

Wedding Policy

First Presbyterian Church

Approved by Session – August 21, 2023

One of God’s greatest gifts and blessings to humanity is holy marriage, “which is instituted of God, regulated by God’s commandments, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be held in honor among all people.” Weddings are times of both joy and reverence. The companionship of marriage is deep joy and also calls for reverence because of the deep commitment two people make to each other under the grace of God.

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church USA clearly and definitively describes “The Christian Service of Marriage,” saying,

“In Baptism, each Christian is claimed in the covenant of God’s faithful love. 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.” [W-4.0601]

The Christian marriage ceremony is a service of worship before God, normally conducted within the sanctuary. The service shall be under the sole direction of the minister. Within the bounds of the responsibility for the supervision and direction of worship, the Session of this church bears responsibility for the service for Christian marriage. Hence, the First Presbyterian Church governing body, the Session, approves this guide.

Pre-marital Counseling

The minister performing the wedding shall meet with the couple to discuss and plan the service and will also seek to lay a Christian foundation, inform the couple of the commitments and discover issues of and within their marriage. This will normally require *a minimum of 4 meetings*. Appointments will begin no sooner than three months from the wedding day.

Marriage License/Fees

State law requires a license to marry. You must apply for your license at the Cass County Courthouse. The following is from the website for Cass County, ND February 2017:

In order to obtain a marriage license in North Dakota, both applicants must apply together in person at the Cass County Courthouse to complete the application. Applicants do not have to be Cass County residents.

A North Dakota marriage license allows a couple to get married anywhere within the state of North Dakota. If applicants are residents of North Dakota but getting married anywhere within the state of Minnesota, they must obtain a Minnesota marriage license. Marriage licenses are obtained in the state that you are getting married in, not in the state where you reside.

Hours of operation for issuance of marriage licenses:
Monday - Friday 8:00am - 4:30pm excluding holidays

Couples are to present the marriage license to the presiding pastor during the rehearsal. The marriage license will be filed for safe-keeping in the office until the day of the ceremony.

Schedule of the Ceremony

No weddings or wedding activities are scheduled during Holy Week (between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday), on the first full weekend in November, on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Year's Eve, and New Year's Day. Other holiday weekends are discouraged, however exceptions may be made in extraordinary circumstances. The scheduling of a wedding is begun after a Request for Wedding Ceremony at First Presbyterian Church has been submitted to the church by the couple. After the date for the ceremony has been approved by the Session and a pastor has been assigned, the couple will be notified. The dates will then be permanently placed on the church's calendar after receiving the deposit, and signed policy. *Public announcements of the wedding date should wait until this process has been completed.*

The rehearsal is ordinarily scheduled the day before the wedding in the late afternoon and generally last less than an hour. *Other activities are scheduled in the church and in the calendars of both pastors and staff, which make it necessary that rehearsals begin promptly on time.*

In planning your wedding at First Presbyterian Church, these policies shall be followed:

1. Non-Member Weddings

Non-Member weddings may be scheduled based on the availability of a pastor of this church.

For the purpose of this policy members are defined as those who have been received into *Active Membership by the Session and who have actively participated in the congregation's worship and ministry for a year prior to the request for a wedding.*

2. Minister Performing the Ceremony

A minister from First Presbyterian Church shall officiate all weddings held at the church.

3. Order of the Service of the Marriage

Since the marriage ceremony is a worship service, the Book of Order prescribes the order of worship.

“The marriage service shall be conducted in a manner appropriate to this covenant and to the forms of Reformed worship, under the direction of the minister and the supervision of the session (W-2.03). In a service of marriage, the couple marry each other by exchanging mutual promises. The minister witnesses the couple's promises and pronounces God's blessing upon their union. The community of faith pledges to support the couple in upholding their promises; prayers may be offered for the couple, for the communities that support them, and for all who seek to live in faithfulness.” [W-4.0603]

The order of worship shall include affirmation of commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and affirmation of commitment by both to each other. The ceremony may include affirmation of the families and friends, marital vows along with the exchange of rings, prayers, scripture readings, and a brief homily by the minister. Special music or hymns are also appropriate to include in the service.

If the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is requested, it needs to be discussed with a minister of First Presbyterian Church and then approved by the Session, and care shall be taken that the invitation to the Table is extended to all worshippers present.

The minister from First Presbyterian Church has full responsibility for the order of worship. The couple may assist the minister in planning the marriage service.

4. **Use of the Building**

The sanctuary is available for weddings. The sanctuary can seat between 550-600 guests. Alternately the Jennie Roberts Room could be used for a small ceremony. The Jennie Roberts Room seats approximately 50.

5. **Arrangements and Decorations**

The sanctuary is furnished with symbols of our Christian faith such as the baptismal font, communion table and the pulpit. Decorations or flowers shall not obscure these symbols. When planning for flower arrangements and decorations, the couple is urged to remember the church's valuing of simplicity. Candelabras, floral arrangement, unity candle(s) and/or pew markers are permitted if placed in the appropriate locations. *You must consult with the wedding coordinator for guidance on flowers and decorations.* Special flowers and decorations used by the church during Advent and Christmas seasons may not be moved for the wedding without permission from the wedding coordinator. No tacks, nails, tape, sticky tape, wire, or other materials that will deface the church property may be used. All flowers and decorations should be removed immediately after the wedding in order for the church to be ready for the next scheduled use. Donation of floral arrangements for Sunday's worship service is appreciated. If this is your desire, please consult the wedding coordinator.

