22]

Marriage

Marriage is the union of one (biological) man and one (biological) woman freely and totally committed to one another as companions for life. We believe that because God our Creator established marriage as a sacred institution between one man and one woman, an immutable precept that marriage is a covenant only between one man and one woman has been the traditional and Biblical definition of marriage for all of human history. [Genesis 2:24]

Salvation

Salvation is God's free gift to us, but we must accept it. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement or good works. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's offer of forgiveness can anyone be saved from sin's penalty. When we turn from our self-ruled life and turn to Jesus in faith, we are saved. Eternal life begins the moment one receives Jesus Christ into his life by faith. [Ephesians 2:8-9]

Bible

The Bible is God's Word to us, written by human authors under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the supreme source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. [2 Timothy 3:16-17]

Church

The Church is Christ's body through which He accomplishes His purposes on Earth. [Ephesians 4:12-16]

Baptism

A person demonstrates his acceptance of Christ and joins the local church via believer's baptism. [Acts 2:38, 41-42; 1 Corinthians 12:13]

Lord's Supper

A believer remembers Christ's death and encourages Christian unity through partaking of the Lord's Supper. [1 Corinthians 11:23-26, 33]

Eternity

People were created to exist forever, either eternally separated from God by sin, or eternally with God through forgiveness and salvation. To be eternally separated from God is death. To be eternally in union with Him is eternal life. Heaven and Hell are real places of eternal existence. [Matthew 25:31-41, 45-46]

The Christian & Social Order

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. [Exodus 20:3-17; Leviticus 6:2-5; Deuteronomy 10:12; Romans 12-14; 1 Corinthians 5:9-10; Colossians 3:12-17; James 1:27]

- 3. Priorities for Scheduling.** The use of the Facilities shall be consistent with the Church's religious, educational, and charitable purposes. All requests for use of the Facilities must be approved by the Church Operations Team. The priorities for use of the Facilities are as follows:

 - a. First Priority: Events, activities, and programs of the Church.
 - b. Second Priority: Member use for special occasions.
 - c. Third Priority: Events, activities, and programs of other religious affiliations or non-profit organizations.
 - d. Fourth Priority: Public use for special occasions.
 - e. Fifth Priority: Any other event, activity, or program as approved.
- 4. Procedure.** In order to use the Facilities, each applicant must fill out the attached application and submit it to the Church Operations Manager. Scheduling of all events must be accomplished through the Church Operations Manager. This can be done by email (pdiaz@firstwest.cc / info@firstwest.cc).
- 5. Rental Fees.*** Fees are associated with room rentals at the Church. All fees are payable to First Baptist Church under the terms of the "Rental Agreement" and due in full at least two weeks before the event. The fees and expenses are shown on the attached schedule.
- 6. Maintenance Fees.*** Normal room set-up is included in room rental fees. After normal business hours or Church program hours a maintenance staffing fee or special set-up staffing fee of \$25.00 per hour or any part of an hour will be in force. Renter will be advised if any additional custodial fees will be charged at the time the "Room Rental Agreement" form is approved.
- 7. Damage Deposit.*** A damage deposit is required prior to rental. If there is no damage to the facility or supplies by caterers, guests, etc., it is returned after the event. The amount of the damage deposit is \$150.00. Failure to abide by any of the guidelines as stated herein may result in forfeiture of damage deposit.
- 8. Safety and Insurance.** It is expected that the person in charge of the group attending will be responsible for the oversight and behavior of that group by providing appropriate supervision and risk management. Groups that are not part of the direct ministry of the Church are expected to have adequate insurance for their personal injuries and liabilities. The Church may request a certificate of insurance before approving use of the Facilities.
- 9. Prohibited Activities.** The Facilities may not be used for any of the following: (a) partisan political groups; (b) for-profit activities from which the Church receives no direct benefit; or (c) any purpose which is not consistent with the goals, purposes, policies, or teachings of the Church.** In addition to the foregoing, the following activities are strictly prohibited:

 - a. The use of alcohol is not allowed in the Facilities.
 - b. Smoking is not allowed in the Facilities.
 - c. Weapons are not allowed on Church premises.

- d. Furnishings may not be moved from the Facilities. Maintenance staff will remove any furnishings as necessary and set up tables, chairs, etc. as requested in the reservation.
- e. Nails, tacks, staples, pins, tape, etc. may not be used on the walls of the Facilities.
- f. Only dripless or flameless candles are permitted with use limited to specific locations within the facilities as approved by the Operations Manager.
- g. The Facilities must be left in the condition in which they were found.
- h. Kissing is not allowed on the platform unless the actors are married to each other.
- i. Scripts must be approved by the Worship Ministry or Senior Leadership Team.
- j. If security beyond the Church's volunteer Safety Team is required, the appropriate law enforcement officers will be contracted at a required minimum of 4 hours at \$25 per hour plus a \$2.50-per-hour fuel fee.
- k. No ticket sales or ads for non-Church events will be allowed on the Facilities.

10. Children and Youth on Premises. All youth activities shall be adequately supervised by adults at all times.

11. Audio/Visual Systems. The Church's audio/visual and lighting control systems may only be used when a technician of the Church is present or by special permission from the Church's Worship Pastor.

12. Rescheduling. Once scheduled, groups and functions will generally not be rescheduled or moved. However, the Church reserves the right to move any group to another facility or reschedule that event to accommodate the needs of groups assigned a higher use priority by this Policy.

13. Cancellation. The Church reserves the right to cancel an event up to thirty (30) days prior to the date if facilities are needed for an all-church activity. The Church's Staff will make every effort to re-arrange room reservations for your reserved date.

My signature below indicates my receipt and understanding of this policy. I also verify that I have been provided with the opportunity to ask questions about the policy.

Signature

Date

* Fees are subject to change without notice and are intended to cover the actual cost to the Church for the use of the Facilities. Under special circumstances, pricing will be negotiated.

FIRST WEST | Facility User Agreement

The undersigned, on behalf of the applicant, applies for permission to use the facilities of First Baptist Church of West Monroe (the "Church"). As a condition of approval, the undersigned represents that the information provided is true and accurate.

Name of Group: _____

Sponsoring Organization: _____

Contact Person: _____

Date Needed: _____

Campus / Facility: _____

Hours Needed: _____

Rooms Needed: _____

Purpose of Event: _____

On behalf of the applicant, I certify that I have read and am familiar with the Use of Facilities Policy of First Baptist Church of West Monroe, LA; that all safety and fire laws will be observed; that if our meeting is cancelled, the Operations Manager will be immediately notified; that the applicant will undertake no dangerous activities or activities which will interfere with other uses in the Church's Facilities; that the applicant will indemnify and hold harmless the Church from any and all claims, damages, liabilities, or judgments, including costs and attorneys fees, which may arise as a result of the applicant's use of the Facilities; that the Church will be named as an additional insured on the applicant's liability insurance policy, if requested; and that the purposes for which the Church's Facilities will be use are consistent with the goals, purposes, and teachings of the Church.

_____ Initial

Signature

Print Name

Title

Name of Applicant/Group

Date



Churches are not Places of Public Accommodation [\[*\]](#)

By Caleb C. Wolanek, JD '17 [\[**\]](#)

On September 1, the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination stated that churches would be subject to the Commonwealth's "public accommodation" statute.[\[1\]](#) Although Attorney General Maura Healey some time ago slipped "houses of worship" onto her website's list of places of public accommodations[\[2\]](#) (even though churches are nowhere listed in the public accommodations statute),[\[3\]](#) the Commission's September 1 "Gender Identity Guidance" boldly stated that "[e]ven a church could be seen as a place of public accommodation if it holds a secular event, such as a spaghetti supper, that is open to the general public."[\[4\]](#)

But the Commission does not get to write the law—the legislature does. And the text and history of Massachusetts's nondiscrimination statute shows that churches are not places of public accommodation and are thus not subject to the nondiscrimination statute.[\[5\]](#)

1. The Massachusetts law historically regulated businesses.

Consider the statute's history. As the Supreme Court noted in 1995, early common law required that "innkeepers, smiths, and others who made a profession of public employment" practice nondiscrimination.[\[6\]](#) Similarly, Professor Joseph Singer writes that "[a]ntebellum law imposed a duty to serve the public on common inns and on common carriers. . . . [I]t "also characterized other businesses as 'common callings,' and based the duty to serve the public on the fact that a business had held itself out as open to the public."[\[7\]](#)

In 1865, Massachusetts was the first state to codify this duty when it prohibited racial discrimination in "any licensed inn, in any place of public amusement, public conveyance or public meeting in th[e] Commonwealth."[\[8\]](#) The Commonwealth soon expanded the statute to include theatres,[\[9\]](#) skating rinks,[\[10\]](#) and finally any "other public place kept for hire, gain or reward."[\[11\]](#)

