

Imam Chris' marriage policy through the ICPgh

Please read through the following. Appendices give detail on common issues of concern.

1. **Both bride and groom** must be of **Muslim faith**. If the bride is not, there are other imams of the city that may be willing to assist. * (See appendix 1)
2. Both parties have already **agreed upon a bridal-gift / dowry**. Discuss and agree upon a mahr **before** ceremony date and communicate the agreed upon amount or item to the imam, whether modest or luxurious, or a ring or sponsoring her education or hajj or anything else of value. This will *not* be made public unless a ring exchange is requested. ** (See appendix 2)
3. **Two adult male Muslim witnesses** must be provided. As the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "there is no nikah without a wali **and two just witnesses**" and most Islamic legal schools obligate them to be Muslim men. Your marriage should be valid to all.
4. **Father of the bride, her wali, must be physically present**. If the father is not a Muslim and she has no male Muslim relatives (i.e. grandfather, brother or son), then the Imam will serve as her wali. **The wali is the main authorizer of the marriage**. Traditionally the imam is just a guide. If the default wali cannot be *physically* present, then he should be reachable via phone, Zoom or Skype for the ceremony. Otherwise, proof must be provided that he has delegated her marriage to another male paternal family member. Or if he has passed, then such proof must be provided, so that the next male relative with the most right can assume the role. *** (See appendix 3)
5. **Marriage license from the Court of Records** must be presented and surrendered to the imam who will sign and mail it in within one week of the ceremony. If the license has already been signed by a judge or other officiant, the imam will merely make a photocopy. If the marriage license cannot be presented, then the imam will withhold giving the masjid certificate until procured. **** (See appendix 4)
6. If marriage is to be performed at the Islamic Center during reasonable hours, there is a **fee of \$100**. If the marriage is **off site, the fee is \$250**. This may be a check made out to the "Islamic Center of Pittsburgh" with "nikah" in the memo, or cash or digital donation. Imam will give a traditional speech on the occasion unless other arrangements are made. Any cash offered after the Islamic Center fee will be considered gratuity for the imam.
7. Pre-marital counseling is available upon request.
8. As of June 2021, the ICP has lightened all covid restrictions, but that is subject to change.

What to expect on the wedding day: Format

Wedding ceremony at ICP may not need exceed 20 minutes once all guests assemble. That includes the *ijab*(offer) and *qabu*(acceptance) followed by a brief speech and closing duaa. Guests may then take pictures and hand out sweets if on hand.

Most weddings are conducted in sisters' section of our prayer hall. If there is special request, or if the wedding party is particularly modest, we may conduct the ceremony in our conference room or lower-level library. If the wedding party wishes to host a reception in our lower-level banquet hall, whether cooking or catering, you may fill a [rental request form](#) and send it to office@icp-pgh.org.

If the wedding is to be off site, the imam will need to know the following:

- Has the aqd al-nikah (katb al-kitab) already been made between bride, wali and groom or will this event include the wedding ceremony?
 - If not (default), then Imam will guide the bride, groom and wali through the marriage and then speak about the blessings and duties of marriage.
 - If yes, then Imam will simply speak about the blessings and duties of marriage.
- Will the reception meal (shaadi / waleemah / banquet) be immediately after the wedding ceremony in the same room **or** will guests move to a separate seating area for the reception?
 - **If** the reception and ceremony are **together**, the ceremony will precede, led by the imam. After duaa, family members may speak, and then pictures will be taken followed by meal and cake cutting.
 - **If** the reception takes place **later** or at a **separate** venue, will the imam be requested to speak at both? There is no additional fee for this, but only a matter of preparation.
 - Will alcoholic beverages be served at the reception or will there be dancing? If yes, imam may leave before or after dinner. Wedding party is hereby reminded to keep their event pleasing to Allah to obtain most barakah. And do not neglect to plan proper accommodation for prayers like asr and maghrib that could take place during your event.
- Will a different family member or friend be designated to recite a portion of the Quran for the ceremony or reception?

- Will the event include a ring exchange, unity symbol, personally crafted vows, certificate signing, etc.? Do you want any/all of those items to take place during the ceremony **or** the reception? Usually they take place during the ceremony and the imam guides them along, with the exception of the certificate signing. From personal experience and observation, it is a bit cumbersome for all members of the wedding party, including witnesses, to go back and forth to a small table where the certificate is, during the ceremony. But I am open.
- Will there be a rehearsal to finalize these particulars? Will there be a DJ or MC for imam to work out cues with?

