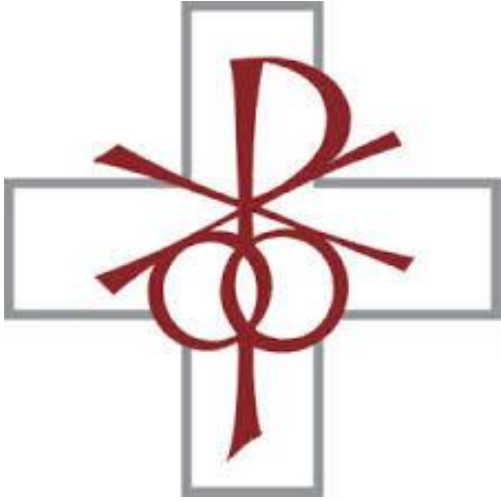


THE WEDDING MANUAL

Messiah Lutheran Church, Keller, Texas



INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! Planning for a Christian wedding is the first step in developing a Christ-centered marriage. Thank you for inviting us to be part of that process. This little manual is designed to help answer questions and clarify issues that often arise concerning the church's participation in weddings. We have discovered through years of experience that it is best for all concerned to clarify and reconcile expectations before the process actually begins. It is very important, therefore, that you read this manual carefully before initiating the first pre-marriage counseling session with the pastor.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Membership Requirement: Because the wedding process requires significant time demands upon the pastor and assumes a certain degree of theological understanding on the part of the participants, we have found it necessary to limit weddings to those who are already associated with our church. *At least one person of the couple* must be an active member or must be preparing for membership. Exceptions to this rule include Lutherans of other congregations who are referred to us by their pastors because of special circumstances.

State Requirements: Marriage is an institution governed and administered by the State. A state license must be obtained before a wedding can be performed at Messiah.

Divorce and Remarriage: The State is more lenient on the matter of divorce than is the Bible. Instructed by the words of Jesus, the Church regards marriage as a sacred institution. The vows are binding for life. God strictly forbids man to interfere with what God has joined together (Matthew 19:6). Fearful of violating this Divine prohibition, the church must inquire concerning the circumstances and status of divorced persons who are requesting remarriage. The following questions are relevant:

What was the cause of the divorce? A Christian is set free from the bond of marriage only through the cause of death, adultery, or malicious desertion of the spouse. If a prior marriage has been broken by any of the above, the living or innocent partner is free before God to marry again.

What is the status or attitude of the former spouse? If a person seeking a wedding at Messiah is guilty of violating a prior marriage vow by breaking the marriage without Scriptural justification, we must inquire about the current status of the ex-spouse. If the former spouse is still single and open to reconciliation, we cannot participate in sealing a wrongful divorce by consecrating a new marriage. If this is the case then such a person who cannot honor or who refuses to honor his/her previous marriage vows is still held accountable by our Lord. Therefore he/she should remain unmarried until proper Scriptural reconciliation can be made with the former spouse.

What is the attitude of the person who desires remarriage? If a person seeking a wedding at Messiah is guilty of violating a prior marriage vow, but the former spouse is no longer legally available or open to reconcile, we must inquire concerning the attitude of the person seeking remarriage. Does he or she recognize the breaking of the past marriage as a sin? Has he or she repented and sought forgiveness from God and from those who might have been harmed by the wrong (former spouse, children, friends, congregation)? Is he or she ready to enter marriage again with the resolve, under God's grace, to honor the new vows as God intends by refusing to break them for less than Scriptural reasons? A new life begins with confession and absolution. It is quite appropriate and necessary for the church to inquire whether the divorced person has come to a right understanding of the marriage vows. It is always a joy for the church to offer Christ's forgiveness and a new beginning for those who acknowledge their sin and desire God's mercy.

THE WEDDING CEREMONY

Wedding ceremonies come in a wide variety. Couples have proven time and again that imagination knows no bounds. People have been married in sports arenas, at square dances, underwater, and in the sky. Couples have chosen outlandish themes and worn strange costumes for their weddings. Creativity has often turned the wedding into a circus event. The wedding chapel business has risen to meet these ever changing desires for novelty.