This language was omitted in 1950 when the nondiscrimination statute started referring exclusively to "place of public accommodation."[\[12\]](#) That designation had been created in 1933

to refer to a list of businesses: “any inn, . . . restaurant, eating-house, public conveyance on land or water or in the air, bathhouse, barber shop, theatre and music hall.”[\[13\]](#)

In 1953, the legislature adopted the current definition: “any place, whether licensed or unlicensed, which is open to and accepts or solicits the patronage of the general public.”[\[14\]](#) This two-pronged definition of “place of public accommodation” persists today.[\[15\]](#)

This history reveals that the public accommodation statute is aimed at businesses, not mere gatherings. This explains the definition’s “patronage” prong. Just as your local movie theatre might call its guests “patrons,” and just as your corner grocer might have a sign at the door saying “Thank you for your patronage,” so too does the statute single out those with customers. Although one might claim patronage means mere “support,” the statute’s history favors a business-oriented reading.[\[16\]](#) Indeed, although the statute regulates hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies, it only reaches those that “operat[e] for profit.”[\[17\]](#)

2. Church meetings are not businesses, so they are not places of public accommodations.

Simply put, churches are not businesses. Church members gather to encourage and admonish one another as they live out their faith; they do not meet to sell goods or services. Although churches often accept donations, these are used to facilitate the religious mission (such as feeding the hungry or paying the church electric bill). These are not business transactions. Indeed, the IRS recognizes that there is no quid pro quo involved with these donations—as demonstrated by the fact that they are tax-deductible.[\[18\]](#)

One might cite several statutory examples of places of public accommodation in an attempt to show that business patronage is not required. That argument does not succeed. The statute says that an “auditorium, theatre, music hall, meeting place or hall, including the common halls of buildings,” is a place of public accommodation.[\[19\]](#) But this seems to refer to something like a convention center. In those places, including in the “common halls” (which I read to mean “lobby”), persons who rent space and then sell admission (or sell products therein) must practice nondiscrimination. But a church, acting as a church, typically does not sell admission or products. Even if a church hosts a spaghetti dinner that is open to the public, it is not a restaurant.

Two other examples are a “boardwalk or other public highway” and a “public library, museum or planetarium.”[\[20\]](#) To be fair, neither of these usually charges admission. But these are also usually government institutions. Government libraries and museums need not be labeled places of public accommodation because they are actually public—that is, society as a whole owns them. Even when private citizens own a public library or museum (and do not charge dues or admission), they are organized for the express purpose of allowing the public to use those facilities. And even then, a transactional element remains in libraries: one may take the book only with permission, and they must either bring it back or pay a fine. A church is not that kind of an institution. Churches are gatherings of the faithful, not businesses.

3. Community use does not transform churches into places of public accommodation.

But perhaps the Commission is not attempting to restrict what churches do when they gather as a church. After all, the example the Commission gave was that of a “secular” spaghetti dinner. It might have also looked at when a town uses a church building as a polling place on Election Day, or a local piano teacher uses the main hall for a recital. Perhaps the Commission attempts to apply the nondiscrimination statute to *those* activities.[\[21\]](#)

But this approach does not succeed. After all, the mere fact that an event does not involve preaching or prayer does not make the gathering non-religious.[\[22\]](#) A more realistic position is that churches are pervasively religious.[\[23\]](#) Therefore, imposing a nondiscrimination requirement actually does inhibit religious activities.

Indeed, the very motivation for opening the church building to a “secular” event might be religious in nature.[\[24\]](#) This is because a church does more than teach from sacred texts. It also tries to embody those teachings—such as the common admonition to love one’s neighbors. This results in community service. Holding the church building out as a safe and comfortable space is a way to love the neighborhood.[\[25\]](#) But because the church is motivated by its faith, it will almost certainly be selective when allocating the use of its property. (This selectivity would also undermine the “openness” prong of the statutory definition.) A traditional mosque or Southern Baptist church would probably not host a beer festival, and it is hard to imagine many churches hosting an atheist convention.

4. Interpret the law to avoid First Amendment violations.

Even assuming the statute’s applicability is ambiguous, we should read the text in a way that avoids a First Amendment violation.[\[26\]](#) Although nondiscrimination is an important goal, so too is enforcing the First Amendment.

Enforcing nondiscrimination raises serious free exercise concerns. After all, if telling a church it must not fire a minister violates the Free Exercise Clause (because it infringes on the church’s autonomy to preach its message),[\[27\]](#) would it not also violate the Constitution to prohibit what those at a church gathering may say? There are also freedom of speech[\[28\]](#) and freedom of association[\[29\]](#) issues. The Commission should avoid, not invite, these conflicts.[\[30\]](#)

5. Conclusion

Public accommodation laws are well-intentioned; their goal is to ensure that all citizens have equal standing in society and public life. But these laws should not infringe on freedom of conscience. Therefore, churches should not be considered places of public accommodation. The Commission should let them be, not threaten them with a statute enforced by fines and jail time.

Churches are physical embodiments of religious convictions. Telling a church that it cannot act on its beliefs—that it must accept the presence of perceived wrong in its midst—seriously

hinders the church's mission. Worse still, it risks forcing compliance for the sake of compliance—something I thought we abandoned long ago.^[31] The First Amendment protects church autonomy from state intrusion by means of a “wall of separation.”^[32] Massachusetts should not breach that wall.^[33]

[*] This article was updated on December 14, 2016, to reflect movement in the lawsuit discussed.

[**] J.D. Candidate, Harvard Law School; B.A. in Political Science, Auburn University. Josh Craddock helped me identify several arguments to make. Any remaining errors are, of course, my own. In the interest of disclosure, I note that I have supported several of the groups that filed the *Horizon Christian Fellowship v. Williamson* lawsuit mentioned below.

ADA Religious Exemption

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides guidelines for what is necessary for organizations to provide accommodation to individuals with disabilities. While churches must comply with portions of the ADA, churches are exempt from the ADA as it relates to public accommodation.

“It’s Title III, Section 36.102 (e) that provides that the provisions of this title shall not apply to religious organizations,” Attorney John Anthony explains. “The statute basically has a blanket exemption for public accommodation for religious organizations or entities controlled by religious organizations.”

A ministry is not required to comply with ADA standards in its treatment of service animals unless it receives public funding or hosts a publicly-funded event.

Even a ministry that is under no legal obligation to admit service animals may choose to use a set of guidelines, such as the ADA, as a guideline for its own service animal policy. First West is a welcoming place and will voluntarily comply with the ADA in most respects. Compliance includes items listed in the policy section below.

For more information:

- Churches Are Not Places of Public Accommodation
<http://harvardjol.com/2016/11/28/churches-are-not-places-of-public-accommodation/>
- ADA - Limited to Commercial Facilities
https://www.ada.gov/ada_title_III.htm

A Welcoming Place

The Mission of First West is to see to it that no one misses the grace of God. Our Vision is to see people changed by the gospel and living out their Christ-centered purpose.

Because we want to see every person changed by the gospel, we believe that the inclusion of individuals with disabilities has a positive impact upon the church. First West is committed to being welcoming and respectful of all people.

We recognize that one out of every five Americans has a disability. It’s our sincere desire to provide accommodation to individuals with disabilities and to serve the families of those individuals.

Service Animal Policy

First West will comply with the ADA in most respects. Compliance includes, but is not limited to, the following items:

- **Definition.** The ADA says that a service animal is any dog that is trained to perform tasks for people with disabilities, including any physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual or other mental disability. A service animal may be trained to recognize and de-escalate agitation (e.g., PTSD), detect early warning signs of a neurological or metabolic episode (e.g., epilepsy, diabetes), assure safe guidance for the visually impaired, or perform simple tasks for people with impaired mobility, such as opening doors or retrieving objects. The task(s) performed by the dog must be directly related to the person's disability.
- **Public Accommodation Events.** Whenever the church allows an outside entity to utilize (use or rent) the church's facility, the church will abide fully by requirements of the ADA. In these instances, no restrictions on seating areas will be enforced. Other policies regarding property damage, threatening behavior and incident reports will be consistently applied.
- **Approaching a Guest with a Service Animal.** Recognize that you can't see most disabilities, and so don't be concerned if a service animal accompanies someone without a readily apparent disability. Other considerations include:
 - Approach guests with a view towards equality, inclusion and respect.
 - A service animal is not a pet; it has a job to do. Making noises at a service animal, approaching it, petting it, and offering it food are all unacceptable, as these behaviors can distract the animal from its duties.
 - Ask the animal's owner before approaching or interacting with it.
 - If you have questions about interacting with a guest and her service animal, consult with a Pastor or a member of the Safety Team.
- **Questions That May Be Asked.** The ADA permits only two questions which can be asked of individuals who have animals which they claim to be service animals:
 - Is the service animal required because of a disability?
 - What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?

