

Faith Lutheran Church Wedding Policy

Introduction

Our congregation congratulates you on your engagement and in your decision to begin your married lives by seeking the blessings of God in a Christian wedding service. While those married by judges and other authorized and licensed people are equally married before God, your desire to have the presence of a Christian pastor expresses a desire to include God's presence on your wedding day and throughout your married life.

A Christian Wedding

When one seeks the assistance of a Christian pastor in planning the wedding service, it reflects a commitment to seeing that all aspects of the service are Christian in content and that it is done to the glory of God. Your wedding day will be special not because you are the "star attractions" but because you have invited Jesus to be present with you, your family, and your friends as you celebrate the joining of your lives together. If either you or your partner is uncomfortable with having the Bible read or with a pastor speaking a message based on Christian truth, you may want to pursue a more secular setting to celebrate your wedding. Faithfulness to Jesus Christ will not allow us to downplay the distinctively spiritual elements of the wedding service.

A Christian Marriage

Having the wedding in a church will not make yours a Christian marriage. A wedding is a ceremony; a marriage is a complex relationship between you and your partner that can grow in health or be weakened depending on your attitudes and actions. What makes a marriage uniquely Christian is the faith commitment each spouse has to Jesus. The mutual giving and receiving of unconditional love and unlimited forgiveness can only happen when those gifts have been received from Christ. Serving and building each other up are possible with Jesus' presence through worship, prayer, and other spiritual practices.

An active relationship with the Lord Jesus can make all the difference in your marriage. The Bible states, "...a cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 3:12)—those strands being you, your partner, and the Lord Jesus Himself. While married life contains difficulties and challenges, studies have shown that partners who pray and worship together on a regular basis are less likely to separate and divorce, pointing to the wisdom, love, and strength Jesus can bring to you as an individual and to your marriage.

If you and/or your currently do not know Jesus Christ we would like to introduce Him to you. We offer a class that will explain who He is and what He has done for us. It provides that basics of the Christian faith and allows you to meet and learn with other adults about this amazing God we worship.

Sexual Involvement and Living Together

Many couples who come to our congregation seeking a wedding service are living together and/or sexually active. Living together has become in our society the accepted norm. This is often viewed as a

“trial marriage”—after all, you don’t purchase clothes, shoes, or cars without trying them out. Couples, wanting to know if their relationship will “work” or not, may move in together for a variety of reasons: convenience, finances, caring for children, etc.

We believe it is important for you to understand what God says with regard to this issue and why He says it. God’s Word teaches that sexual expression and intimacy belong with the marriage relationship. Sexual intercourse between unmarried persons is called fornication and the Bible clearly states that this is wrong (1 Corinthians 6:9; Ephesians 5:3; and Hebrews 13:4).

But why would God want to restrict us in this way? Is He a “sexually repressed” Being who doesn’t want His children to have any fun? Not at all. In making us male and female He invented sex with all its joys, passions and desires. He knows that sexual intimacy is a powerful bonding “agent” between a man and a woman. Sex is never just a physical act; it is the uniting of two whole persons in such a way that they become as the Bible states, “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). This bond takes place at a deep emotional level. When sexual activity takes place outside of biblical marriage, there is a great danger that people will take advantage of others; the result will be feelings of being sexually and emotionally used. There is also a danger that couples bond sexually while ignoring the other aspects of their relationship, thus putting the marriage on shaky footing. Counselor Jim Taley writes, “Premarital sex creates instability in the relationship. It is like trying to build the second floor of a building on a few sticks in the ground. There is guilt, and unrealistic expectation of marriage, when neither makes that commitment and intensity in the relationship without a foundation of friendship to hold it up.”

The reality that God knows what He is talking about is apparent in our society. The statistics from studies done over the last two-plus decades reveal that the majority of couples who live together break up either before marriage or later through divorce. A University of Wisconsin study indicated that of every 100 couples who lived together 40 couples separated and never got married, 45 couples who did marry were divorced within 10 years, while 15 couples had a marriage last long than 10 years. In a study to determine relationship satisfaction, Dr. David Olson of Life Innovations examined over 17,000 couples. Two-thirds of the couples living together reported “low satisfaction” regarding their relationship while two-thirds of the couples living separately indicated “high satisfaction”. Even more remarkable was the finding that couples who waited until marriage to become sexually active reported greater sexual satisfaction than those who didn’t.