The Church is not such a “business.” The pastor *assumes* that couples requesting a church wedding desire to speak their solemn vows in the context of a Christian worship service. While we encourage couples to be married in God’s house, if another location is desired, the pastor will still conduct the ceremony as a Christian service, in which the same considerations apply:

The Christian worship service, as this congregation understands it, is characterized by dignity, reverence, and honor. Christ is always the center of the service, and His Word always reigns supreme. In the Lutheran wedding, marriage is never trivialized. The solemn vows are spoken with respect. The wedding ceremony is never reduced to a show, and the chancel is not a stage. The wedding ceremony is a worship service, and the standards of worship will be maintained throughout. Those who desire more creative alternatives will be better served by a wedding chapel.

That our expectations may not conflict, please take note of the following ground rules for weddings at Messiah:

The chancel furnishings are fixed. All chancel furniture and ornaments have symbolical as well as practical value. Our chancel is always sacred space, and we do not wish it to be turned into an open stage for weddings.

The Christian wedding does not exalt “love” or romance or the wedding couple. **It exalts Christ** and provides an appropriate environment for speaking sacred vows in His presence, and for receiving His blessing.

Music for the wedding service must be appropriate for Christian worship. Propriety involves far more than a generic mention of “God” or heaven, or the absence of offensive language or themes. Romantic love songs, first-date songs, and other music that may have strong sentimental value are more appropriate for the reception than for the worship service. The ceremony does not exalt romance, but provides a context for vows. Contemporary Christian music is allowed, but only when the lyrics have a certain degree of theological substance (and accuracy!), and the music is fitting for the worship context. Because of its non-Christian, and even anti-Christian context, Mendelssohn’s *Wedding March* and Wagner’s *Bridal Chorus* are not permissible. Please see Appendix A for the reasoning behind this rule. All other music must be submitted for approval well in advance of the wedding date unless it appears on the appended list of suggested music.

In our congregation, the pastor conducts the public reading of Scripture. We hold to this practice also in wedding services.

Little children who serve as flower girls and ring bearers must either be mature enough to behave properly throughout the wedding (30-40 minutes), or plans must be made for their supervision and removal from the chancel if necessary. An unruly child in the chancel is a terrible distraction for everyone.

Photographers should be instructed to respect the sacred character of a Christian worship service. NO flash photography is permitted during the service either by the official photographer or others. (The official photograph may take flash pictures of the processional, but none after the invocation.) The actual wedding may be photographed or video-recorded only if the photographer remains inconspicuous throughout the service. The photographer should consult the pastor about his or her plans. Before and after service the photographer may use

any equipment to make any pictures desired; however, the sanctuary must be cleared at least thirty minutes **before** the service. The pastor will be happy to re-enact scenes to be photographed.

All members of the wedding party must be appropriately attired and sober at wedding time. We also ask that the party refrain from chewing gum during the service.

Private communion (communion of the wedding couple only) at a wedding service is not permitted.

Communion of the entire congregation is permitted only under certain circumstances. The pastor will discuss this with those who may be interested.

The service of “Holy Matrimony” is found in the Lutheran Service Book hymnal on page 275ff. This service, with few deviations, serves as the wedding ceremony for Messiah. Couples are not permitted to “write their own vows”, etc. Certain ceremonial options, such as a unity candle, may be discussed with the pastor.

As a festive occasion, some couples may wish to adorn the sanctuary with more flowers than usual. While this is not discouraged, caution must be taken not to over-do a good thing. Free-standing pedestals with vases are provided for flowers placed in the chancel area. **No flowers or other decorations are to be placed upon the altar itself.**

A rehearsal (led by the pastor) is usually scheduled for the Friday evening prior to the wedding. This usually takes about an hour and is to cover details of the service so that everything goes smoothly at the wedding itself. It is important that all members of the bridal party be present.