Members of the Safety Team, Pastoral Staff, Ministerial Staff and other church employees are directed to ask ONLY these questions about service animals on church property.
- **Allergy Concerns.** The ADA prohibits an organization from barring a service animal because members have allergies or fear the animal.
- **Service Animal Food and Water.** The church is not responsible for providing a service animal with food or water.
- **Designated Outdoor Latrine Area.** The church provides a designated outdoor latrine area for service animals by the 3rd Street Worship Center Chiller Unit Gates. This grassy area is designated for service animals. Owners are encouraged, but not required, to dispose of animal waste after use.
- **Restrooms.** Guests with service animals are free to use all handicap accessible restrooms. Service animals are prohibited from using interior facility restrooms.

- **Property Damage.** If a service animal damages church property, including, but not limited to, defecating or urinating inside a church facility, the animal's owner will be asked to correct the problem. The animal may also be escorted from the building.
- **Threatening Behavior.** If a service animal appears to pose a threat to people, including, but not limited to, excessive barking or other disruptive behavior inside the building, the animal's owner will be asked to correct the problem. The animal may also be escorted from the building.

First West requires guests with service animals to comply with the following:

- **Harness and Leash.** Service animals must be harnessed, leashed and/or tethered while on church property. In rare instances, a harness and leash may interfere with the service animal's work or the person's disability may prevent the use of these devices. In these situations, the church will do everything possible to mitigate this requirement.
- **Worship Center Seating.** While the church takes care not to unduly isolate an assistance animal owner, or restrict their movement within public spaces, we may ask guests with service animals to sit in designated areas to minimize distractions for others.
- **Volunteer Positions.** Some volunteer positions on church ministry teams may preclude, limit or alter participation by individuals with service animals. Adjusted team service may include, but not be limited to, the following:
 - Worship Ministry Teams and On-Stage Positions
 - Worship Choir and Orchestra
 - Camera Operator
 - Door Greeter
 - Decision Encourager
 - Preschool/Children's Leader
 - Food Service
 - Safety Team
 - International Mission Trips
- **Incident Reports.** Members of the Safety Team, Pastoral Staff, Ministerial Staff and other church employees are required to complete an incident report whenever a policy violation or actionable moment occurs on church property.
- **Refusal to Comply.** Church employees will work to defuse any conflict or disagreement that may arise. In the rare instance that an individual refuses to comply with a Pastor or a member of the Safety Team, local law enforcement will be called to take charge of the situation.

For more information:

- Churches and the Americans with Disabilities Act
<https://www.churchlawandtax.com/blog/2016/july/churches-and-americans-with-disabilities-act.html>
- Service Animals: Help Your Ministry Respond Appropriately
<https://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/resources/safety-library/risk-management-articles/administrative-staff-and-finance/service-animals-help-your-ministry-respond-appropriately/>

Comfort Animal Policy

- **Definition.** Some individuals use a range of animals for emotional support. The church does not recognize the right of individuals to bring comfort or “emotional support” animals on church property. The ADA does not require business owners to allow comfort animals on their premises.
- **Comfort Animal Designation.** Members of the Safety Team, Pastoral Staff, Ministerial Staff and other church employees are asked to take no action if there is reason to doubt an individual’s claim that their service animal is legitimate.
 - Observe the animal.
 - If it damages church property, becomes disruptive or appears to pose a threat to others, you can ask the animal’s owner to escort the animal from church facilities.
 - Consult with a Pastor or a member of the Safety Team.
- **Animals Other Than Dogs.** Any animals other than legitimate service animal (dogs) brought into church facilities will be designated non-service animals and will be escorted from the building.
- **Incident Reports.** Members of the Safety Team, Pastoral Staff, Ministerial Staff and other church employees are required to complete an incident report whenever a policy violation or actionable moment occurs on church property.
- **Refusal to Comply.** Church employees will work to defuse any conflict or disagreement that may arise. In the rare instance that an individual refuses to comply with a Pastor or a member of the Safety Team, local law enforcement will be called to take charge of the situation.

For additional information about the ADA:

- Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the ADA
https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal_qa.pdf
- ADA: Questions and Answers
<https://www.eeoc.gov/facts/adaqa2.html>

Revised 10.1.2018

FIRST WEST | Transgender Guidelines

First West welcomes everyone without regard to previous faith experience or sexual orientation or any other attribute. Those who attend peacefully with a worshipful attitude are welcome to attend any Sunday morning worship service on any First West campus.

First West affirms the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 (BFM) as the church's statement of faith in its Constitution and Bylaws. The BFM, our Definition of Marriage Policy and Covenant Marriage Position Paper further clarify our convictions about marriage and human sexuality.

The first responsibility and requirement of church membership—including leadership positions and most volunteer service positions—require agreement with these doctrinal and policy statements.

Here's a short summary of how our church is prepared to minister to you and other transgendered individuals:

1. **We have abundant grace, love and concern for your well-being.**
2. **Bring your kids.** They are welcome to participate in every way.
3. **Attend a worship service.** All are welcome.
4. **Attend gender-specific events appropriate for your naturally born sex only.** We ask that naturally-born males who may identify as females NOT to attend women's events. In the same way, we ask that naturally-born females who may identify as males NOT to attend men's events.
5. **We aren't able to offer a small group option for individuals who've transitioned or who are currently transitioning.**
6. **We love you and we care about you and your family, but our conviction is that God assigned your gender at birth.** That conviction doesn't preclude us from ministering to you and your family.
7. **We ask that you use 1 of our 2 family restrooms when on the West Monroe Campus.** That's for your comfort and privacy and for the comfort and privacy of others.

FIRST WEST | Definition of Marriage

Biblical Definition of Marriage

The vision of First West is to see people changed by the Gospel and living out their Christ-centered purpose. We believe that a man and woman seeking marriage should do so with the biblical understanding of marriage, which is clearly stated in Genesis 2:24. First West further defines marriage as the union of one (biological) man and one (biological) woman freely and totally committed to one another as companions for life. We believe that because God our Creator established marriage as a sacred institution between one man and one woman, an immutable precept that marriage is a covenant only between one man and one woman has been the traditional and Biblical definition of marriage for all of human history ("Biblical Definition of Marriage"). The Church, through its Lead Pastor and ministerial staff, considers the Biblical Definition of Marriage to be a central tenet of the Christian Church and hereby creates this policy, which shall be known as the "Marriage Policy."

Cohabiting Couples

The Scriptures also teach that cohabitating couples fall short of God's standard for pre-married couples. Despite growing popularity and practice of cohabitation within both the church and culture, First West's desire is to submit to Scripture in all things, including cohabitation, prior to marriage. The finding of secular research notwithstanding, it is First West's conviction that cohabitation is a biblically sinful decision for couples. Therefore, if a couple decides to continue cohabitating, First West reserves the right to refuse to host or officiate at a couple's wedding as participating in such a wedding, through use of the Church's facilities or the officiating of such wedding by a First West pastor, would contradict the Church's beliefs.

Church Facilities

In accordance with the Church's religious beliefs, the Church specifically prohibits acts or omissions including, but not limited to, permitting any Church assets or property, whether real property, personal property, intangible property, or any property or asset of any kind that is subject to the direction or control of the Church, to be used in any manner that would be or could be perceived by any person to be inconsistent with this Church's Marriage Policy, including but not limited to permitting any Church facilities to be used by any person, organization, corporation, or group that would or might use such facilities to convey, intentionally or by implication, what might be perceived as a favorable impression about any definition of marriage other than the Biblical Definition of Marriage.

Pastors and Staff

The pastors and staff of First West shall only participate in weddings and solemnize marriages that fit the above biblical definition of marriage. Finally, the facilities, campuses, property, and entities related to First West shall only host weddings and all related activities that align with the Biblical Definition of Marriage.

Louisiana Covenant Marriage

Further, we believe biblical marriage is a service of worship in which the bride-elect and groom-elect, in the company of their loved ones and friends, publicly covenant with each for life under the blessing of God. As an extended effort to champion the life-long nature of this covenant between one man and one woman in a culture where divorce is rampant, First West requires that biblical wedding ceremonies which are performed on any campus or facility of First West to be a covenant marriage as defined by the Covenant Marriage Act (HB 1631). (Further information with regards to the extra requirements for Covenant Marriage and its stipulations can be found online at <http://new.dhh.louisiana.gov/index.cfm/page/695>.)

