

DEEPER LIFE CAMPUS FELLOWSHIP, CANADA

INTERACTIVE COUNSELLING/SEMINAR

TOPIC: BIBLICAL PROCEDURES ON MARRIAGE

Hebrews 13:4; 1Corinthians 14:40

Marriage is one of the most important and powerful institutions that God established (Hebrews 13:4). Unfortunately, the Devil has introduced so many deceptions into the world about marriage to deceive and confuse mankind (John 10:10). While God seeks to settle the solitary in godly families, Satan on the other hand does work day and night to hinder the realization of this beautiful and glorious divine plan. He does not want anyone to enjoy the honor that God reserves for marriage (Hebrews 13:4). Thus, in every age, the devil always try to hinder men and women from following the path that leads to successful marital lives (1Peter 5:8).

Nevertheless, it is more interesting to discover that God is always willing to reveal His perfect will to each of His children (Jeremiah 16:2); and the church cannot but teach her members the time-tested scriptural precepts and a long marital-bliss secrets of overcoming Satan's devices concerning marriage (2 Corinthians 2:11). While the period of singleness could be maximized for simple living, devotedness and consecration to God, personal, character and personality development, it is sad to see how many young people today are trapped in the web of emotional struggles, loneliness, immoralities and a search for identity in the context of married society.

As the church grows, the need to coordinate and regulate how things are being done cannot be overemphasized. Hence, need to guide young people in the church into successful marital relationships led to the establishment of the marriage committee that we have in the church today. Since purity is demanded among children of God (1 Timothy 5:2), the need for a transparent process of guiding young people through the path of a sin-free proposal, courtship and into a fulfilling marital union is necessitated.

THE PURPOSE AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE MARRIAGE COMMITTEE

Hebrews 13: 4; 1Corinthians 14:40; 1Timothy 3:1-7

The marriage committee should ideally comprise of leaders who are devoted to guiding, counselling, encouraging and praying for those who are eligible or at the point of making decisions concerning marriage. The sole aim of the marriage committee is to prevent marital complications, conflicts among brethren over relationships, various forms of disorderliness in the marriage processes and all kinds of contradictions found in churches today. Where orderliness is not put in place early enough, several problems and complications might arise. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that God is not the author of such confusions (1Corinthians 10: 31). Many have been deceived into believing that hearing and knowing God's will in marriage is not real while others consider it as old fashioned. Since most mistakes in marriage are not reversible, it is very crucial for every single believer to prepare their heart to follow the path that God through His word and faithful servants has prepared for the church (Deuteronomy 27:10; 2Chronicles 20:20).

"Thus, saith the LORD, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6: 16). Like many other godly precepts, marriage committee may not be directly mentioned in the Bible, however, it is very clear from their works and operations that God is using them to save many lives and marriages from the evils of this untoward generation. Hence, it could be considered part of the **"many other words"** inspired by the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:40; 2Timothy 3:16,17).

1. The membership are usually 4 brothers and 3 sisters (usually at the level of District Coordinators or Women Coordinators), depending on the numerical strength of the church.
2. All members of the MC are married, mature, experienced and committed members of the church.

3. It is also important to state that issues brought before the marriage committee are kept confidential. It is not discussed outside the forum. It is also important to know that the church doesn't allow husband and wife to serve as members of the Marriage Committee at the same time.

THE PROCEDURE AND MODUS-OPERANDI OF THE MARRIAGE COMMITTEE

1Corinthians 14:40

Usually, Marriage Committee meetings hold fortnightly. However, the time and frequency may vary for one church location to another.

1. After praying to know the will of God, a brother or sister should first see the leader of his/her local church who would refer him/her to the marriage committee after proper counselling.
2. If the testimony is clear, he/she will be required to carry out some specific medical tests from church designated medical laboratory. **THE RESULT MUST BE SENT DIRECTLY TO THE MARRIAGE COMMITTEE FROM THE DIAGNOSTIC CENTRE.**
3. Thereafter, the Marriage Committee will interview the brother/sister for the correctness or otherwise of his/her declarations and check whether he/she is walking by sight or if there has been any pre-arranged agreement before coming to the Marriage Committee.

NB: The Marriage Committee is NOT TO APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE anyone's leading. The committee is just there to guide, encourage, pray for young people in the church who are at the marriageable age and ensure that everything is done in orderliness and honesty.

4. Generally, a sister will be considered ripe for marriage only when she has attained the age of 23 years; and if she is in an institution of higher learning, she must be in her final year. However, there may be special exceptions to this general rule.
5. A sister who is of age, free and ready for marriage is informed to expect a brother. She must pray and hear from God before giving the reply directly to the brother who proposed to her. She is requested and reminded to be polite, courteous, very plain and clear while giving her answer to the brother.
6. Where more than one brother has come to the Marriage Committee for a sister, they are sent in the order of 'first come, first to go'. Permission to go can only be given to the next brother when it is confirmed that the sister has concluded praying on the previous brother sent and that her answer is negative.

