

MARRIAGE POLICY



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
ELMHURST, PENNSYLVANIA

www.fpcelmhurstpa.org

Christian Marriage Defined

Christian marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. We believe marriage is a permanent holy covenant ordained by God between a man and a woman (Genesis 1:27; 2:18, 23, 24; Matthew 19:1-5; Mark 10:6-8)), which also models the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:23). For Christians marriage is a covenant through which a man and a woman are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship. In a service of Christian marriage a lifelong commitment is made by a woman and a man to each other, publicly witnessed and acknowledged by the community of faith. Therefore, all of the plans for a Christian wedding should reflect the sacredness of that covenant (Matthew 19:5,6).

Weddings At First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst

Because weddings are particularly subject to being misunderstood as private or family events rather than services of corporate worship, it is especially important that marriage rites reflect God's plan as defined above, not merely the private and personal statements of the couple. When the bride and groom choose the church to conduct the service and give its blessings upon the new relationship, they should expect to be guided by scripture and church traditions.

1. The bride and groom must individually confess a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst will not knowingly marry unbelievers, or join an unbeliever to a believer in marriage (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). God's Word is clear about the necessity of spiritual compatibility between marriage partners. We understand the common biblical meaning of "believer" as a reference to a "born-again" believer (John 3:3). Therefore, we will not marry a believer to an unbeliever.

2. The bride and groom must abstain from physical intimacy or living together. The Bible says that if anyone is "in Christ" they are being made "new" as their "old" life "passes away" (2 Corinthians 5:17). One important aspect of our new life in Christ is that of our sexuality. Sex is a gift from God, for He is the one who created it! Therefore, we must follow God's directions regarding our sexuality. The Bible gives us clear instructions for sex within the parameters of the marriage relationship (2 Corinthians 6:3). God's Word also gives us clear warnings and consequences when sex is used outside of the marriage.

While many couples that come to First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst are honoring God through abstaining from sexual intimacy, there are many couples that do not fall into this category. Couples who are sexually intimate or are living together as if married, and all that marriage implies, are asked to temporarily move apart into separate residences and covenant with First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst to abstain from sexual relations, remaining chaste, until their wedding day. We would like the opportunity to encourage you to make this commitment with us, understanding that this is God's best for your marriage relationship. In order for their wedding to take place at First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst or be officiated by the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst, the couple must sign the Premarital Covenant (see separate sheet), thereby agreeing to abstain from sexual intimacy before marriage.

Prior Marriages:

Remarriage of divorced persons — remarriage may be permitted by a pastor from First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst if the Session approves and pastoral evaluation of the circumstances in light of God's Word determine the following: The former spouse is now deceased. (Romans 7:2, 1 Corinthians 7:39), that the reason for divorce was a pattern of adultery (Matthew 5:32. 19:3-9) or desertion by the unbelieving ex-spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15),

the former spouse initiated divorce and has remarried (Romans 7:3). If the divorce occurred because of abuse, and where the former spouse refused to turn from actions of abuse, the principles of I Corinthians 7:12-15 permitting divorce would possibly apply. The Session will evaluate all potential remarriage situations on a case-by-case basis. Recognizing the time needed for healing and restoration, persons who fit the above criteria should have been divorced no less than two years prior to their wedding.

Approvals and Officiating

The approval of the Session of the church is required for any wedding to be held in the First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst. The pastor of the church is to officiate in all wedding ceremonies held in the sanctuary. Exceptions to this standard require the approval of the Session of the church.

Pre-Marital Counseling

Presbyterian form of government requires the pastor to meet with the man and woman to counsel them regarding their marriage plans. The Pastor in counsel with the Session determines the number and length of counseling sessions. Typically, five or six counseling sessions of approximately one to one and one-half hours in length are needed to cover necessary matters.

Music

Because a wedding ceremony is part of a service of worship, it should be subordinate to the worship of Almighty God who sanctifies the marriage. For this reason, music and the other elements of the worship service associated with the wedding ceremony should reflect this spirit of worship. Music that is used in the context of the wedding ceremony should not be considered "background music." Rather, the musical selections should fit intrinsically into the overall liturgical design to create an atmosphere suitable for the glorification of God. Music which focuses one's attention on anything other than the covenantal relationship being entered into should be avoided, particularly secular music which has no reference to God and which does not speak of love in the context of covenant. To that end, any non-traditional music requires the approval of the Session.

The bride and groom being married at First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst are expected to use the church organist/pianist for their weddings. Those desiring to use another organist should arrange for that organist to meet with our organist for instruction in the use of our organ. The use of an accompanist or musical instrument(s) other than that of First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst must be submitted for approval by the Session.

The repertoire of music available for weddings is vast. For that reason consultation with the pastor and organist well in advance of the wedding date is necessary. The preferred time frame is three months-notice for all music to allow for sufficient preparation of the music and to give necessary time for any needed changes or additions to be made. Fees for the organist and/or other musicians and timely payment of the fees will be set at the discretion of the accompanists.

Vocal solos with organ or other instruments are acceptable and recorded accompaniments for wedding vocal solos are permitted. Vocal selections should have texts of a sacred nature, suitable for use in a worship service. Scripture, hymns and other religious poetry are appropriate in this case.

If it is decided to use a soloist, either vocal or instrumental, these persons should be engaged as soon as possible. Also, it is wise to discuss their repertoire with them first, before involving

the organist in the process. If there is to be a soloist for whom organ accompaniment is requested, arrangements should be made to have a copy of each selection, in the key in which it is to be performed, delivered to the church organist at least one month before the wedding. Soloist fees are variable and are the responsibility of the wedding party.

Occasionally a hymn may be sung by the congregation. This is a good way to involve guests in your wedding and it emphasizes the worship aspect of the service. If you desire a hymn, discuss it with the pastor and organist.

ALL music selections must be approved by the Pastor and Session.

Photography

Your wedding at First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst will be a religious ceremony. Like other religious services, it is a worship of God who calls people together. Due to the sanctity of the ceremony in the sanctuary, (Leviticus 19:30) no personal or professional photography is permitted in the sanctuary during the ceremony — that is, after the processional ends until the final wedding kiss. The processional and recessional may be photographed from the rear, and posed photographs in the sanctuary (both formal and re-staged ceremony pictures) before and after the service are permitted.

Video is allowed from the choir loft or back of the sanctuary from a fixed position by permission. A videographer is not allowed to move around during the ceremony.

It is the responsibility of the bride and groom to inform the professional photographer(s), videographer(s), and wedding guests of these policies. Often a note to the effect that “photographs and videos are not to be taken during the wedding ceremony” is printed in the wedding program.

Decorations

You are welcome and encouraged to have floral arrangements and candles to enhance the beauty of your wedding. Your choice of flowers - silk or fresh - is permitted. No tape, tacks, staples, nails or wire may be used to attach these arrangements to the pews or any other piece of furniture, appurtenance or portion of the church structure. All live arrangements, plants, etc. must be in waterproof containers. All attachments shall be made with ribbon or elastic bands. There are also some existing wall hangers that may be utilized for hanging flowers or other approved decorations.

Aisle runners are not prohibited but are not encouraged because of the potential safety issues. Flower petals and similar materials are not to be dropped or spread as a part of the décor or by any participant in the wedding party. Your florist may visit the church anytime by appointment, and the church will be available two hours before the wedding ceremony for the florist to deliver and decorate the sanctuary. If you desire to leave your flowers at the church following the ceremony, please let the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst know of those plans.

If the bride and groom desire to include a unity candle lighting as a part of their ceremony they will need to provide their own unity candle arrangement after consulting with the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst.

Sanctuary décor is subject to the current worship schedule at the time of your ceremony, and will remain in the sanctuary as they are for our Sunday worship services.

It is the responsibility of the bride and groom to advise florists or decorators of the regulations concerning their services.

Ceremony

The content and arrangement of the wedding ceremony will be discussed by the bride and groom with the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst. You are welcome to include vocal music and special readings in addition to scripture, a homily, the vows and other parts of the ceremony. When asking friends or family to participate in these ways, it is suggested that such readers be comfortable in public speaking and the use of a microphone. The readers should be present for the rehearsal. Holy Communion may be celebrated at the request of the couple only if: (1) all guests are invited to partake of communion - not just the wedding couple or wedding party, and (2) both the bride and groom will be receiving communion.

Other

If they choose to employ a wedding planner or director it is the ultimate responsibility of the bride and groom to make arrangements in consultation with the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst for the rehearsal and the wedding ceremony. If a reception is to be held at First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst, it is the responsibility of the bride and groom or their representative to arrange for a caterer. Responsibilities concerning the caterer are as follows:

- > The caterer shall furnish all cups, plates, punch bowls, table cloths, etc.
- > The caterer will clean the kitchen area following the reception.
- > See also the First Presbyterian Church of Elmhurst policy for use of the Christian Education Building
- > Wedding parties eating prior to the wedding must do so in designated areas.

No rice, confetti, or other material may be thrown inside any of the church buildings or on any of the grounds. Neither may balloons be released from church property. It is suggested that bird seed and/or soap bubbles be used outside and away from the buildings.

Smoking and alcoholic beverages are not permitted in the church buildings or on the grounds. Persons participating in the wedding are requested to refrain from the use of alcoholic beverages prior to the rehearsal and the wedding.

All personal belongings of the wedding party are to be removed from the building immediately following the service and prior to the wedding reception. This includes receptions held in the Christian Education Building. This allows for the custodial staff access to the church building to begin cleaning.

The wedding party will be held responsible for any damage done to the facility, furnishings, or grounds.

Weddings planned during a holiday season (e.g. Christmas, Easter) must utilize the existing decorations, no changes will be permitted, and must coordinate with holiday programs and worship events. The church may not be available for a wedding at these times.

The bride and groom are responsible for seeing that all who participate in the wedding adhere to these policies. This includes the wedding party, the wedding planner or director, the photographer(s), videographer(s), the caterer and the decorator or florist.

Fees

There is no fee for members of the First Presbyterian Church who wish to be married in our sanctuary. Non-members must pay a fee of \$100.00 for use of the sanctuary for a wedding. The social room in the Christian Education Building is available for receptions at a rate of \$100.00 for non-members. Members may make a donation in an amount they consider suitable.

Other fees for both members and nonmembers are as follows:

<u>Organist</u>	\$75.00 for members, accompanists normal fee for non-members
<u>Janitor</u>	\$50.00 for wedding in sanctuary
	\$50.00 for reception in Christian Education Building

Adopted by Session, October 7, 1997

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