Covenant marriage requires premarital counseling with accompanying signed affidavits and attestations that this counseling has been done in accordance with the Covenant Marriage Act. As a result, all weddings performed on any campus or in any facility of First West will require premarital counseling done in partnership with First West's Counseling Center. All accompanying paperwork will be filled out by the individual counselor, the bride-elect, and the groom-elect. The above paperwork will be submitted to the Clerk of Court's office to be filed with the state of Louisiana per the requirements of the marriage license.

Primacy of Scripture

We believe this Church's Marriage Policy is based upon God's will for human life as conveyed to us through the Holy Scriptures, upon which this Church has been founded and anchored, and this Marriage Policy shall not be subject to change through popular vote; referendum; prevailing opinion of members or the general public; influence of or interpretation of any government authority, agency or official action; or legal developments on the local, state, or federal level.

The Biblical Definition of Marriage is the only definition of marriage that will be recognized or accepted. No officer, employee, servant, agent, volunteer or any person, corporation, organization, or entity under the direction or control of this Church shall commit any act or omission, or make any decision whatever, that would be inconsistent with, or that could be perceived by any person to be inconsistent with, full support of this Church's Marriage Policy and strict adherence to the Biblical Definition of Marriage rather than any alternative to the Biblical Definition of Marriage.

Living Together

We ask couples who are living together to move into separate homes. Scripture tells us to "flee sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18) and to place yourself in a living situation that you have the best chance for purity and separation from temptation (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:4). It is our observation that couples that honor the Lord in every aspect of their relationship experience greater oneness, peace, and joy in marriage.

If you are currently cohabitating or have questions about cohabitation, we would like to have the opportunity to discuss this further with you.

Premarital Counseling

Each pastor of First West conducts the service of marriage only after pre-marital conferences have been completed. First West's Counseling Center Pastor will meet with you immediately following your request for either use of First West facilities and/or your request for a member of the ministerial staff to perform your wedding ceremony. He will discuss the Church's requirements for covenant marriage and will also discuss the recommended schedule for premarital counseling.

It is your responsibility to make arrangements for these sessions through the First West Counseling Center (318-322-1427). The final conference with the pastor performing your ceremony should be scheduled one or two weeks prior to the wedding. At that time, any special requests for the ceremony should be discussed.

FIRST WEST | Covenant Marriage | Summary

In our age of deep moral confusion, we believe that the Church must reaffirm its convictions about what marriage is. In joyful, caring love for his creatures the Lord gave us the Scriptures to be our authority and to guide us. Sourced in love, the Bible's teaching about marriage is good news for people. We affirm that, according to the Bible, God's design for marriage is a covenantal union between one man and one woman that is open to the gift of children.

Marriage Is a Covenant

How does the world view marriage? When we look at marriage laws in most states, and at marriage in American popular culture, we see that world's view of marriage. The world sees marriage as a contract that makes the romantic feelings of the adult parties 'official.' This is an impoverished reduction of what God created marriage to be. The world's misunderstanding of marriage teaches people to abandon ship when things get hard, leaving broken homes, abandoned children, and lonely and broken spouses in the wake.

According to Scripture, however, marriage is a *covenant* (Mal. 2:14; Mat. 19:4-5), a lifelong union that binds husbands to wives, wives to husbands, and both to the children that God may choose to bring to them. The faithfulness that results from such a lifelong union trains us to persist when things are difficult. Covenant commitment enables us to make serious personal investments in the difficult problems that we face in our communities. History teaches us that a strong marriage culture creates and sustains a society with strong bonds of trust between people and the well-being of its citizens.

Marriage Is a Total Union

Marriage is also a total union, not a partial one. The world tends to imagine our lives as pies that are divided up into various slices: a religion slice, a work slice, a friendship slice, a marriage slice, and so on.

However, the covenantal nature of God's design for marriage means that marriage is not merely one slice in one's overall life. Rather, covenant marriage requires all that are, from both spouses. We can understand Paul's message to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 7 as meaning that husbands and wives may not hold anything back from each other, whether that be affection, sex, time, or finances. God requires that our spouses receive the very best from us. We are to pattern our relationship with our spouse on the fierce love with which Christ sacrificed himself totally to his people. In turn, his people totally submit to him in all things (Eph. 5:21-33).

The total union between Christ and the Church vividly demonstrates the total union between husbands and wives.

Marriage Requires Openness to Children

The world's misunderstanding of marriage as a mere contract infects the marriage culture of the United States with selfishness. Selfishness turns our attention away from the children who are born into the union and toward the happiness of the adults who enter into the contract.

Marriage is unlike other relationships in part because of children. The wellbeing of children is an essential reason why God ordained that we treat marriage differently than our other relationships. The marital relationship is the healthiest, wisest and most successful environment in which children can be effectively nurtured into flourishing and competent citizens. Thus, any society that cares about its own survival will be concerned to foster a strong marriage culture. A strong marriage culture includes encouraging couples to be open to the gift of children.

The Scriptures consistently emphasize that children are a gift from the Lord (e.g., Psa. 127:3-5). The older term for marriage, 'holy matrimony', actually comes from the Latin word for 'mother'. More importantly, however, if couples use technology permanently to refuse the gift of children, there is a sense in which they are refusing a part of themselves with each other.

Our Commitment to Covenant Marriages

Louisiana's covenant marriage statute recognizes that marriage is a lifelong commitment, and it encourages couples to work through their problems in counseling rather than ending a difficult relationship except in limited circumstances such as adultery or abuse. In so doing it takes a stand against easy, 'no-fault' divorce. At First West we believe that in substance the Louisiana statute affirms the biblical understanding of marriage, and we require all who want to be married here to commit to the heightened requirements for covenant marriage in Louisiana law. The pastors at First West would be happy to meet with you to discuss further the biblical basis of marriage and how covenant marriage works in Louisiana.

In our age of deep moral confusion, it is necessary for all Christians to give ‘a reason for the hope that is within them’ (1 Pet. 3:15) about what marriage is and why the classical Christian account of marriage, which some have called ‘conjugal union’,¹ is good news. We affirm that marriage is a covenantal and total union between one man and one woman that is open to the gift of children. As almost each part of this definition is contested and can create confusion, we will carefully explain each element of it and how each element is integral to the gospel itself in the sections that follow.

Marriage Is a Covenant, Not a Contract

Nothing has been more catastrophic for marriage in our society than the reduction of marriage to the status of a mere contract. John Witte, Jr. has argued that in the history of the west, a number of different ‘models’ have been proposed by Christians for understanding what marriage is.² In various Christian societies, marriage has been understood as a sacrament, a covenant, and a miniature commonwealth. Only since the Enlightenment has marriage been understood as a contract like any other. Of these different ‘models’ of marriage, the covenantal model has the deepest roots in Scripture.

God’s covenant with Israel at Sinai (Ex. 19-20) becomes the basis among the prophets for speaking as though God were married to Israel, and for speaking of Israel’s idolatry and covenant breaking as if it were adultery (Jer. 3:8; Ezek. 16; Hos. 2:2-23; Isa. 57:7-17). Indeed, the steadfast covenant love of God for Israel is seen as paradigmatic of the husband’s love for his wife. This marriage covenant between God and Israel becomes the basis for reading the Song of Songs allegorically among the Rabbis and the early Christians. The historian Jaroslav Pelikan has argued that by the time this text was included in the canon, the song was already read as an allegory of God’s love for Israel.³ The love between husband and wife in marriage, especially in Hosea and Malachi, is then expressly seen as a microcosm of this love of God for Israel (Hos. 1:2; 3:1; Mal. 2:14-16). In the New Testament, this theme continues as the covenant love of marriage is framed as a microcosm of God’s steadfast love for his people in Christ (Eph. 5:21-33).

Paul tells us that the fact that this covenant includes one male and one female is not arbitrary, but rather shows us something significant about this relationship between God and his people. As Gerald Hiestand has recently argued, there are different kinds of power – physical, intellectual, emotional, and so on – but physical power creates and sustains the domains

¹ Patrick Lee and Robert George, *Conjugal Union: What Marriage Is and Why It Matters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

² John Witte, Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*, Second Edition (Louisville: WJK, 2011).

³ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Whose Bible Is It? A Short History of the Scriptures* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 43.

wherein these other forms of power can be expressed for the flourishing of relationships and communities. Husbands are almost always endowed with greater physical strength than their wives, and Paul is commending to them to love their wives in such a profound way that they use that superior physical strength to protect and enable the expression of their more supple strengths to create the flourishing of families and surrounding communities.