The pastors of Messiah are not permitted to perform joint wedding services with clergy of other denominations that are not in fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

THE RECEPTION

Most couples plan a reception following the ceremony. We do offer the church Fellowship Hall as a venue for the reception. If this is desired, please verify schedule and other terms with church personnel (fees, rules, etc).

If an off-site reception is preferred, the pastor is often invited to offer a meal prayer for the gathering. If you desire him to do so, please make this request clear prior to the event. In fact, if you wish the pastor and his wife or family (or the organist, for that matter) to attend the reception it is best to send a formal invitation along with any others you may be sending.

PRE-MARRIAGE COUNSELING SESSIONS

Marriages are breaking down in record numbers today. The reasons are many, but they include such basic problems as unrealistic expectations, lack of sufficient preparation, false understanding of marriage, and immaturity of one or both partners. A few sessions of pre-marital counseling will not fix major problems, of course, but they give an opportunity for the pastor to help set realistic expectations, and to explore whether the couple has thought through the issues which frequently disturb marital harmony. With the pastor, the couple discusses such topics as family background, roles in marriage, spirituality and marriage, and communication. The wedding rite itself also serves as an outline for discussion of these topics.

The counseling sessions are designed to take place over the course of several weeks rather than days. For this reason, the couple should request to begin meeting with the pastor at least six weeks prior to the wedding date.

FEES

Church Facility Rental Fee: There is no fee assessed for renting the sanctuary for the wedding and pictures. Use of the fellowship hall for rehearsal dinner or reception may be assessed a fee to cover cost of utilities.

Church Cleaning Fee: Most weddings take place on Saturday, which means the church must be cleaned immediately after the wedding to prepare the church for Sunday worship. **A cleaning fee of \$75** will be assessed if only the sanctuary and a bridal room are used. **A cleaning fee of \$150** will be assessed if a reception in the church follows the wedding. The church will arrange for the cleaning. *Payable to "Messiah Lutheran Church".*

Church Organist: The organist of Messiah Lutheran Church is usually willing to serve for weddings, but this is not part of his/her job description or church salary. In addition to offering special gifts and talents, the organist usually makes a significant time commitment for weddings, including helping the couple choose appropriate music, as well as playing for the service itself. Therefore we have set the current **organist fee of \$150**.

The Organist receives this fee directly from the couple.

Professional Musicians/Soloists, etc.: Professional musicians and soloists should be contracted individually by the wedding couple. Non-professionals, such as friends and relatives or fellow church members, should also be remunerated by the wedding couple in proportion to their skill level and the amount of time and work necessary to make their contribution.

Church Choirs: Occasionally a special choir of the church is asked to participate at weddings. Such participation is not always possible, but when the choir does participate a monetary gift is usually donated by the wedding couple to the music ministry of Messiah.

Pastors: A pastor or pastors asked to serve for a wedding are customarily offered a monetary gift. The honorarium is usually in the \$100 - \$200 range, depending on the amount of time the pastor has spent with the couple for marriage and wedding preparation. This gift, if given, goes *directly to the pastor*.

Please bring all fees/honoraria to the rehearsal prior to the wedding day.

COUPLES LIVING TOGETHER

The Church is often asked to preside over weddings for couples who have already begun co-habitation. This places the Church in a very difficult moral dilemma. On the one hand, the Church, following the sixth commandment, condemns the practice of sex outside of marriage as fornication (1 Cor. 6:13) We do not wish to condone such behavior or even appear to do so lest we encourage others toward sin (Eph 5:11). On the other hand, we believe it is right and proper for people who are living in such a situation to get married, and we want to encourage and support that remedy. We will, therefore, provide a Christian wedding for a co-habiting couple only under the following circumstances:

For those who desire a more traditional and larger wedding service: The couple must typically separate (move apart) until the wedding day.

Alternatively, the pastor is willing to participate in an immediate ceremony to legalize the marriage. A public service of recognition of the marriage may then follow if the couple desires.

