

## What if

- **we're already living together?**
- **one of us was previously married?**
- **we can't get a license?**

A "general answer":

This church does not create impediments to marriage based on previous marital status, current living arrangements, gender or sexual orientation. We want to be supportive of your best efforts to create a life together which is joyful, forgiving, resilient, and a benefit to others.

We are supportive because we have an open and generous view of God and of the human capacity for love. Planning your wedding together can be a sign of, and an occasion for, tremendous emotional growth and spiritual maturing. We think that those things are more important than one's past mistakes or experiences.

When meeting with us to plan your wedding, these issues provide an opportunity, but not an obligation, for deeper conversation about your personal growth and your love relationship. But simply put, we will not exclude you on the basis of prior marriage or sexual expression, etc.

## What if we're already living together?

Millions of couples today begin their lives together apart from any legal bonds. Some move in together, either because they cannot marry legally or they wish to avoid legal entanglements which could become a burden to them. For some, a previous marriage convinced them that another legal marriage would be a risk not worth taking.

Chance are, if you are already living together, you have not been socially stigmatized. Your families and friends already know you are living together. Your reasons for getting married now may include one or more of the following: (1) a parent or other family member is anxious or pained about your un-married living arrangement; (2) children do not understand—or are embarrassed in front of their peers by— your present arrangement; (3) you want to have the legal benefits of marriage in order to protect your partner, or qualify him/her for medical or other benefits, or ensure that accounts, property and other assets may not be endangered in the future.

This church does not exclude you by reason of your current relationship and living arrangement. We are happy to support and uphold your emerging commitment to one another.

We recognize, of course, that many couples have chosen to live together with no solid sense of commitment to one another or to the future. Commitment may seem like an entangling word to some. But it is a sign to your partner that she/he can rely on you and your support and love, from this time onward. With or without a marriage license, offering that commitment love and support is what a marriage is all about. If you are reading this, it probably means that you have grown in your relationship to the point where offering and receiving signs of commitment have become important to you.

## What if one of us was previously married?

A previous marriage which ended in divorce can be a major emotional pain or scar, which affects some people so profoundly they are afraid to ever make another commitment in love.

It is best not to think of blame or fault when looking back on a previous marriage. Our ministry and service to a couple planning marriage is not to illicit shame or guilt, nor to demand some sign of repentance.

We know that all people are imperfect; all God's children bear the marks of error, failure, immaturity, selfishness and sin, but God's grace and compassion are freely given to all who ask for them.

When contemplating a new marriage, there may be an opportunity, especially with guidance and counsel, to reflect on what may trigger new psychological or emotional pain. Moving on after a painful divorce *may be* an important chance for emotional and spiritual growth and change (which is the whole point of repentance). The important lesson in moving from "divorced" to "remarried" is to start a new relationship wiser and stronger, with the expectation that the re-marrying individual doesn't fall into the same patterns or experiences which caused the pain and disintegration of the previous marriage.

Beyond this opportunity for emotional and spiritual growth, there is no reason to re-live the traumas of a previous marriage or "carry baggage" from a previous marriage into a new marriage. It is often beneficial to counsel with the Pastor or other spiritual advisor about your experience and your hopes for the future. It is always wise to be open and honest with your spouse-to-be about any and all former relationships. But there is no required examination, nor is there any categorical disqualification for entering marriage because of a prior status.

## What if we can't get a marriage license?

Some couples choose not to, or cannot, obtain a valid marriage license. Same-sex couples are not presently permitted to marry in California (either pending lawsuits or ballot initiatives concerning Proposition 8 may change this fact). Older couples (one or both of whom have been widowed, for example) who receive Social Security checks may fear losing their current benefits by marrying and so do not want to risk a legal wedding.

While legal marriage confers thousands of legal benefits, it is the mission and ministry of this church to serve God by blessing and confirming your love, not merely to ratify your legal marital status.

— Pastor Dan Hooper  
Hollywood Lutheran Church