The disparity in physical strength between husband and wife is not inherently degrading to women, and Paul's point is that the marriage relationship should be structured in such a way that husbands use their strength to empower their wives' strengths to come to the fore: "Christ doesn't just deploy his power on behalf of his bride; he *shares* his power with his bride."⁴

Although there are similarities between a contract and a covenant, the differences far outweigh the similarities. A covenant is permanent, public, sacred, and sacrosanct in a way that contracts are not. Covenants were like contracts in that they were pacts freely entered into, established by solemn and binding oaths. However, in addition to the parties entering into the covenant, the community to which the covenanters belonged, and God himself, were witnesses and enforcers of the covenant. Malachi 2:14 explicitly tells us that God is witness to and enforcer of the marriage covenant: "the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant."

The responsibility of the community to support and guard marriages are among the historic reasons for the practices of the publication of "the banns of marriage" (from the middle English word meaning 'proclamation') and godparents, who were thought of as 'co-parents' and kin to the children of the matrimonial union and were included within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity of the children for whom they served as sponsors at baptism.⁵

Even in our own nation, where the contractual model of marriage has held sway almost since our inception, the marriage contract has always been seen as different than other contracts. In 1834, Chief Justice Joseph Story of the U.S. Supreme Court wrote that "all civilized societies" have viewed marriage as "a peculiar and favored contract." It is "in its origin a contract of natural law," and "it is the parent, and not the child of society; the source of civility and a sort of seminary of the republic." Because it is such a singular type of contract, Story continued, "It appears to me something more than a mere contract. It is rather to be deemed an institution of society founded upon the consent and contract of the parties; and in this view it has some peculiarities in its nature, character, operation, and extent of operation, different from what belongs to ordinary contracts."⁶

⁴ Gerald Hiestand, "Put Pain Like That Beyond My Power: A Christocentric Theodicy with Respect to the Inequality of Male and Female Power," in *Beauty, Order, and Mystery* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2017), 115-116.

⁵ See Claudia Rapp, *Brother-Making in Late Antiquity and Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 11, 35.

⁶ Joseph Story, *Commentaries on the Conflict of Laws, Foreign and Domestic*, quoted in John Witte, Jr., "More than a Mere Contract: Marriage as Contract and Covenant in Law and Theology," *University of St. Thomas Law Journal* 5 (2008), 599.

The contemporary understanding of marriage, by contrast, reduces marriage to the status of other contracts. It can be negotiated with whatever stipulations the parties negotiate, and the vows may contain whatever content the parties prefer. Seen through this lens, it is arbitrary historical contingency that marriage is between a ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ who are themselves male and female, respectively, or that the union is between two people alone. As Andrew Root says, marriage as pure contract “is unbound to anything other than the free negotiation of the individual selves that choose to find intimacy with each other.”⁷

Marriage for Christians is a covenant, not a contract. The basis for the fidelity of husband and wife to each other is God’s steadfast, faithful love for his people in Christ. The monogamous, male-female duality at the heart of this covenant is essential to the biblical vision, both in the creation ordinance of marriage and in its renewal and reaffirmation in Christ (Gen. 2:24; Mat. 19:5; Eph. 5:31).

The beauty of marriage within God’s ultimate plan to reconcile all things to himself in Christ is marred when Christians acquiesce to a culture of ‘no-fault’ divorce or profess ‘irreconcilable differences’ as the basis for the dissolution of the union. The beauty of marriage is marred when Christians accept the normativity of physical or emotional abuse within marriage unions. The beauty of the marriage covenant is marred when we refuse to take responsibility for one another and inquire into the health of each other’s marriages. The beauty of marriage is marred when we begin to treat it as a ‘mere contract’ that can be modified in whatever way we want.

Marriage Is a Total Union, Not a Partial One

If marriage is a covenant, rather than a mere contract, it must also be said that the kind of union it envisions between the couple is a *total* union rather than a *partial* one. Covenants in the ancient world were always sealed by a ‘covenant sign’, and we see this in covenants throughout Scripture. Covenant signs indicate the total commitment of the self required by the covenant. The covenanter holds nothing back of him or herself when entering into the covenant, whether the covenanter is God or a human being or community.

When God covenants with his creation not to destroy it through flood again, the sign that he puts in the heavens is the rainbow, representing the hunter’s bow, no longer turned downward in wrath toward the creation, but pointed upward into the heart of heaven, in symbolic judgment of God should God ever fail in his promise (Gen. 9:13-17). When God covenants with Abraham, an animal is split into two and the parties walk through the sacrificed animal as if to say, may it be unto me as with these animals if I fail to uphold the covenant. In a dramatic gesture, however, God puts Abraham to sleep, and only he passes through the sacrificed animal (Gen. 15).

Abraham, Moses, and the Israelites are also to circumcise themselves and their families as a covenant sign, of their complete covenantal allegiance and devotion to God. This sign was used

⁷ Andrew Root, *The Children of Divorce: The Loss of Relationship as the Loss of Being* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 38.

throughout the ancient near east, but in Israel it took on a particular meaning. It was like pruning a plant so that it could be more fruitful.⁸ But the specific kind of fruitfulness indicated by circumcision was a fruitfulness of soul - hence the constant exhortation by the prophets to have our hearts circumcised (Deut. 10:12-17; 30:6; Jer. 4:1-4; Rom. 2:25-9; 3:30; Col. 2:11-13).

From Scripture it is clear that the covenant sign accompanying the covenant of marriage is sex. Sex is the sign which manifests one's commitment to the total union envisaged in the marriage vow.⁹ Gordon Hugenberger draws our attention to several places in which this relationship between sign and vow is crucial to understanding OT laws. For instance, in the provision that a man who has sex with an unbetrothed virgin in Deut. 22:28, the law requires that the man pay the bride price and marry her because he has professed with his body his commitment to the covenant, and now his life must follow: he must commit himself to a total union with her.¹⁰

This total union, which the marriage vows profess and the body consents to in sexual act, is what it means to be 'one flesh'. This same logic, that one must not profess with one's body what one has not consented to with one's lips and with one's whole life, is what grounds Paul's admonition to the men of Corinth not to sleep with prostitutes, because in doing so one becomes 'one flesh' with her (1 Cor. 6:16). This 'one flesh' dynamic in marriage means that one partner cannot withhold anything from the other. A full and complete interdependence between husband and wife is envisioned in the Scriptural vision of marriage.

There are any number of ways that husbands and wives may withhold some part of themselves from the other. Paul addresses the withholding of sex in 1 Corinthians 7:4-5, but we also withhold some part of ourselves from this total union when we withhold affection, or transparency about our financial dealings. We withhold a part of ourselves when devote ourselves overzealously to our work at the expense of our families.

The fact of this total union in the marriage covenant means that, second to God, our spouses are our first priority, and that consent and mutual submission to one another is the expression of this total union through which the covenantal union between God and his people is magnified. This is the reason that Jonathan Grant can say that more than any legislative changes to secure the sanctity of marriage, the quality of our marriages that most magnifies God and makes his gospel attractive: "it is perhaps in our marriages that we can most clearly witness to the gospel of peace and reconciliation."¹¹

Marriage Requires Openness to Children

In our day perhaps the most glaring way in which we withhold ourselves from the total union that marriage requires is by withholding ourselves from the fertility that the covenant sign of sex entails. Since the 1950s, it has been possible through technological means, in most cases, to

⁸ See the analysis in Peter Leithart, *Delivered from the Elements of the World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016), 88-90.

⁹ Gordon Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 265, 281, 343.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹¹ Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015), 71.

detach sex from procreation. This has led, perhaps unsurprisingly, to what Mary Eberstadt has helpfully called a ‘recreative’ rather than a ‘procreative’ vision of the sexual act.

Many authors, including Eberstadt and Kay Hymowitz, have argued that the ability to detach sex from procreation has had the most pronounced consequences for men, for whom fatherhood has typically triggered a more robust work ethic as well as a protective instinct. Hymowitz notes that “adult manhood has almost universally equated with marriage and fatherhood,” and Eberstadt argues that the ‘atrophying of the protective instinct’ in many men has occurred ‘because many have nothing to protect.’¹²

Protestants have too quickly assumed that birth control is a matter for couples to decide about on their own without the guidance of the church community. In one sense Scripture does not tell us, as the Roman Catholic church argues, that each and every sexual act must be open to fertility, but there is a powerful argument to be made from scripture that permanent frustration of the connection between sex and fertility is inconsistent with the total union required by marriage. Children are, according to Scripture, are “a gift from God; they are a reward from him. Children born to a young man are like arrows in a warrior’s hands. How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them!” (Psa. 127:3-5).