The facilities will be open one hour before rehearsal and three hours before the wedding. Additional hours may be requested for a fee. Please *do not* arrive at the church more than three hours before the wedding. The wedding couple will be responsible for alerting family, bridal party, guests, and vendors of these rules. The sanctuary is normally available for decorating on the day of the rehearsal during usual church office hours *if* an appointment is made through the church office. Coordinate the times for decorating with the church office through your wedding coordinator. Music rehearsals should be completed before the actual wedding rehearsal. They may be scheduled with the Organist.

6. **Music**

"We offer creative gifts in worship as well, including music, art, drama, movement, media, banners, vestments, vessels, furnishings, and architecture. When such gifts only call attention to themselves, they are idolatrous; when, in their simplicity of form and function, they give glory to God, they are appropriate for worship. [W-1.0204]

It is required that the couple schedule a time with the church organist and/or director of music ministry to discuss the selection of music for the service. The church organist shall ordinarily play for weddings. If the organist is not available, he/she could assist the couple by providing names of other organists. The church organist/Director of Music Ministry has sole discretion to approve or deny the use of proposed music selections.

All music used during the wedding ceremony must direct attention to God and express the faith of the church. Although it is possible that some secular songs may achieve this purpose, generally such songs are better used at the rehearsal dinner or reception. It is the responsibility of the wedding party to provide any sheet music the organist does not

possess. Photocopies are a violation of copyright law and are not acceptable. The congregational singing of hymns is encouraged. The minister and the church musicians will suggest appropriate musical selections. They will make every effort to consider and accommodate the requests of the couple.

If special vocal or instrumental music is to be provided with the accompaniment of the church organist, it may be necessary to make arrangements for a rehearsal in addition to the standard rehearsal. The soloist is responsible for initiating such arrangements with the organist. The organist reserves the right to charge a higher fee if more than one rehearsal is required. **All music in the wedding service will be performed live (*no recordings*).**

If the couple want to include a vocal or instrumental soloist in their wedding, but do not know whom to contact, one of the church musicians will make recommendations. Financial arrangements must be made privately with that musician(s).

7. **Photography/Sound System/Livestream**

The church understands the desires to have wedding pictures; however, distractions during the wedding service are not permitted. Flash photographs may be taken in the sanctuary **before and after the service of worship. Photographs may be taken during the processional (seating of the family and entrance of the wedding party) and the recessional. Flash photographs are not allowed to be taken during the service. It is the couple's responsibility to inform the photographers and family of the above policy.** If a photographer wishes to look at the sanctuary or set up equipment in advance, they will need to make an appointment to do so through the church office. Formal pictures should be concluded an hour before the wedding ceremony begins. Videotaping of the service is allowed by available lighting only (no floods) and the camera(s) and operator(s) must remain stationary and in an unobtrusive location. The wedding coordinator must approve the location of the camera(s). The display of a video presentation prior to or during the service is not allowed. A member of the sound system team is required to run the church's sound system for the wedding. Photographers may never place themselves behind the pastor or climb on any musical equipment.

8. **Wedding Coordinator**

It is required that the services of a First Presbyterian wedding coordinator be used for the planning, rehearsal, and service. The wedding coordinator will assist in the planning, will direct the rehearsal and wedding and assist the minister. The wedding coordinator will oversee the arrangements and details of the wedding and discuss the policies and fees of the church with the couple. All paper forms can be given to the wedding coordinator or returned to the church office. All payments should be made online at firstpresfargo.org/give.

The wedding coordinator has sole discretion to determine if proposed plans comport with this policy and to approve or disapprove them.

9. **Miscellaneous**

Wedding bulletins are prepared at the discretion of the couple with consultation and approval from the minister. The printing of the program is the responsibility of the couple.

It is requested that those getting married instruct their wedding party to carefully examine the heels of stiletto shoes. We have a natural, cork floor in the worship space which is

easily damaged and which is expensive to repair. Wearing shoes which do not mar the floor is essential.

Glitter, rice, bird seed, or confetti may not be used or thrown in or on the church grounds or buildings. Silk flower petals may be thrown in the aisle by the flower girl, if desired, and must be picked up following the wedding by the wedding party.

Sparklers and other fireworks are not permitted on church property.

No alcoholic beverages are permitted in the building or on church property. *No person under the influence may participate in the rehearsal or marriage service.*

Smoking is not permitted in the buildings and is limited on the grounds to areas where ash receptacles are available.

The wedding party and families are responsible for retrieving belongings, food and personal items and for returning the church to the same state as prior to the event. Garbage should be placed in appropriate receptacles.

The wedding party and families are responsible for advising all who assist in preparations and/or take part in the wedding service of these guidelines and policies.

10. Schedule of Fees

For those families who are currently Active Members of First Presbyterian Church, and have been actively participating in the worship and ministries of the congregation for at least one year prior to their request to be married at First Presbyterian Church, there is no charge to use the sanctuary. However, custodial fees and honorariums will be assessed to both members and non-members according to the fee schedule. Please contact the office for the current fee schedule.

A deposit of \$300 for members and \$700 for non-members if required to reserve a date on the church calendar. The deposit is non-refundable. The deposit will be applied toward total fees due.

- 11. Social Functions:** Ministers and wedding staff do not ordinarily attend the social functions (rehearsal dinner and wedding reception) of non-members. If ministers and wedding staff are desired to attend any social functions surrounding the wedding service, invitations should be extended to them and their guest at least one week prior to the rehearsal. They may not be able to attend such functions if their schedule does not allow.