Where many brothers are on queue to see a sister and she is not coming up with any response to the first brother who has proposed to her, the Marriage Committee could intervene and stop any other person from being sent to talk to her about marriage to prevent any form of bias and carnality from creeping in. In such instances, sisters in this category are invited and advised to go and pray to determine God's will. However, if she comes up with the name of one of the brothers amongst those on the waiting list, he is automatically sent to see her no matter his number on the queue provided there was no pre-arrangement between them. On the other hand, if she is led to someone who has himself not come up to see the Marriage Committee on her behalf and such a brother is free to marry, the sister would be allowed to see him. This is done to avoid embarrassment and temptation to pick and choose carnally.

7. After a sister/brother has given her/his consent, the two of them are invited to see the Marriage Committee to confirm their convictions. The Marriage Committee will listen to the testimony of the sister preferably without

the brother listening. They are then advised to seek their parents' consent. While they are free to see other relatives if they choose to, it is mandatory to see their parents (if such parents are still alive) for their consent. If they need to travel, they are advised to take along one other person who is mature and approved by the Marriage Committee.

Whoever is chosen by the intending couples, will see the Marriage Committee or a representative of the Marriage Committee who will enlighten him/her on the role he/she will play.

He/she is made to realize the purpose or the necessity of a third party and that he/ she is going as a representative of the church to help the intending couple not to be too close. He or she is not to be the spokesman for the intending couple who ought to have spoken to their parents individually before presenting the would-be suitor. Where the parents are outside the State/Region/Country, a letter from the Overseer's office in the State/Region/Nation will be issued for help from the host Overseer or his representative.

8. After obtaining their parents' consent, the intending couple is given necessary instructions and guidelines for their courtship. Positive parents' consent must be obtained before courtship can begin. Parents' consent need not be in writing. The church considers the verbal report of those who travelled with them as sufficient.
9. The courtship briefing must be comprehensive, and it includes the following instructions, advice and warnings.
 - (a) **Venue of Courtship meetings:** Usually a private but not secluded place. For example, a Christian couple's house (with more than one room) having children or where people move in and out would be considered ideal. All doors and windows should be kept open during meeting time. Late night meetings are not permitted by the church.
 - (b) **Details of Meeting:** Every meeting should be adequately prepared for. The meeting can be divided into 2 parts:
 - (i) **Bible discussion.**
 - (ii) **Practical Marriage plans**

The Bible discussion can simply be exhortations from the Bible which should be rotated between them. After each exhortation, opportunity should be given for questions and clarifications.

10. **Immediately after the courtship and before dowry/bride price payment, the church would normally make announcement for a period of 3 weeks in case anyone have any reason or objections to the proposed marriage.** Any objections raised would then be dealt with before dowry payment. During this period, the intending couples would be required to carry out a final medical test from a recognized and recommended government hospital to confirm their HIV status. In the case of any of the parties test positive to HIV at this stage, the wedding process would be suspended and the case would be referred to the Pastor without any delay.
11. The dowry list is submitted to the Marriage Committee for scrutiny and approval before payment is made. Unscriptural items on the list are deleted and the intending couple is warned not to give money in place of those items. As soon as dowry is paid, the intending couple can now go ahead to file court notice in preparation for their wedding. **It would be wrong practice to file notice in court before dowry is paid.** Church wedding would take place after obtaining court license or marriage certificate. After the dowry is paid, the bridegroom will collect a letter from the parents of the bride giving the church the right to continue with the wedding arrangements. Before fixing the wedding date, the house of the brother will be inspected by at least two members of the marriage committee.

NB: A brother or sister who have had a child/children before marriage/conversion are usually guided on how to go about this before the marriage is consummated.

12. A post-marriage interview or counselling is done by the Marriage Committee about 2-4 weeks after the wedding. This counselling is done in the house of the couple and the aim or goal is to help the new couple adjust properly and turn from the former individual life to a corporate life pattern.

THE PLEASANTNESS OF MARRYING THROUGH THE MARRIAGE COMMITTEE

John 13:17; Ecclesiastes 3: 11; Jeremiah 29:11

There are many benefits of going through the church procedure for our marriages. Some of these benefits includes but not limited to:

1. Absence of guilt (1John3:20-22)
2. Peace of mind (Jeremiah 6:16)
3. Testimonies that can help to encourage the future generations (Isaiah 62:10).
4. Confirmation of true spiritual compatibility and sameness of conviction (1 John 4:1)
5. Good planning for the future (Luke 14:7-35)
6. Clarification of medical fitness (1 John 4:1)
7. Exposure of deception and deceivers (Proverbs 19:5; Psalm 101:5)
8. Time tested confirmation of leadings from both sides (Isaiah 28:16)
9. Leadership and parental benedictions (1 Timothy 4:14)
10. Prevention of unpleasant experiences through godly parental counselling (Proverbs 11:14).

QUESTIONS AND SATISFACTORY ANSWERS