If we permanently refuse the gift of children, there is a sense in which we are refusing a part of ourselves from one another. More importantly, we cut ourselves off from a principle reason that Scripture and Christians through the ages have held the conviction that marriage is between a man and a woman. Just as this total union can only be given between a couple, so the fertility that springs from the covenant sign of this union can only happen as husband and wife become one flesh in the sexual encounter. The older term for marriage in the Christian tradition is ‘holy matrimony’. It is no accident that this term derives from the Latin word for ‘mother’ – it is in this union, in which the husband is bound to his wife and the children that result from this union, that the role of mother is sanctified and dignified.

Our Commitment to Covenant Marriages

Because we confess that marriage is a total, lifelong, covenantal union between one man and one woman that is open to children, we endorse Louisiana’s covenant marriage guidelines and require every wedding that happens at First West to be a covenant marriage. In essence, the Louisiana provision recognizes that marriage is a lifelong commitment, and therefore the statute requires intentionality before entering marriage, and it makes it difficult to get divorced.

Prior to getting married, premarital counseling is required. Secondly, the couple must sign a Declaration of Intent which states their intent to live as husband and wife forever, that they have disclosed all information which could ‘adversely affect’ the decision to marry, and that

¹² Hymowitz, *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men into Boys* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 127; Mary Eberstadt, *Adam and Eve after the Pill* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012), 55.

they are committed to preserve their marriage, including marriage counseling, should marital difficulties arise. In order to obtain a divorce, a legal separation of two years is required.

In order to obtain that separation, a spouse must prove adultery by the other spouse, commission of a felony that gives rise to a sentence of hard labor or death, physical or sexual abuse of the spouse seeking the divorce, or a child of either spouse, or habitual 'intemperance', a term that includes drug or alcohol abuse, cruelty, or other severe mistreatment by the other spouse. Thus, only after reasonable efforts have been made to preserve the marriage, including a lengthy period of separation wherein spouses have an opportunity to reconcile, will divorce be granted.

Our conviction at First West is that these requirements substantially align with the biblical vision of marriage, and we require all members who desire to get married at First West to commit to covenant marriage. Furthermore, as we believe that the heightened requirements for divorce in Louisiana are a help to those who might be tempted to leave their marriages in a season of difficulty, we encourage all members who were not married covenantally to take advantage of the legal process that enables couples to convert their marriages into covenant marriages. The pastors at First West would be happy to discuss this process with you and to help you work towards strengthening your marriage.



**WEDDING
HANDBOOK**

Table of Contents

Welcome!.....	3
First West’s Definition of Marriage	4
Covenant Marriage	4
Living Together.....	5
Premarital Counseling.....	5
What We Believe	6
Officiants	8
Guest Minister	8
Pastor’s Honorarium	8
Wedding Director	9
Function of Your Wedding Director	9
Scheduling	10
Non-Member Weddings	10
Fees & Venues	11
Church Facilities	11
Wedding Weekend	12
Rehearsal.....	12
The Worship Service/Ceremony	12
Dressing Areas.....	12
Receptions.....	13
Building Services	13
Wedding Dress & Personal Valuables	14
Childcare	14
Decorating	15
Wedding Day Timeline	16
12 Weeks Prior to Wedding	16
8 Weeks Prior to Wedding	16
6 Weeks Prior to Wedding	16
4 Weeks Prior to Wedding	17
2 Weeks Prior to Wedding	17
1 Week Prior to Wedding.....	17
Contact Information	18



Welcome!

To the Bride and Groom,

Congratulations on the decision you have made to enter into the covenant of marriage. We believe marriage is a gift from the Lord, given to us in order to put His greatness on display for the world to see (James 1:17, Matthew 5:14-16). Our desire at First West (First Baptist Church of West Monroe), First West Calhoun and other entities is to help you as you prepare for your special day. More importantly, while we desire couples to have a wonderful wedding day, our greatest passion is for your marriage to bring God the glory He deserves.

Whether we are providing you a location to get married or a pastor to officiate your ceremony, as the body of Christ, we are primarily concerned with God being honored in the process. Since marriage is one of the most important decisions you will ever make, we feel it is our responsibility to help prepare you for marriage. To that end, this wedding policy guide will assist you in the process.

In the following pages you will find all the information you need regarding our definition of marriage as well as our policies and procedures for use of our facilities, pricing, requirements, recommended timelines and much more. We hope that this guide will be a great help to you.

The first step in the process will be for you to become familiar with this information. The second step will be for you to contact our Operations Manager who will help you get the process started.

May God bless you as you prepare for an incredible wedding day!

Your Ministerial Team @ First West



First West's Definition of Marriage

The vision of First West is to see people changed by the Gospel and living out their Christ-centered purpose. We believe that a man and woman seeking marriage should do so with the biblical understanding of marriage, which is clearly stated in Genesis 2:24. **First West further defines marriage as the union of one (biological) man and one (biological) woman freely and totally committed to one another as companions for life.** We believe that because God our Creator established marriage as a sacred institution between one man and one woman, an immutable precept that marriage is a covenant only between one man and one woman has been the traditional and Biblical definition of marriage for all of human history ("Biblical Definition of Marriage"). The Church, through its Lead Pastor and ministerial staff, considers the Biblical Definition of Marriage to be a central tenet of the Christian Church and hereby creates this policy, which shall be known as the "Marriage Policy."

Scripture teaches that cohabitating couples fall short of God's standard for pre-married couples.

Despite growing popularity and practice of cohabitation within both the church and culture, First West's desire is to submit to Scripture in all things, including cohabitation, prior to marriage. The finding of secular research notwithstanding, it is First West's conviction that cohabitation is a biblically sinful decision for couples. Therefore, if a couple decides to continue cohabitating, First West reserves the right to refuse to host or officiate at a couple's wedding as participating in such a wedding, through use of the Church's facilities or the officiating of such wedding by a First West pastor, would contradict the Church's beliefs.

In accordance with the Church's religious beliefs, the Church specifically prohibits acts or omissions including, but not limited to, permitting any Church assets or property, whether real property, personal property, intangible property, or any property or asset of any kind that is subject to the direction or control of the Church, to be used in any manner that would be or could be perceived by any person to be inconsistent with this Church's Marriage Policy, including but not limited to permitting any Church facilities to be used by any person, organization, corporation, or group that would or might use such facilities to convey, intentionally or by implication, what might be perceived as a favorable impression about any definition of marriage other than the Biblical Definition of Marriage. The pastors and staff of First West shall only participate in weddings and solemnize marriages that fit the above biblical definition of marriage. Finally, the facilities, campuses, property, and entities related to First West shall only host weddings and all related activities that align with the Biblical Definition of Marriage.

Covenant Marriage

Further, we believe biblical marriage is a service of worship in which the bride-elect and groom-elect, in the company of their loved ones and friends, publicly covenant with each for life under the blessing of God. As an extended effort to champion the life-long nature of this covenant between one man and one woman in a culture where divorce is rampant, First West requires that biblical wedding ceremonies which are performed on any campus or facility of First West to be a covenant marriage as defined by the Covenant Marriage Act (HB 1631). (Further information with regards to the extra requirements for Covenant Marriage and its stipulations can be found online at <http://new.dhh.louisiana.gov/index.cfm/page/695>.)



Covenant marriage requires premarital counseling with accompanying signed affidavits and attestations that this counseling has been done in accordance with the Covenant Marriage Act. As a result, all weddings performed on any campus or in any facility of First West will require premarital counseling done in partnership with First West's Counseling Center. All accompanying paperwork will be filled out by the individual counselor, the bride-elect, and the groom-elect. The above paperwork will be submitted to the Clerk of Court's office to be filed with the state of Louisiana per the requirements of the marriage license.

We believe this Church's Marriage Policy is based upon God's will for human life as conveyed to us through the Holy Scriptures, upon which this Church has been founded and anchored, and this Marriage Policy shall not be subject to change through popular vote; referendum; prevailing opinion of members or the general public; influence of or interpretation of any government authority, agency or official action; or legal developments on the local, state, or federal level. The Biblical Definition of Marriage is the only definition of marriage that will be recognized or accepted. No officer, employee, servant, agent, volunteer or any person, corporation, organization, or entity under the direction or control of this Church shall commit any act or omission, or make any decision whatever, that would be inconsistent with, or that could be perceived by any person to be inconsistent with, full support of this Church's Marriage Policy and strict adherence to the Biblical Definition of Marriage rather than any alternative to the Biblical Definition of Marriage.

Living Together

We ask couples who are living together to move into separate homes. Scripture tells us to "flee sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18) and to place yourself in a living situation that you have the best chance for purity and separation from temptation (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:4). It is our observation that couples that honor the Lord in every aspect of their relationship experience greater oneness, peace, and joy in marriage.

If you are currently cohabitating or have questions about cohabitation, we would like to have the opportunity to discuss this further with you.

Premarital Counseling

Each pastor of First West conducts the service of marriage only after pre-marital conferences have been completed. First West's Counseling Center Pastor will meet with you immediately following your request for either use of First West facilities and/or your request for a member of the ministerial staff to perform your wedding ceremony. He will discuss the Church's requirements for covenant marriage and will also discuss the recommended schedule for premarital counseling. It is your responsibility to make arrangements for these sessions through the First West Counseling Center (318-322-1427). The final conference with the pastor performing your ceremony should be scheduled one or two weeks prior to the wedding. At that time, any special requests for the ceremony should be discussed.



What We Believe

God

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He eternally exists as one essence in three co-equal distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. [Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 6:4; Ephesians 4:6; John 14:16-17; John 1:1-18]

Creation & Care

God created the universe and guides history for His purposes. [Genesis 1:1; Romans 8:28]

Christ

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is co-equal with the Father. Jesus lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on a cross. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to Heaven's glory and will return again someday to Earth to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. [John 1:1, 14; 20:30-31]

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. He is the one who inspired men to write the Scriptures. He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts of sin. He calls men to the Savior, and effects regeneration. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the assurance of God to bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service. [Genesis 1:2; Psalm 139:7; Matthew 28:19; Luke 11:13; John 4:24; 2 Timothy 1:14; Revelation 22:17]

Humanity

People are made in the spiritual image of God, to be like Him in character. People are the supreme object of God's creation. Although every person has tremendous potential for good, all of us are marred by an attitude of disobedience toward God called sin. [Genesis 1:26-30; John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 1:21-31; Colossians 1:21-22]



Marriage

Marriage is the union of one (biological) man and one (biological) woman freely and totally committed to one another as companions for life. We believe that because God our Creator established marriage as a sacred institution between one man and one woman, an immutable precept that marriage is a covenant only between one man and one woman has been the traditional and Biblical definition of marriage for all of human history. [Genesis 2:24]

Salvation

Salvation is God's free gift to us, but we must accept it. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement or good works. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's offer of forgiveness can anyone be saved from sin's penalty. When we turn from our self-ruled life and turn to Jesus in faith, we are saved. Eternal life begins the moment one receives Jesus Christ into his life by faith. [Ephesians 2:8-9]

Bible

The Bible is God's Word to us, written by human authors under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the supreme source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. [2 Timothy 3:16-17]

Church

The Church is Christ's body through which He accomplishes His purposes on Earth. [Ephesians 4:12-16]

Baptism

A person demonstrates his acceptance of Christ and joins the local church via believer's baptism. [Acts 2:38, 41-42; 1 Corinthians 12:13]

Lord's Supper

A believer remembers Christ's death and encourages Christian unity through partaking of the Lord's Supper. [1 Corinthians 11:23-26, 33]



Eternity

People were created to exist forever, either eternally separated from God by sin, or eternally with God through forgiveness and salvation. To be eternally separated from God is death. To be eternally in union with Him is eternal life. Heaven and Hell are real places of eternal existence. [Matthew 25:31-41, 45-46]

The Christian & Social Order

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. [Exodus 20:3-17; Leviticus 6:2-5; Deuteronomy 10:12; Romans 12–14; 1Corinthians 5:9-10; Colossians 3:12-17; James 1:27]

Officiants

Since weddings are a holy act and sacrament of the church, First West requires a member of the pastoral or ministerial team to officiate all weddings in church venues. Feel free to speak directly with any pastor about your wedding ceremony. If you aren't sure who should officiate your wedding, contact the Lead Pastor's Office at 318-322-5656.

Guest Minister

An ordained minister may be invited to assist if he is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention and is supportive of our Church's adherence to the SBC's guiding principles as outlined in *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. This pastor must complete and submit the *Application to Serve as Assisting Pastor* (located in the forms section of this packet). All ministers must be registered with the State of Louisiana in order to assist with a wedding or sign the marriage certificate. To register, the minister should call the Ouachita Parish Clerk of Court's office.

Pastor's Honorarium

While your pastor does not charge a fee for officiating at your wedding, it is customary to present an honorarium. It is suggested that no less than \$300 be presented to your Wedding Director to give to the pastor either at the rehearsal or when you present the marriage license. It is also suggested that no less than \$150 be presented to the assisting pastor.



Wedding Director

First West requires a Wedding Director to make your special day everything you want it to be! If you are acquainted with one of our Wedding Directors, you are welcome to use the director known to you. If you aren't sure, we can provide a list of Wedding Directors or choose one for you. Be sure to consult with your Wedding Director well in advance of the wedding.

The Wedding Director serves as the liaison between the wedding party and the Church. If the bride also chooses to secure the services of an outside wedding planner, First West's assigned director will work in cooperation with that person. First West's Wedding Director is entrusted with the good stewardship of church facilities and property.

Function of Your Wedding Director

The Wedding Director provides the bridal party approximately 10 hours of her time. This includes meeting with the bride or bridal party to discuss arrangements, coordination with vendors, preparation of the wedding program, and direction of the rehearsal (assisting the pastor who will conduct the ceremony and directing the entrance of the bridal party for the ceremony).

The Wedding Director:

- Notifies the bridal party and vendors about the times and entrances available to them.
- Manages and safeguards church policies and guidelines.
- Is present any time the wedding party is present in the Church facility.
- Is charged with leading the rehearsal.
- Assist the pastor as requested.
- Handles the marriage license and honorariums. The marriage license and honorariums for the pastor and the musicians should be given to the Wedding Director at the rehearsal.
- The wedding license should be delivered to the Wedding Director at rehearsal (The Ouachita Parish Clerk of Court will provide information on securing your wedding license).



Scheduling

The Church's facilities were provided through God's benevolence and by the sacrificial generosity of Church members. It is our desire that facilities be used for the fellowship of the Body of Christ and to bring God glory. Facility usage will not be permitted to persons or groups holding, advancing or advocating beliefs or practices that conflict with the Church's faith or moral teachings. The Church has in place an approved process for the review of all requests for use of Church facilities.

Weddings must be scheduled a minimum of ninety (90) days in advance in order to be in compliance with First West's premarital counseling requirements. Application shall be made through the Operations Manager who will help coordinate an initial meeting with the Counseling Pastor. Following this meeting, upon recommendation of the Counseling Pastor, the date, time, and facilities for both the rehearsal and wedding can be scheduled.

Because of ministry events on our Church calendar, weddings cannot be scheduled on Sundays, Wednesdays, or during general Church meetings or events. Neither weddings nor rehearsals are scheduled during the week of the following holidays: New Year's, Thanksgiving, or federal / state holiday weekends. Weddings are not scheduled the week prior to, during, or following the Church's annual Vacation Bible School.

In order to help protect your special day, First West will not schedule two weddings during the same weekend unless one is a private exchange of vows requiring no rehearsal, no reception, and no decorations.

Typically, Saturday evening weddings will not be booked later than 6 pm in West Monroe's Feazel Chapel or 4 pm in the Worship Center (all campuses). Wedding invitations should not be ordered, announcements or detailed arrangements made until this agreement has been confirmed.

All applications require a \$200 refundable security deposit for both Feazel Chapel and the Worship Center. Dates will be confirmed and security deposits accepted following the initial meeting with and based upon the recommendation of the Counseling Center Pastor. At that time, the wedding application should be completed and submitted to the Operations Manager.

Non-Member Weddings

Since weddings are a holy act and sacrament of the church, weddings at First West venues are reserved for church members in good standing. For more information about becoming a member of First West, sign up for our next Lunch with the Pastor event at: firstwest.cc/membership.



Fees & Venues

Significant utility and custodial expenses are involved with use of the Church properties. At the initial meeting to reserve the Church, you will be given the fees for your wedding, exclusive of fees for musicians, soloists, videographers, or other persons you enlist to work for your wedding.

Your wedding fee includes the following:

- Building Services / Housekeeping personnel
- Sound and Lighting Technician(s)
- Reception supplies (as applicable)
- Cost of linen cleaning
- Wedding Director

Any fees necessitated by additional sound and/or lighting personnel, moving of equipment, or personnel hours beyond what is normally established shall be assessed and charged to the wedding party at the rate of \$100 per hour. Checks shall be made payable to First Baptist Church.

Church Facilities

Facilities for wedding service include the following:

- Feazel Chapel (capacity 275)
- Worship Center (capacity 1,834 including balcony)
- Driskell Chapel (capacity 20)

Reception areas:

- Tennison Hall, including Atrium
- Tennison Hall
- Reception Rooms A100-102 (located in the Adult Education Building)



Wedding Weekend

Rehearsal

Wedding rehearsals typically occur the evening prior to the wedding (usually around 6:00 PM). Your Wedding Director will ensure an efficient rehearsal of an hour or less! Consult with your Wedding Director for any exceptions to this general rule. Both sets of parents and all ushers should be present.