In any case the couple must be willing to acknowledge their wrongdoing, and then honor the Word of God by seeking forgiveness through private confession and absolution. An attitude of pride and indifference will nullify any attempt on the part of the church to participate in a wedding.

Note: While this policy is intended to safeguard the reputation of the church and pastors, it is also intended for the welfare of the couple. Marriages that begin after a period of living together are much more fragile than those which begin properly with a sacred vow. Confession and absolution provides a vitally important transition for those who wish to begin anew with God's blessing and the assurance of His forgiveness. A new beginning through repentance provides a much stronger foundation for a lasting relationship.

CONCLUSION

A Christian wedding is a worship service, invoking the presence and blessing of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God instituted marriage in the Garden of Eden to be a blessing to mankind. He used marriage as a picture of the communion between Christ and His Bride, the Church. Jesus blessed and honored marriage with His presence and first miracle at Cana in Galilee. The Apostle Paul commended marriage to God's people as good and honorable. The wedding is not "your service," but the Church's service for you. It is an occasion of joyful celebration and thanksgiving to God for His marvelous blessings in Christ, and an opportunity to implore His blessings upon the new union, joined together by Him.

To God alone be the glory.

Revised 12/2019

APPENDIX A

WEDDING MUSIC

A NOTE ON THE WEDDING MARCH AND BRIDAL CHORUS:

Mendelssohn’s *Wedding March* is from the opera *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. This piece has its origin during a dream sequence where the bridegroom is turned into an ass. Obviously, this is not an appropriate context for a Christian Wedding.

Wagner’s *Bridal Chorus* comes from the opera *Lohengrin*. It introduces a scene which shows a man and his wife whose affections are cooling. During the course of the scene a murder is committed. This is hardly the right mood for a Christian wedding.

SAMPLE OF POSSIBLE SELECTIONS

Processionals and Recessionals (organ)

<i>Canon in D</i>	Pachelbel
<i>Psalm XIX</i>	Marcello
<i>Trumpet Voluntary</i>	Clarke
<i>Trumpet Air</i>	Clarke
<i>Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring</i>	Bach
<i>Prelude in Classic Style</i>	Young
<i>Hornpipe</i>	Handel
<i>God of Grace</i>	Manz
<i>Now Thank We All Our God</i>	Manz
<i>Processional on “Praise My Soul the King of Heaven”</i>	Cherwien
<i>Recessional on “Sent Forth By God’s Blessing”</i>	Sedio
<i>Ode to Joy</i>	Beethoven

Congregational Singing

<i>Now Thank We All Our God</i>	LSB 895
<i>Praise to the Lord, the Almighty</i>	LSB 790
<i>Go, My Children, With My Blessing</i>	LSB 922
<i>O Father, All Creating</i>	LSB 858
<i>Lord, When You Came as Welcome Guest</i>	LSB 859
<i>Gracious Savior, Grant Your Blessing</i>	LSB 860

It is best to make an appointment to meet with the church musician/organist to discuss music for the wedding, and to hear samples of some of the options. This can be scheduled in conjunction with one of your premarital counseling visits with the pastor, for your convenience.

While not required, we do strongly encourage at least one hymn be included in the wedding service.

APPENDIX B

PERSONAL INFORMATION

(To be submitted to the Pastor before the initial Pre-marriage counseling session. Copy/paste into an email is fine.)

Groom's Info.

Name:

Address:

Home Phone:

Cell Phone:

Email:

Occupation:

Work Phone:

Age:

Date of Birth:

Member of Messiah?

Have you been married before?

If yes: Widowed?

Date:

If not widowed: Date Separated:

Final Divorce Date:

Reason:

Bride's Info.

Name:

Address:

Home Phone:

Cell Phone:

Email:

Occupation:

Work Phone:

Age:

Date of Birth:

Member of Messiah?

Have you been married before?

If yes: Widowed?

Date:

If not widowed: Date Separated:

Final Divorce Date:

Reason: