

First Presbyterian Church, Winchester, Virginia
Serving Christ and Neighbor in the Heart of Winchester and Beyond

Wedding Policy

We, the Session of First Presbyterian Church, affirm the following statement about marriage from the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.:

Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives. The sacrificial love that unites the couple sustains them as faithful and responsible members of the church and the wider community.

In civil law, marriage is a contract that recognizes the rights and obligations of the married couple in society. In the Reformed tradition, marriage is also a covenant in which God has an active part, and which the community of faith publicly witnesses and acknowledges.

Book of Order W-9.000

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Your Wedding

This paper is written for couples choosing to marry at First Presbyterian Church or Old Stone Church of Winchester, Virginia. We hope it will guide you and be of assistance in your planning of this important and joyful celebration in your life.

The Meaning of Christian Marriage

Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human community. Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people to love and support each other for the rest of their lives. The sacrificial love that unites the couple sustains them as faithful and responsible members of the church and the wider community.

In a Christian marriage, two people recognize their dependence upon God for the gift of life and its blessings. Their understanding of God and the purpose for their lives is based on a relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is hoped that the couple's marriage will serve not only their own interests to make a home together, but that it will serve God's plans by being a blessing to this hurting and divided world, seeking to make it a better place. The couple will be encouraged to see their covenant with each other as paralleling the covenant that God has made with us first through the people of Israel and then through Christ. The love promised between them is predicated on the love for the world that God has shown by being incarnated as a human being and going to the extreme of dying on a cross for all humankind. (John 1:1-14, 3:16)

It is the hope of the members of First Presbyterian Church that your wedding will be the beginning of a pilgrimage that will be blessed by God as you seek to be a blessing to others and to reflect God's plan for your lives.

Helpful Information

1. The Wedding as an Act of Worship

The Presbyterian understanding of a wedding service is that, first and foremost, it is an occasion to praise God. The service begins with the focus on God's providential caring for all creation, for the love seen in the coming of Jesus, and the meaning of this for all

humankind. The secondary focus is on the couple marrying and the mystery of God using the couple to accomplish God's purpose of redeeming the world.

Every effort, therefore, is made to make the wedding an occasion of joy and celebration, pointing beyond ourselves to the God who makes all of life possible. The resources of our Judeo-Christian heritage have an important bearing on the meaning of the ceremony, which is designed to be as dignified as it is beautiful. There will, no doubt, be questions that arise about the appropriateness of certain practices. It is hoped that the pre-marital consultations will cover these questions adequately. Requests to serve communion must be approved by the Session and care shall be taken to extend the invitation to all baptized who are present.

2. Procedures for Scheduling a Wedding

The general procedure for scheduling a wedding is as follows:

- 1) Check with the church secretary to see if the date you want is available.
- 2) Fill out a wedding information form which, when completed, will be given to the pastors. The "Planning Your Wedding at First Presbyterian Church" booklet covers the variety of procedures, expectations, and fees.
- 3) After the form is returned to the church and reviewed by the pastors, you will be contacted to schedule your initial premarital counseling session.

Weddings officiated by one of the church's pastors and held in the church are not scheduled finally until one of the pastors gives approval to conduct the ceremony and the Session hereby authorizes the use of the church's facilities for the ceremony. The pastor and Session's primary criterion for approval is a couple's demonstration of a sufficient understanding of the nature of the Christian marriage covenant and a commitment to living their lives together according to the covenant's values.

At least one member of the couple shall be an active member of the congregation, have a familial connection to First Presbyterian Church, or be an active member of a Shenandoah Presbytery congregation. The pastors have discretion regarding persons with some other relationship to First Presbyterian Church. The pastors will exercise their discretion in consultation with the Session. The relationship with First Presbyterian Church determines the applicable fee schedule.

After the wedding is scheduled, you will be put in touch with a wedding coordinator who will be able to help you prepare and answer questions concerning your wedding at First Presbyterian Church.

3. Who Conducts the Wedding Ceremony?

One of the pastors of First Presbyterian Church shall officiate. A guest clergy may assist in the ceremony only upon approval of the officiating pastor. The officiating

pastor will work with the couple to plan the wedding service within the framework of the Presbyterian Directory for Worship.

4. Premarital Consultations with the Pastor

Ordinarily couples shall meet with a pastor at least three (3) times, spread over at least a three (3) month period. The purpose of these meetings is for the pastor and couple to get to know each other better, to explore important issues in married life, to consider the importance of faith and biblical teachings on married life, and to plan the wedding service.

5. Recognizing a Civil Marriage

A service of worship recognizing a civil marriage and confirming it in the community of faith may be appropriate when requested by the couple. The service will be similar to the marriage service except that the opening statement, the declaration of intention, the exchange of vows by the couple, and the public declaration by the minister reflect the fact that the two people are already married to one another according to the laws of the Commonwealth. (Book of Order W-4.9000)

6. What are the Duties of the Wedding Coordinator?

In making preparations for any wedding, the couple will want to be in communication with the wedding coordinator. This is to facilitate the smooth execution of all plans, to answer questions well in advance of the wedding and to make the couple aware of details that they otherwise may overlook. The wedding coordinator of First Presbyterian Church is to be engaged for all weddings. It is the coordinator's responsibility to:

- open the church at least two hours prior to the ceremony
- be your advisor in planning wedding arrangements in accordance with church policy;
- assist the pastor in directing the wedding rehearsal;
- direct the set-up and decorating and be responsible for seeing that the wedding goes smoothly;
- oversee the care and security of the building with the assistance of the sexton.

A family may also have a coordinator; however, in that case the church's coordinator will also be used and will have the final responsibility.

Such detailed arrangements as instructions to the ushers, handling of flowers after the ceremony, lighting candles, seating of relatives and many other matters, which are a part of the smooth operation of the wedding ceremony, should be carefully planned in advance with the coordinator.

7. Wedding Music

The church organist/pianist will ordinarily play for all weddings conducted in the sanctuary. Either the organ or piano may be used. In the event that the organist cannot be present, the organist will secure a substitute. In special circumstances where a couple desires another organist or other instrumentalists to play, a consultation with the suggested organist or other instrumentalists is required. The decision to invite another organist or other instrumentalists rests with our church organist/pianist, the Director of Music Ministry, and the officiating pastor.

A piano is the only musical instrument available at Old Stone Church.

The texts and the music should contribute to the worship atmosphere of the service. The texts should correspond to the themes, which are inherent in a Christian marriage (e.g. God's love for the church displayed through Christ, forming the foundation for the love two people share; God's blessing petitioned for the marriage; the praise of God necessarily expressed when Christians rejoice). Ordinarily, classical and sacred music would be given priority, although some contemporary music is acceptable if the lyrics and tune are in harmony with a worship emphasis, and compatible with the theology of marriage. The singing of hymns is encouraged as a way of involving the wedding guests in the worship. Music selections that conflict in any way with this policy will be considered on an individual basis, with the final decision on what music may or may not be used resting with the church organist, the Director of Music Ministry, and the officiating pastor.

8. Photography

The photographer is permitted to take pictures in the vestibule of the church before the procession and at the end of the ceremony. Flash photographs taken during the ceremony, which is a worship service, are disruptive, and, therefore, are not permitted. During the service the photographer will remain in the back or in the balcony and may take pictures without a flash. Pictures of the wedding service may be recreated after the service. It is the responsibility of the couple or a person acting in their behalf to make clear the restrictions regarding photography. Videotaping is permitted if the operator is located in the balcony, behind the rear pew, or inconspicuously in the choir loft (with permission of the Director of Music Ministry, according to provisions of #9) and remains in one position during the service. Equipment needs to be set up at least thirty minutes prior to the service. If a bulletin is used, please include a notice that "flash photography is not allowed during the wedding ceremony." All photography in the Sanctuary should be completed before any outdoor photography and within one hour after the ceremony.

9. Use of Choir Loft by Photographers/Videographers/Musicians

The choir loft may only be used with prior permission arranged through the Director of Music Ministry. If permission to use the choir area is granted, there will be a charge of \$125.00 for the services necessary to move the furniture and materials out of the area and returning them to their proper places for the next service of worship.

10. Decorating Guidelines

Weddings may be held in the sanctuary, Boyd Chapel or Old Stone Church (Piccadilly Street). The congregation is grateful for these facilities and believes they provide a beautiful setting for your wedding. The sanctuary seats approximately 350, Old Stone Church 175, and Boyd Chapel 85.

Flowers enhance a sense of worship, but floral displays should be in keeping with the decorum of the church and the nature of the service. It is the responsibility of the couple to be sure that the name, address and telephone number of the florist or other individuals responsible for decorating are left with the coordinator. All decorations must be removed as soon as the guests have left the church building and all pictures have been taken. The couple should assign someone to be responsible for removing any flowers or decorations after the ceremony, especially if these decorations are to be used at the reception.

Arrangements for decorating the church should be made as close to the time of the wedding as possible. In order that the church property is protected, the following regulations must be observed:

- Rice or confetti may not be thrown inside or outside the church building. Birdseed is the only thing permitted and only outside.
- No property of the church – vases, etc. – may be removed from the church premises.
- Any breakage is the responsibility of the couple.
- Flowers or other decorations placed on the ends of the pews must have protective devices to avoid scratching. Pew bows, flowers, etc. may not be taped onto the pews.

Items available for use in weddings are candelabra (with candles), candle holder (with candles), worship center candles and hurricane globes (with candles) for windows (only for services after 5:00 p.m.). Aisle runners are not permitted.

11. Dressing at the Church

The couple and their attendants may dress in the Kent Room (parlor) of the church or the church library. Since the Kent Room and the church library are not very large, we ask that the wedding party please keep all personal items together and not scattered all over the room. We do not allow food and beverages in the Kent Room because of all the antiques in that area. If you wish to have light refreshments, they must be kept in Loudoun Hall or Graham Room and someone must be assigned by the couple ahead of

time to clean up this area before the wedding ceremony. The Kent Room (parlor) and church library must be put back in the order it was before the wedding party leaves. All children must be supervised when in the Kent Room.

12. The Rehearsal

The church's wedding coordinator and sexton will attend the rehearsal to assist the pastor and to insure the seating of guests with dignity, to assist with the processional, and to perform other responsibilities as may be assigned.

For legal purposes, the pastor must have the wedding license before the ceremony. Therefore, the license must be brought to the rehearsal and given to either the pastor or the coordinator. Also, any required fees should be brought to the rehearsal and given to the coordinator. You should also bring your wedding bulletins, guest book, etc. to the rehearsal and give them to the coordinator.

Except for small, informal weddings, a rehearsal is usually held on the evening prior to the ceremony. Ordinarily present are the pastor, organist/pianist, other musicians as necessary, the sexton, your wedding coordinator, the wedding party and parents of the wedding couple. Time for the rehearsal is set by the pastor and the wedding couple. One hour is allowed for the rehearsal and promptness at the rehearsal is expected. It is imperative that the wedding party arrives for the rehearsal on time. If your party does not arrive on time, your rehearsal time may be shortened, or an additional fee applied for the pastor, organist/pianist, coordinator, and sexton for any additional time necessary. Children must be supervised and not allowed to run around unsupervised in the sanctuary during the rehearsal.

13. Conduct of Wedding Party and Guests

It is a rule of the church that there be no smoking or the use of alcoholic beverages on or in the church premises. The wedding party, all guests, and photographers should depart from the church no more than 90 minutes after the conclusion of the ceremony.

14. Regulations for a Wedding Reception

Facilities of the church available for a reception include Loudoun Hall and the Fellowship Hall. The use of these rooms is subject to their availability and completion of the facility use agreement. No alcoholic beverages will be served or consumed at a reception in the church building. Care of guests' wraps or personal possessions shall be the sole responsibility of the hosts. No nails, thumbtacks or tape may be used in connections with decorations. Decorations will be the responsibility of the persons holding the reception. All wedding receptions must be concluded by 10:00 p.m.

Suitable music for the reception must be arranged in advance and under no condition may pianos or other instruments be moved without approval and previous arrangements with the church office.

15. Parking Arrangements on the Mall

If a limousine or vehicle(s) will be parked on the mall, it is necessary to secure a vehicular use permit from the Downtown Development Board. The wedding couple must inform the coordinator if a permit will be needed and the coordinator will secure this permit. If planning on using a horse and buggy, the wedding couple must make sure that the company they are using has special insurance, or it will not be allowed on the mall. It is the wedding couple's responsibility to check on this and present proof to the Church. The wedding couple must also contact the Downtown Development Board.

16. Weddings at Old Stone Church

Because Old Stone Church is of great community and historic interest, it is offered to the community for use for Christian weddings, without the restriction of having to use a First Presbyterian Church pastor. Services held there would be within the Christian tradition, but couples would be able to use a minister and musicians of their own choice. The ministerial staff would approve the appropriateness of these services. First Presbyterian Church use of Old Stone would take precedence over any scheduling of weddings. The use of a sexton would be required.