What to expect: documents

Both bride and groom must submit driver's license or other government photo ID for scanning or send a copy to the imam. This is a basic procedure at most masajid, and may be done at earliest convenience, even by email.

The ICP marriage certificate displays basic wedding party details along with our stamp and embosser. If you wish to provide a more decorative certificate ([for example](#)), we will accommodate and can add our stamp. This may assist if Islamic marriage proof is required to travel or reside together in a Muslim majority country.

Dowry and marital conditions may be written on back of the certificate.

The couple may request a more detailed contract cementing certain Islamic privileges, rights, and obligations. Specifically, the imam recommends agreement to delegate divorce to the wife if she receives approval from an imam, and to agree to follow the Sharia and [the AMJA family code](#) or similar in case of dispute threatening the continuity of the marriage or proper process of separation.

Appendix 1: Why Imam Chris does not officiate weddings with non-Muslims

I understand that love is not something we ourselves choose, but it is thrown into our hearts and we are tested and tried by it. Love may drive us to do amazing things, be better versions of ourselves, sacrificing some of our time, money, and pursuits to care for another, and building a world for them that forces us to mature along with our beloved. It is a source of great pleasure and may sometimes lead to pain and frustration. But love may also take us on a new journey, at first intriguing and surprising, but later, we find we have become a completely different person than the generations that we hailed from that reared us.

I may not know you personally, and so I do not wish to make assumptions, but a great many Muslim men have approached me with at least one thing in common. And I remind them of what Allah says in the Quran:

{وَلَا تَنْكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكَاتِ حَتَّى يُؤْمِنَنَّ وَلَا أُمَّةً مُؤْمِنَةً خَيْرٌ مِنْ مُشْرِكَةٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَتْكُمْ وَلَا تُنكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَتَّى يُؤْمِنُوا
وَلَعَبْدٌ مُؤْمِنٌ خَيْرٌ مِنْ مُشْرِكٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكُمْ أُولَئِكَ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ وَاللَّهُ يَدْعُو إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ وَالْمَغْفِرَةِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيُبَيِّنُ آيَاتِهِ
لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ (221)} سورة البقرة

“And do not marry idolatrous women until they believe. And a believing slave woman is better than an idolatress, even if she pleases you. And do not marry your daughters to idolatrous men until they believe. And a believing slave is better than an idolater, even if he pleases you. They invite to the Fire, but Allah invites to Paradise and to forgiveness, by His permission. And He makes clear His verses to the people that perhaps they may remember.” [al-Baqarah 2:221]

The prohibition in this ayah is **one** reason why I personally do not witness or officiate weddings with non-Muslims. There is another reason as well. It is perhaps well known that the Quran makes a concession in chapter 5 verse 5, allowing Muslim men to marry chaste Christian or Jewish women.

{الْيَوْمَ أَحِلَّ لَكُمْ ... وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ إِذَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ
مُحْصِنِينَ غَيْرِ مُسَافِحِينَ وَلَا مُتَّخِذِي أَخْدَانٍ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ حَبِطَ عَمَلُهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ

مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ (5) سورة المائدة

“And this day, permitted for you all are ... and the chaste women of those given the Book before you, if you have given them their reward, desiring chastity, not promiscuity nor taking as [boy/girl] friends. And whoever disbelieves in faith, then their deeds have nullified, and they are in the Hereafter among the losers.” [5:5]

Many scholars and imams refrain from officiating such marriages because most nearly all unmarried women in America do not ascribe to religion much less place any value whatsoever on chastity. See Chapter 24 (Surah al-Noor) ayah 3.

And in a society that views marriage as a permanent bond, and not only criminalizes polygamy but even Muslims shun it as well, then if I witness our sons -- the Muslim men of this Ummah -- marry Christian and Jewish women -- then what will happen to all the good Muslim women waiting on the sidelines? Muslim men asking to marry non-Muslims are not outliers, but at least a *third* of the marital requests I receive. A staggering amount.

And as we know, Muslims came to the Americas long before Columbus, and several million slaves were Muslim. Despite all this, Islam all but vanished from the continent in 19th century. Historians name multiple causes for this, but one of the leading causes is intermarriage with non-Muslim native Americans.