Promptness in beginning the rehearsal is a must. It is very important that the bride and groom ensure that all members of the wedding party be on time for the rehearsal as well as the wedding. Neither the rehearsal nor the wedding ceremony will be delayed for any reason.

The Worship Service/Ceremony

Special requests should be made through the pastor at the time of your conference with him. Vows will be in keeping with biblical principles and traditional ideals. The wedding ceremony will start promptly at the appointed time.

Dressing Areas

Bridal rooms are available to the bride and her attendants for use in dressing for the wedding. Rooms are also available to the groom and his groomsmen. Immediately following the wedding, all personal belongings are to be removed from the dressing areas. It is suggested that one or more persons be assigned to this task. The Church shall not be responsible for any items left in these areas after the wedding.

Food and/or beverages other than water are not permitted inside West Monroe's Feazel Chapel or Driskell Chapel or the Worship Center (all campuses). An area may be set aside for a sandwich tray outside these areas on the day of the wedding. Arrangements must be made through your Wedding Director ahead of time for this privilege.



Receptions

The Operations Manager will be happy to assist you in planning your reception. For planning purposes, the following dances are permitted for the reception:

- Bride & Groom
- Bride & Father
- Groom & Mother

Reception areas are Tennison Hall, the Atrium, or A100–102 (located in the Adult Education Building). For your convenience, a chart of table layouts for the reception is included in this packet.

- The appropriate forms must be properly completed and submitted to the Operations Manager at least 60 days prior to the ceremony.
- It is required that the Church's Food Services team members supervise the kitchen and equipment use, even when your event is catered.
- Reception supplies are available for use only on Church property. The wedding party is responsible for any breakage and/or loss and will be so charged.
- Receptions must end and all decorations be removed no later than 9 pm for Friday weddings and 6 pm for Saturday weddings. It is the responsibility of the wedding party to remove all decorations immediately following the reception. It is advisable to have a coordinator assist with your reception.
- If you have rented items such as chairs, columns, arches, etc., please arrange for someone in the wedding party to take down and remove all rental items from the Church. The Church staff members are not responsible for removing rented items, nor can the Church store rented items.
- A charge of \$150 will be billed to the bride and groom if rented items are left to be removed by our Building Services personnel.

Building Services

The Building Specialist will take direction for your wedding needs from the Operations Manager. Please ensure the Operations Manager has advance notice of any special needs that your wedding may require. Our Building Specialists do not assist with any wedding needs other than those described herein.

- A Building Specialist will be present one hour prior to your rehearsal.
- For safety purposes, our Building Services personnel will advise which door is to be used on the day the Church is decorated. Only the door designated will be unlocked for decorating purposes.



- With Feazel Chapel usage, you will be advised to keep the door locked while decorating. Under no circumstances are any doors to be unlocked or propped open by any member of the wedding party, decorators, or caterers. This policy is for your safety and for the security of our facilities and will be enforced by our Building Services team members.
- On the day of your wedding, if there is a reception, you will have a total of no more than six (6) hours that the Church will be available to you or four (4) hours without a reception. This includes time for dressing, photographs, ceremony, reception, and clean up. Our Building Services personnel will remain present when the wedding is scheduled to begin. Your Wedding Director should make immediate contact with the Building Specialist upon arrival at the Church.
- Our Building Services team members are responsible for restoring the building(s) for Sunday services following a wedding. Therefore, it is imperative that all decorations be removed from the Worship Center / Feazel Chapel immediately following the ceremony. It is the responsibility of the bride to make certain that a team has been appointed to remove decorations and to clean up.
- Cleanup of dishes, etc., is the responsibility of the person in charge of the reception. The Building Specialist's responsibility shall be limited to the placement and removal of furniture and the cleaning of the floors. If our Building Services personnel must clean up, there will be an additional charge of \$100 per hour. A Building Specialist is available should there be a mechanical problem but shall have no responsibility for bringing in flower arrangements, decorations, or stacking and storing rental items.

Wedding Dress & Personal Valuables

When selecting your wedding gown and attendant(s) dresses, please remember to maintain dignity along with grace and style.

The bride is responsible for determining the hour her wedding gown and bridesmaids' dresses will be delivered to the Church. All deliveries should be made as near the time of the wedding as possible. The bride should give this information to her Wedding Director who will communicate this to the Church.

The Church's responsibility is limited to providing a dressing area for the bridal party. The Church is NOT responsible for any personal items such as wedding dresses, jewelry, etc., brought to the Church for use at the wedding and/or reception. Every reasonable precaution will be made to protect such property, but a friend or member of the family should be designated to be responsible for valuables during the service and/or reception.

Childcare

The church is not responsible for providing childcare for the children of the bridal party or the wedding guests.



Decorating

Interior finishes of our chapels and Worship Centers are ready for your wedding day!

The following policies help preserve the spiritual atmosphere and safeguard the furnishings:

- Decorating in West Monroe's Feazel Chapel or the Worship Center may begin at 8:00 AM the day prior to the wedding and should be completed prior to the rehearsal.
- Decorating after the rehearsal is not permitted.
- Fresh flowers must be brought on the day of the wedding to avoid wilting. Due to health policies, we cannot store flowers in our food refrigerator.
- Flower arrangements must be prepared outside the Worship Center or West Monroe's Chapel. The kitchen is not available for this purpose. Suitable containers other than paper mache are to be used.
- Only dripless or flameless candles are permitted. If dripless candles are used, the flame must be extinguished immediately following the ceremony. Candelabras, unity candles, and columns are not available from the Church.
- Candles may not be used in Tennison Hall.
- Candles are not to be placed on the shelf under the stained glass in Feazel Chapel.
- Balloons, confetti and glitter are not allowed in any part of the Church or Church properties as part of the decorations.
- All decorations shall be removed by the wedding party immediately following the wedding ceremony. It is the responsibility of the bride and groom and/or their families to see that all rental items are removed promptly after the wedding. Our Building Services personnel will not remove rented items and/or store them until the next business day. The Operations Manager must be given the name and telephone number of a contact person who is not in the wedding party but who will be responsible for seeing that these items are removed from the Church. This person will also be responsible for any lost and found items to be picked up at the Church.



Wedding Day Timeline

12 Weeks Prior to Wedding

- Use of Facilities Policy and Wedding Handbook read and appropriate forms returned to Operations Manager
- Reserve the Church
- After confirmation, order invitations
- Make first appointment with First West Counseling Center
- Enlist Musician(s)
- Enlist Florist
- Enlist Caterer

8 Weeks Prior to Wedding

- Enlist musicians
- Enlist florist
- Enlist caterer
- Enlist photographer/videographer
- Finalize music selections
- Consultations and schedules for wedding day set

6 Weeks Prior to Wedding

- Submit Music Form to Church for approval
- Complete Reception Form and submit
- Mail your invitations



4 Weeks Prior to Wedding

- Pay balance of fees to the Church
- Get your marriage license
- Submit bridal photo to newspapers
- Purchase attendants' gifts
- Enlist person to remove property brought to worship & reception areas
- Contact Food Service Director if you are having your reception at the Church
- Contact Wedding Coordinator / Food Service Director regarding layout for reception

2 Weeks Prior to Wedding

- Pick up rings
- Pick up wedding gown
- Confirm plans with caterer as to delivery and call the Church to report
- Prepare and submit announcement to newspapers
- Confirm delivery from florist; notify Operations Manager

1 Week Prior to Wedding

- Pack for honeymoon
- Make certain those in wedding party have their attire
- Prepare minister's honorarium and give to your Wedding Director for presentation
- Prepare fees for musician(s)
- Enlist someone to be responsible for checking bride's room, etc., as soon as bridal party departs for reception
- Make certain all in your wedding party are aware of Church regulations regarding use of church property (no alcoholic beverages, no smoking, etc.)



Contact Information

Lead Pastor’s Ministry Assistant Primary Contact for Wedding

Hope Edwards 318-322-5656

Wedding Director names and contact information will be provided by the Lead Pastor’s Office.

First West Counseling Center 318-322-1427

Todd Sherwin, Director

Taylor Lollis, Office Manager

Pre-marital counseling should be scheduled immediately following receipt of confirmation from the Church.

Building Services

Bill Smith, Building Services Director 318-680-7735

A Building Specialist will be on site to assist with temperature control, mechanical or electrical problems.

Food Services (including supplies for receptions)

Pattie Diaz, Operations Manager 318-322-5199

Pianists/Musicians

Casey Harold, Worship Pastor 318-322-5206

First West members are always preferred. Our Worship Ministry team can provide recommendations. Remember that each musician sets his/her own fees.