What might this mean for you and your partner?

- ‡ If you are not sexually active you can feel good about your decision to wait. Don’t give in to the advice that you need to find out if you are “sexually compatible” before you get married. Continue to set sexual boundaries and wait until your wedding night to give yourself fully to each other. Continue to build a solid foundation of friendship for marriage.
- ‡ If you are sexually active but not living together, consider making an agreement with your partner that says you will refrain from sex until your wedding night. This will give you the opportunity to discover if you are bonded by more than sexual passion, allow you to work on the other aspects of your relationship, and enjoy heightened sexual anticipation.

- ↓ If you are living together there are two options.
- 1) If it is not possible to separate until your wedding night, our pastor will marry you within 14 days of your visit with him. Once this ceremony has taken place plans may be made for the renewal ceremony and reception on the date selected, if so desired.
 - 2) If the above option is not workable you may secure the services of another pastor of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod or a pastor from a church body who is in fellowship with the LC-MS to perform the wedding service.

If you are a Christian, you may very likely realize that you have violated God's commands with regard to sexual expression in your relationship. We encourage you to confess that to God, to receive His forgiveness through Jesus, and to ask for the strength to resist temptation—now and after your wedding day! Don't allow this kind of sin to become a barrier in your relationship with Jesus Christ or to be a source of unhealthy guilt in your marriage.

Premarital Preparation

While our congregation prays that yours is a beautiful wedding day, our greater concern is for the quality of your marriage relationship. To assist you in the premarital dialog, you will be asked to respond to an inventory entitled "PREPARE". This is a computerized evaluation which, based on your individual responses, is designed to assess the strength and growth areas of your relationship. It is not a test and is not designed to determine the potential success or failure of your marriage. Rather it serves as a springboard for communication and discussion of relationship issues.

We provide two options for you to consider for your wedding preparation. The "Homework Option" includes meeting with an independent counselor, completing several worksheets on your own, and discussing with the officiating pastor your personal and marriage goals. The "Mentor Option" involves developing a relationship with a married couple from our congregation who would "mentor" you in discussing the inventory and who would be available on a causal basis to discuss other areas of interest and/or concerns that you might have. Below is the number of sessions and their content:

Homework Option:

At home: Take the PREPARE inventory online. Payment of \$35 is made with a debit/credit card.
The church office can assist you in setting this up.

Session 1: Meet with a counselor to go over your PREPARE results.

Session 2: At home, individually complete and then discuss the Family of Origin and Marriage Expectations worksheet.

Session 3: At home, individually complete and then discuss the Couple Communications worksheet.

Session 4: At home, individually complete and discuss the Goals and Spiritual Growth worksheet.

Session 5: Get acquainted with the officiating pastor. Discuss the worksheets you have complete at home as well as personal and marriage goals. Consider the elements of a Christian marriage, and discuss any remaining relationship issues.

Wedding Costs

The subject of fees and charges are of concern to many couples, especially when they begin to add up tuxedo/formal rentals, food, hall, cake, gifts, musicians, invitations, and so forth. Here are the fees in connection with your church wedding. Some fees are firm; others are suggested amounts.

While no charge is made to members of the congregation for the use of the church for the wedding service, a monetary donation of \$50 is expected from the bridal couple to help cover the expenses incurred by the congregation in conducting the wedding (heat, lights, candles, etc.). The fee is \$125 for non-members.

If one of our church musicians is used the expected fee will be \$100. This covers rehearsal time, time spent with soloists and the wedding service proper.

A \$50 dollar custodial fee is required as our custodian is present at the time of the wedding. This amount covers any general assistance and clean up that might be needed.

A charge of \$25 will cover the cost of printing your wedding bulletins here at the church office. This is above the cost of the wedding bulletins.

As mentioned under "Premarital Preparation", there is the charge of \$35 for the processing of the PREPARE survey, payable at the time it is taken.

The suggested honorarium for the pastor is \$125 for members and \$185 for non-members. This reflects the amount of time the pastor spends during the premarital counseling sessions.

Music

Since the wedding service is a worship service, all musical selections and arrangements are to be Christ-centered. As we are gathered to glorify God, our music should add to the reverence of the wedding service. Often there are secular songs on the radio which a bridal couple feels would enhance sound good at the service. While appropriate for a reception, these are not in keeping with a Christian wedding service. Any questions about music selections should be presented to the officiating pastor for consideration and approval.

If you want the congregation to provide a musician (keyboard and/or vocal) you may contact the church office for names and numbers. Their fees vary but include:

- ‡ One meeting with the wedding couple;
- ‡ One rehearsal with the vocalist(s); and
- ‡ The wedding service.

If you use an additional vocalist of your choosing, we suggest an honorarium of at least \$75. Checks should be made out to the vocalist(s).

Rehearsal and Wedding

The rehearsal—usually the night before the wedding service—and the service itself may be scheduled during the week, at any hour, day or evening, that does not interfere with normal church programming. In general, the church prefers not to hold weddings during the season of Lent, since it is a time of spiritual discipline, penitence and self-denial. No weddings will be held during Holy Week (the week prior to Easter Sunday). Exceptions may be considered on an individual basis.

It is also our policy to do no more than one wedding per calendar day. You not only have much by way of preparation; so does the pastor as he prepares for the service. Since this is a special day we do not want to rush the wedding service and preparations. That is why we prefer to do one wedding per day. Weddings will be placed on the church calendar on a first come, first serve basis and that day will be reserved only for that couple.

Receptions at the church

Receptions at the church can be done either by an outside caterer or served by the Women of Faith, the women's organization of Faith Lutheran Church. If done by the caterer, kitchen items like coffee pots and roasters are available for use, provided they are cleaned and returned to their respective places. Receptions done under the supervision of the Women of Faith require the bride or her mother to consult with the designated contact person of the Women of Faith regarding the arrangements. This should be done as early as possible to reserve the fellowship hall. It is expected that the bridal couple will purchase all of the necessary items, including the food and its preparation, to be used at the reception.

What is available for use and supplied by the Ladies Society are the following:

- ½ ladies to serve
- ½ coffee pots
- ½ roasters
- ½ silver service
- ½ silver knife
- ½ punch bowl
- ½ seating for 130-150 people

The wedding party is responsible for:

- ½ an adequate number of waitresses for the dining hall,
- ½ the purchase and preparation of the food,
- ½ the purchase of disposable plates, cups, plastic ware, napkins and candles,
- ½ any decorations for the hall, and
- ½ someone to serve punch and cut the cake.

We offer two options:

- 1) If the food is prepared elsewhere and served by the Women of Faith, the cost will be \$1.25 per plate.
- 2) If the kitchen is used by a professional caterer for preparation of the meal, a \$25 fee will be assessed.

The Women of Faith will provide a member to assist with any needs.

Any other alternatives could be discussed with the Women of Faith.

The fellowship hall may be used for receptions (seating capacity of 130-150). For congregational members there a \$150 fee for the use of the hall.

General and miscellaneous items

Fees are due in full at the time the date is set (members \$355 / \$480; non-members \$515 / \$640).

There is to be no...

- ↓ Smoking on the church property.
- ↓ Alcoholic beverages served on church property.
- ↓ Rice or bird seed thrown on church property.

Candles: the candles located to the left of the cross in front of the sanctuary will be used for all wedding services. Also for your usage are the candelabras that attach to the back of the pews. There are a dozen of them available; you must supply the candles (eleven inch straight candles fit the holder and allow the brass followers to contain the wax). Other candles such as the unity candle are welcomed. It along with the two side candles you must purchase. This will be placed on the altar to be lit at the appropriate time during the service.

Flowers: the flowers for the service are to be provided by you. If you wish to use the chancel flower pedestal a liner is available for you to take to your florist. Flowers may be placed anywhere in the chancel as long as they do not interfere with the service and do not block the view of the altar.

Aisle runner: this is also your responsibility to purchase from your florist, if you desire to use one. The aisle is 39 feet in length.

Photography and video recording: flash photos are not permitted during the worship service. At no time is the photographer to interrupt the service by either excessive movement or position him/herself in a place of high visibility.