For these reasons, and more, I do not facilitate weddings with non-Muslim brides. Consider all that you will miss if you continue with this marriage:

- Praying with your spouse during the day or during the night. As the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “*May Allah show mercy to a man who gets up during the night and performs salaah, awakens his wife to pray and if she refuses, he sprinkles water on her face (to make her get up). May Allah show mercy to a woman who gets up during the night and performs salaah, awakens her husband for the same purpose; and if he refuses, she sprinkles water on his face.*”

- Fasting with your wife, especially during Ramadan, waking up for suhoor together, supporting each other during the day, breaking fast together, and praying tarawih together, at home or at the masjid, reciting Quran together and learning about it together.
- Celebrating Eid together, enjoying the Muslim community, watching games, eating savory food, and visiting relatives.
- Connecting your hearts to a masjid, a house of worship, together, where you two can each go for prayers, lessons, volunteering, solace, camaraderie, and invested belonging.
- Feeling solidarity with news events from around the world, expressing joy and sorrow together for what befalls our brothers and sisters around the world, and by extension, supporting each other when we want to give to those noble causes.
- Performing pilgrimage together to the House of Allah, built by Prophet Ibrahim, and visiting the masjid and final resting place of our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Medinah.
- Having a common ground, faith and reference for solving our disputes and guiding our future. A common paradigm and worldview for raising your children with.
- Celebrating faith-based milestones for your children, like their memorization of Surahs and coming of age to pray and fast. And trusting each other to faithfully attend to those duties and inculcate and defend proper Islamic beliefs and values as a team.
- A reasonable cause of hope to enjoy the fruits of this Quranic verse saying what means, **“Gardens of eternity; they will enter *with the righteous among their ancestors, their spouses and their descendants.* And the angels will enter upon them from every gate...”** [13:23]
- What guarantee do we have, years from now, should we pass away and our affairs are in the hands of non-Muslims, that they would see to it that we receive an Islamic burial, and that our estate be distributed Islamically without any undue preference? And what in the case of separation, when their system demands half of what you worked your life for, while Islam protects it and only gives each person their God-given right?
- And what if children born out of this union question the salvation of their parents, be they raised this way or that, what confusion might be born of this? And I have heard so many times, *“My wife is fine raising our children Muslim”* but years later when the children arrive, she has a change of heart and there is no legal repercussion that can be done about it, even if she carved in stone her prior agreement.

Or perhaps one might think, “*I can change her, she’ll be accepting and supporting of Islam*” but as soon as you think that, then you have already erred, because it is only Allah Who guides, we are but tools that may make them more receptive or close them off entirely by our example.

When living with non-Muslims, we do not impose our ways on them, since they do not follow our faith, whether that is with alcohol and pork, or even with more major facets of our religion, such as prayer and pure monotheism. But what often happens is that we ourselves may grow shy or fatigued from expressing those choices ourselves. Like taking time off in the middle of an activity to observe prayer, or to change a channel from something we should not watch, or sending back a plate at a restaurant for something we should not eat. Are we putting ourselves in an environment that helps our faith grow, or lets our faith wane and fade simply so that we can be “one happy family”? As the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “A man is upon the religion of his closest companion, so look to whom you take as your closest companion.”

I know my brother that not everyone is at the same level of faith nor commitment. And I should not treat everyone as if they are. But it is my sincere hope, expectation, and observation that those with Islamic roots someday search for those nostalgic objects, experiences, and lessons to pass on to their children. And so naturally, your spouse may desire to do the same, of celebrating Easter at church and then advent calendars, nativity scenes and fern trees at Christmas. What will your legacy be? Can you even guarantee that you will have one?

Finally, should the woman desire to learn about Islam, I would be ***more than happy*** to answer any questions, give a presentation, and provide resources, not only literature, but other sisters to socialize with. I know several brothers who have told the woman of their heart’s desire “I will only marry a Muslimah” and so they have given their fiancé breadth to research Islam, even practice the faith at their own leisure and volunteer in the community as an observer, before ultimately taking shahadah and joining the Ummah of Muhammad ﷺ.

But if it is your solemn intention to continue with things as they are in expedient fashion, please let me know, what was it that our Muslim daughters and sisters could not provide or what turned you away from them, so that I can tell them when they ask where all the decent unmarried Muslim men have gone?

May Allah guide us all to what pleases Him

And so that the subject is not neglected, by **consensus** of the scholars of Islam, it is forbidden for a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man and any such marriage is invalid. Any intercourse is considered unlawful *zina* fornication, and children are Islamically considered father-less bastards without inheritance between child and sire. This is based on the verse of the Quran which means:

{ لَا هُنَّ حِلٌّ لَهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحِلُّونَ لَهُنَّ } سورة الممتحنة

“***They*** [Muslim women] ***are not permitted for them*** [non-Muslim men] ***and those men are not permitted for those women.***” [60:10]

The Quran gives Muslim men a concession to marry some non-Muslim women (again, in circumstances where Islam is strong and Muslims are in a protected land to practice their religion without worry) because women are more dynamic and likely to convert to the religion of their husbands, especially in an Islamic environment where the children are not at jeopardy of going astray. Non-Muslim men are far less likely to ever convert to the religion of a Muslim woman, especially in the West. Unless she has withheld herself from him until he does convert and marry her and is willing to give her all the rights that Islam guarantees might he oblige. It may take a year or more for him to study and observe Islam and Muslims and contemplate the decision before deciding to convert and marry.

Allah knows best, and may Allah exalt the mention of His Messenger and upon his family and companions and followers and grant them peace.

Appendix 2: the Mahr (bride's gift)

Allah ﷻ says in the Quran:

{وَأْتُوا النِّسَاءَ صَدُقَاتِهِنَّ نِحْلَةً فَإِنْ طِبْنَ لَكُمْ عَنْ شَيْءٍ مِنْهُ نَفْسًا فَكُلُوهُ هَنِيئًا مَرِيئًا (4)} سورة النساء

“And give the women [upon marriage] their [bridal] gifts in good faith. But if they give up willingly to you anything of it, then eat from it in satisfaction and ease.” [4:4]

The *mahr* or sometimes called *sadaaq* or bridal-gift or dowry is a mandatory gift that Allah commands the husband to give to the bride upon consummation of the marriage. Allah refers to it as *fareedah* (strong obligation) and *ujoorahunn* (their reward) many times in the Quran, no matter the circumstance, even for the Prophet ﷺ and his marriages and even for marrying slaves.

The mahr is traditionally money, and may be as little as \$100 or as much as \$100,000 or any agreed upon amount, depending on the circumstances of bride and groom, culture, etc. The mahr could also be intangible, like a man's accepting Islam, or his teaching her for free, or shared ownership of a product or business. It could even be a hajj trip or education expenses.

In western culture, the engagement ring and ring exchange seems to have taken the place of the dowry, but in Islam, neither the woman nor her family are required to spend on her husband and we encourage preserving Islamic culture.

The amount of the bridal gift is not announced during the ceremony, nor before or after. But we *strongly* encourage writing it down, and we keep track of trends and wish to know what you have agreed upon.

The mahr is the sole property of the wife. Her family has no right to it nor can they pressure her to spend it any certain way. She may invest it, donate it, spend it on handbags and shoes or whatever she pleases to do with it without blame, if no zakat is due upon it. If the husband gave a certain gift to the wife and a different gift to the family, then the gift to the wife is the mahr.

In the case where the husband decides to divorce his wife before consummating the marriage, she is entitled to half the agreed upon sum, unless she forgoes it, or he gives all. If he already gave the entire sum, he may not take any portion back.

The mahr is also significant if the wife later decides she wants to leave her husband but he wishes to stay married to her. In this case, [her resource is *khul`ah*](#) and she would offer her husband all the mahr back in exchange for agreeing to separate. If the mahr is a reasonable amount, then the mahr should be enough for an imam to ratify the *khul`ah*. If it was a dollar or a small amount or forgone entirely, then she is at the husband's mercy on how much to accept from her or not.

It is also with the mahr that marital conditions may be added. Suggested conditions may include, “if the wife seeks a *khul`ah*, and gives back the dowry, then she is divorced from her husband” or “the husband may not force his wife to work nor may he force her to stay home from work”.

Do note that the mahr along with any conditions may be changed if bride and groom mutually agree without any coercion.

Appendix 3: The necessity of the Wali

Allah ﷻ says in the Quran:

{فَأَنكِحُوا الَّذِينَ بِأَذْنِ أَهْلِهِنَّ وَأَتُوهُنَّ أَجُورَهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ... (25) سورة النساء}

“Marry those women *with the permission of their families* and give them their customary compensation...” [4:25]

Throughout the Quran, Allah commands the wali, the woman’s guardian—but never her alone—to marry her off or withhold marrying her to certain people. For more info, see [this](#).

And the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [said](#):

لا نكاح إلا بولي

There is no marriage without a wali.

