

The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Austin, TX
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Bahá'í Weddings -- Information and Check List

State of Texas Marriage Requirements

Marriage License

The official civil marriage license is obtained from the Travis County Clerk's office located at 5501 Airport Blvd., Austin. Hours are 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. . (Marriages are conducted by the Austin Spiritual Assembly.).

Application for License: The following instructions are copied from a list of Marriage License Requirements provided by the Travis County Clerk's office, January 29, 2004.

What you need to bring to the County Clerk's Office:

- 1 \$41 cash or credit card (no checks)
2. Identification: Accepted forms of Identification include:
Current stat issued Driver's License, ID Card, Military ID, Passport or an original or certified copy of a Birth Certificate.
3. Each person should know their Social Security Number.
4. If recently divorced within the last 30 days, a certified copy of your divorce decree which states the 30-day waiting period has been waived.
5. If the applicant is female and desires to have her maiden name on the license, she will need to provide a certified copy of her birth certificate or a certified copy of her divorce decree that states her name is to be changed to her maiden name.

When Should the Marriage License Be Purchased:

1. The Marriage License will expire after 30 days.
2. There is a **72 hour waiting period**, except for Active Military.

Applicant's Age:

1. Each applicant must be 18 years of age.
2. If one, or both, of the applicant's are fourteen to seventeen years of age, a parental consent form must be signed. The parent must appear with identification in front of the clerk to sign an affidavit consenting to the marriage of a minor.
3. A person under 14 years of age must obtain a District Court Order.

Bahá'í Marriage (Bahá'í marriage ceremonies are legal in all 50 states)

The following material is provided to give those who wish to marry with a Bahá'í ceremony an understanding of the requirements of such by the Institutions of the Bahá'í Faith which in Austin is the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Austin, TX. Prior to making the decision to marry the couple should have come to an understanding of each other's character with agreement on the spiritual basis for their marriage. There are a number of specific and general passages in the Bahá'í Writings relating to marriage: *A Fortress for Well-Being, Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life, Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1968-1973*, pp. 105-12.

The Institution of Marriage

“And when He desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and to set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book. He saith, great is His glory: “Marry O people, that from you may appear he who will remember Me amongst My servants; this is one of My commandments unto you; obey it as an assistance to yourselves.”

Bahá'u'lláh, in *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 105

Bahá'í marriage laws to be upheld by Local Spiritual Assemblies

The basic requirements of the Bahá'í marriage laws are:

- Consent of both parties
- Consent of natural parents
- Performance of a Bahá'í ceremony under the prior authorization of an Assembly
- Removal of administrative rights if the laws are broken.

Requirement for prior authorization by the Local Spiritual Assembly

When a marriage is planned, the Assembly should be informed far enough in advance so that it can review and approve the parental consent and ensure that arrangements for the Bahá'í ceremony are in conformity with Bahá'í principles and the requirements of civil law. If difficulties arise in obtaining consent, the Assembly should lend whatever help it can.

All Bahá'ís who wish to marry must first contact a Local Spiritual Assembly. It is not possible to have a Bahá'í marriage ceremony without an Assembly's prior authorization. When a couple asks an Assembly to arrange a Bahá'í ceremony for them, the Assembly may wish to request a meeting with its representatives to review with them the Bahá'í Writings on marriage and to impress upon them the importance of the step they are about to take. This session should be both a serious and happy occasion and help them understand the permanent nature of their commitment to each other.

The Local Spiritual Assembly does not have the responsibility to approve or disapprove of the marriage or to discourage the couple from marrying if it does not feel the parties are compatible. If one or both parties should ask for the Assembly's advice, however, it may be given freely.

The Assembly's representatives may wish to review the following publications with the couple: *A Fortress for Well-Being, Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life, Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1968-1973*, pp. 105-12.

Witnesses of the Ceremony representing the Spiritual Assembly - two required.

These two witnesses may be chosen by the couple or by the Spiritual Assembly, but must in any case be acceptable to the Assembly; they may be its chairperson and secretary, or two members of the Assembly, or two other people, Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í or any combination of these.

The witnesses can be any two trustworthy people whose testimony is acceptable to the Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction the marriage is performed. A witness must be of “good reputation among men,” and “the testimony of followers of any faith is acceptable to God”

95-Day Period of Engagement

Currently this law is not yet applicable in the West. However, Persians residing in the West obey such laws as a matter of conscience. The law applies to Persian believers wherever they have established residence after leaving Iran. In cases where children born to such parents are brought up in the Persian tradition, speak Persian, and are thoroughly conversant with the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, they will obviously feel an obligation, and should be assisted, to observe this law as circumstances permit.

Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities, 1998. Summarized from letters from the Universal House of Justice

Further considerations

Should the couple to be married have any questions regarding the requirements for marriage, they may consult further with the Spiritual Assembly. They may wish to study the guidance given to Spiritual Assemblies in the publication, *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities, Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies*, published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States (current edition - 1998..

Nature of the Ceremony

There is no ritual, according to the Aqdas, the Guardian is very anxious that none should be introduced at present and no general form accepted. He believes the ceremony should be as simple as possible, the parties using the words ordained by Bahá'u'lláh and excerpts from the Writings and prayers being read, if desired. There should be no commingling of the old forms with the new and simple one of Bahá'u'lláh, and Bahá'ís should not be married in the church or any other acknowledged place of worship of the followers of other faiths. *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*, p. 16-22 (from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi).

The pledge of marriage, the verse to be spoken individually by the bride and the bridegroom in the presence of at least two witnesses acceptable to the Spiritual Assembly is, as stipulated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: *“We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God.”*

Bahá'í Prayers, U.S. Bahá'í Publishing Trust

Who “performs” a Bahá'í marriage?

As foregoing statements indicate, a Bahá'í wedding is simple and there is no official or ecclesiastic individual in the Bahá'í community that “performs” the wedding. In Christian marriages, for example, a priest or minister is central to the ceremony and states that the couple is married [after they say their vows]. Such is not a part of a Bahá'í ceremony.

The couple may select a time during the reading of writings and prayers to recite their vows. They may wish to print a program for those attending the ceremony so that they will know when the couple are to recite the marriage vows. Because many people are unaware of the Bahá'í Faith and Bahá'í weddings, some Bahá'ís ask a knowledgeable Bahá'í to help explain the nature of Bahá'í marriage and the ceremony to the wedding guests and/or act as a master of ceremonies.. Care should be taken, however, that this individual is not seen as representing a function of clergy in the Bahá'í Faith .

Checklist for Bahá'í Weddings

Planning

- ___ Is a liaison between the couple and the Spiritual Assembly needed and/or desired?
- ___ If bride and/or groom is Bahá'í, ensure that they are registered believers in good standing.
- ___ If the Bahá'í is unknown to the Assembly, verify membership and status with another Local Assembly or the National Spiritual Assembly. Also, if previously married and the individual(s) was a Bahá'í at the time of the divorce, verify that a Bahá'í divorce was granted.
- ___ Advise the couple of the laws and principles of Bahá'í marriage: parental consent, the vows, the need for two witnesses, the simple nature of the ceremony, the absence of commingling of religious traditions.
- Ensure that consent from all living parents has been freely given and obtained in writing. If there are special circumstances in this regard, determine how the matter will be resolved and inform couple.
- ___ Obtain a Bahá'í marriage certificate. (from the Assembly secretary)
- ___ Determine from the couple the date, time, and location of ceremony.
- ___ Review program planned by couple. If bride or groom is not Bahá'í, ensure that they have not commingled the Bahá'í ceremony with any other religious ceremony. If a second ceremony of another religion is desired, ensure that both ceremonies will be conducted on the same Gregorian day and that the two ceremonies are not commingled.
- ___ If the Bahá'í ceremony is to be the legal one, ensure that the civil license has been obtained. Ensure that all requirements for civil law (e.g., blood tests) have been satisfied and that any required paperwork has been submitted before any specified deadlines.
- ___ Appoint or ask the couple to name two witnesses to be present at the ceremony. The witnesses must be acceptable to the Austin Spiritual Assembly; if Bahá'ís, ensure that they are registered believers in good standing.
- ___ Appoint an Assembly representative(s) to attend the wedding.
- ___ Have the couple obtain marriage license from the county clerk's office. Be sure they take notice of any restrictions or guidelines.
- ___ If bride and/or groom is Bahá'í, complete for each believer a Bahá'í Membership Data Form, including name(s), any change of address, and marriage license number.
- ___ Is the Spiritual Assembly providing other assistance with the program? If so, what type?
- ___ Ensure that someone at the ceremony (e.g. the Assembly representative) will be responsible for either returning the license to the Assembly or making copies and mailing the original to the county clerk's office. (See below, "After Ceremony")

During or immediately following the ceremony

- ___ Have Bahá'í marriage certificate completed and issued to the couple. (Copy for the Assembly's files, if desired.) [Action: Secretary]

After Ceremony

- ___ Mail the completed Bahá'í Membership Data form(s) to the Bahá'í National Center with a few days following the ceremony. [Action: Membership]
- ___ Complete marriage license according to instructions provided. Provide the couple with a copy, retain a copy for the Assembly's files, and mail the original to the county clerk's office at P. O. Box 1748, Austin, TX 78767. The Count Clerk will record the license, provide a seal on it and return it to the couple, mailing it to whatever address the couple provides. [Action: Secretary]

(Handbook—Rev. Jan. 29, 2004)