And he ﷺ [said](#):

أَيُّمَا امْرَأَةٍ نَكَحْتُ بِغَيْرِ إِذْنِ وَلِيِّهَا فَنِكَاحُهَا بَاطِلٌ فَنِكَاحُهَا بَاطِلٌ فَنِكَاحُهَا بَاطِلٌ فَإِنْ دَخَلَ بِهَا فَلَهَا الْمَهْرُ بِمَا اسْتَحَلَّ مِنْ فَرْجِهَا فَإِنْ اشْتَجَرُوا فَالسُّلْطَانُ وَلِيُّ مَنْ لَا وَلِيَ لَهُ

“Whichever woman marries without the permission of her wali, her marriage is false, her marriage is false, her marriage is false. If he entered into her, then the mahr is for her in lieu of what he enjoyed from her private parts. If they disagree, then the sultan is the wali for whoever has no wali.”

Scholars of Islam have agreed as a matter of consensus that the wali is the woman’s father as long as he was married to the mother during the pregnancy and he shares the same religion. Like many other masājid, if the father is in another country and does not even speak English or Arabic, we will *still* want to have him on the phone or facetime during the wedding ceremony to pass off the bride to her new husband. **The Imam may be suspicious and decline officiating your wedding if you do not want to involve your parents, or he may require attending pre-**

marital counseling sessions. He may also ask for witnesses to support your claim if you allege that the rightful wali is unfit to perform this duty or he has obstructed the marriage process. Otherwise, this is the father's right that cannot be taken away by any relative or any imam unless he is unable to dispose this right or deemed unfit, regardless of the age or experience of the woman seeking marriage. But if such is the case, the responsibility moves to other available close male relatives of her religion. If none exists, then the imam or masjid community leadership may assume that role or they may delegate it to a responsible community member.

As for the Prophet's [narration](#),

الثَّيِّبُ أَحَقُّ بِنَفْسِهَا مِنْ وَلِيِّهَا

A woman who has been previously married (*thayyib*) has more right to her person than her guardian.

The Prophet ﷺ did not deny that she has a wali, but instead reduced his role to ceremonial only, because she is now experienced with men and knows what marriage is like and what to look out for.

For female converts to Islam, the imam or another masjid representative will assume the ceremonial purpose of a wali. A Muslim community representative cannot, nor even an imam, serve as the *wali* of a Muslim woman if she has male Muslim relatives. What he can do is serve as the *wakeel* or “safeer/mu`abbir” or go-between of the wali, the imam, bride and groom, and carry the message of the wali's offer/ijab to the groom.

Allah knows best.

Appendix 4: The necessity of marriage license from the court

Many marriages we officiate are small, sometimes with only the new couple plus witnesses from the Islamic center staff in our conference room. When so few people are privy to the ceremony, it may be easy for people to take advantage of such intimate gatherings by trying to hold a “secret marriage”. This is usually done because people have something to hide. Religious institutions and their staff may also be sued for “marrying without license” if they perform such ceremonies, and may be prosecuted especially for facilitating polygamy, which is currently illegal nationwide. It is therefore, no surprise that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ forbade secrecy in marriage when he [said](#):

فَصَلُّ مَا بَيْنَ الْحَرَامِ وَالْحَلَالِ الدَّفْءُ وَالصَّوْتُ

What separates halal and haram [in marriage] is a drum and vocalization.

In other words, making it *known* and public. Furthermore, we know that marriage is about more than love. Statistics tell us that nearly half of all marriages end in divorce, and during that process, the former couple rightfully becomes stingy in fighting for their rights financially, along with access to children born between them. To better ensure that these rights are guaranteed to be properly enforced, the marriage must be made official. Proof of marriage can also be of immense benefit for tax purposes, shared ownership rights, inheritance and beneficiary. Especially important and relevant to Muslims is traveling in Muslim countries as a married couple. And while US courts have laws that are contrary to Islam, many of their customs have had their origins from divine law.

There are some men who wish to avoid a public marriage because they fear the possibility of divorce and losing the bulk of their assets and more for years to come. However, when they have children, they are surprised to learn that they have little or no rights to their children, and may still owe the children’s mother child support. A marriage license guarantees his rights to his children.

Such proof of marriage may also be helpful when trying to secure the rights of a spouse or parent not only at home but also abroad should one ever travel and events happen that keep them apart for an extended period of time. The benefits of a publicly licensed marriage far outweigh the harms.

For these reasons and more, the Islamic Center of Pittsburgh, like nearly all medium and large masajid throughout the United States does *not* facilitate or issue certificates for those seeking marriage without a license. In some limited circumstances, we may direct you to other resources.

To obtain a license, see [here](#). To look up a record of marriage within Allegheny county, see [here](#).

May Allah guide us all to what He loves and is Pleased with.