

A New Beginning: Christian Marriage Preparation and Wedding Planning West Plano Presbyterian Church's Theology and Practice

Throughout our lives, we come to places of new beginnings which excite and challenge us. Marriage, and the courtship that precedes it, is such a time. This brochure is prepared for those seeking information concerning getting married at West Plano Presbyterian Church. It is likely that those asking this question have already made the decision to be married. This information will answer some of the typical questions about with requirements, restrictions, and costs that may apply.

Making arrangements for a wedding is really part of a much larger process which is the making of a marriage. In this sense, marriage is understood as a life-long partnership ritualized in the wedding service. Therefore, it is helpful, even necessary, to make a distinction between marriage preparation and wedding planning. Both of these are important but are not the same, with on the second more naturally following the first. Presbyterian pastors are required to provide a process of preparation for all couples seeking to be married in the church. As outlined in the *Book of Order*, this preparation will explore many questions including these:

1. the nature of their Christian commitment, assuring that at least one is a professing Christian,
2. the legal requirements of the state,
3. the privileges and responsibilities of Christian marriage,
4. the nature and form of the marriage service,
5. the vows and commitments they will be asked to make,
6. the relationship of these commitments to their lives of discipleship,
7. the resources of the faith and the Christian community to assist them in fulfilling their marriage commitments. (*Book of Order* W-4.9002a)

Discussion on these topics is no less important for subsequent marriages following a death or divorce than they are for a first marriage. Typically, such preparation takes place over an extended period of months (six to nine) and precedes the planning process for the wedding. This timeframe allows for a natural relationship to form and for the decision to marry to deepen and mature.

INTRODUCTION

Christian marriage, according to the Presbyterian church [*Book of Order* - W-4.1002], is “a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family.” But marriage is also “a civil contract between a woman and a man.” In this country pastors are authorized by the state to officiate over these civil contracts. But more than this “Christian marriage is a covenant through which a man and a woman are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship.” Such a statement invites us into a more theological understanding of marriage that connects a person’s decision to enter marriage with a personal faith in the one God revealed in Jesus Christ. A Christian perspective understands marriage as “a lifelong commitment. . . publicly witnessed and acknowledged by the community of faith.”

These statements constitute the tip of the marriage iceberg with much more to be discovered. One of the gifts the church has to offer those seeking marriage is a wonderful vision of this shared partnership, a partnership that has many benefits as well as challenges. It is a good and wise thing to take time for conversation around these truths which is what a couple should expect with the pastor. The period of preparation will explore the many dimensions of this partnership and offer helpful suggestions for personal reading and reflection. One implication of everything said above is that couples should allow a generous time frame for all that comes before the wedding.

What follows in this brochure is meant to offer more specific information to help you understand some of the more practical matters pertaining to a wedding at West Plano Presbyterian Church. While this brochure will not answer all your questions, it will help you in deciding to take the next step. That next step will be scheduling a more extensive conversation with the Pastor on your plans to be married.

1. A Presbyterian wedding is understood to be a service of worship. [*Book of Order* W-4.10003]

As a service of worship, the wedding is “under the direction of the Pastor and the supervision of the Session.” Ordinarily, a wedding takes place as a special service scheduled for this

reason; however, it “may take place during the Service for the Lord's Day upon authorization by the Session.” Usually, the church’s regular worship space is used for weddings unless a different setting is desired. All wedding requests must be approved by the Session before final confirmation of the wedding date.

2. Church furnishings such as the communion table, font, paschal candle, and cross are not to be moved.

Font, pulpit, and table constitute the central symbols of our Christian identity, therefore they are equally important to the wedding liturgy as to all worship services. Since weddings do not take place outside of liturgical time but within the church year, the worship space must be left as it has been arranged. Throughout the year, the church changes its worship environment which includes hangings, banners, etc. The timing of the wedding within the liturgical year will determine how the sanctuary looks. No weddings are permitted on the weekend of Passion/Palm Sunday or the Holy Triduum (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter).

3. The officiating clergy for all weddings will be the Pastor of West Plano Presbyterian Church.

Other clergy may be permitted to assist subject to the approval and invitation of the Pastor. In special circumstances, other clergy may officiate in the place of the Pastor. Such a decision is subject to the approval of both the Pastor and the Session.

4. The marriage service must conform to Presbyterian standards of worship for a wedding. [Book of Order W-4.9004].

These standards set forth the order and sequence of the service elements. These elements include scripture, prayers, music, the exchange of vows, and the public announcement of the marriage. Traditions common to particular cultural groups are permitted when they do not conflict with the central meaning of Christian marriage. No “unity candle” may be used in the service as it is redundant to the primary symbols in the service. If one is desired, it is better reserved for the wedding reception. With the permission of the Session, the Lord’s Supper may be celebrated

according to Presbyterian polity. In such cases, the manner of celebrating this sacrament will be in keeping with current WPPC practice. Here is a general outline of the service according to the two rites in the Book of Common Worship:

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| <p><i>Rite I</i></p> <p>Processional Sentences of Scripture Statement on the Gift of Marriage Prayer Declarations of Intent Affirmations of the Families Affirmations of the Congregation Readings from Scripture Sermon [Psalm, Hymn, or Spiritual] Vows Exchange of Rings (or Other Symbols) Prayer Lord's Prayer Announcement of Marriage [Hymn] Charge and Blessing Recessional</p> | <p><i>Rite II</i></p> <p>Processional Call to Worship Psalm, Hymn of Praise, or Spiritual Confession and Pardon The Peace [Canticle, Psalm, Hymn, or Spiritual] Readings from Scripture Sermon Creed Rite of Christian Marriage Statement on the Gift of Marriage Prayer Declarations of Intent Affirmations of the Families Affirmation of the Congregation [Psalm, Hymn, Spiritual, or Anthem] Vows Exchange of Rings (or Other Symbols) Prayer [Lord's Prayer] Announcement of Marriage Charge to the Couple Blessing of the Couple [Psalm, Hymn, Spiritual, or Anthem] [The Eucharist or Prayer of Thanksgiving with Lord's Prayer] Hymn Charge and Blessing Recessional</p> |
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5. The WPPC Organist will serve as organist at all weddings.

All requests and selections for music must be approved by the Organist with the consent of the Pastor. Music chosen for the marriage service must be appropriate for worship. [Book of Order W-4.9005]. The church Organist has a vast knowledge of suitable music and will assist the couple in making choices for the service. The use of a soloist or instrumentalist must be arranged with and approved by the Organist. Under no circumstances may prerecorded music be played. A substitute organist may be used subject to the approval of both the church Organist and Pastor.

6. Flowers used for the service should be in proportion to the space.

Given the small size of the sanctuary, flower baskets are limited to two. No artificial flowers are permitted in such baskets. Other decorations such as ribbons may be used after first obtaining permission. The throwing of rice, birdseed, or rose petals, releasing of balloons, blowing of bubbles, releasing of butterflies, etc. is not permitted on church property.

7. Worship aids for the wedding may be reproduced by the church office if the paper is provided by the couple.

The final copy of the worship aid must be approved by the Pastor even when the decision is to use a professional printer.

8. Since a wedding is a service of worship, photography during the service is restricted.

Professional photographers must confer with the Pastor at least one week prior to the wedding. Still photographs may be taken during the opening processional and following the final blessing. Neither flash nor non-flash photography may be taken during the service.

Video-taping is permitted as long as the camera remains stationary in the back of the sanctuary and out of the way of human traffic. Photographs may be re-staged following the service.

9. One hour should be allowed for the wedding rehearsal which shall be under the direction of the Pastor.

As a courtesy to the church staff, the wedding party should arrive promptly at the scheduled

time. Any plans to remain longer than the scheduled hour (to add decorations, for example) should be arranged with the Pastor through the church office.

10. Limited space is available if the bride and her bridal party wish to arrive early on the day of the wedding to complete getting dressed at the church.

This must be prearranged through the church office.

11. The Fellowship Hall may be used for a rehearsal dinner or reception subject to additional costs and special arrangements.

Such a request must be made through the church office to the Session and Pastor.

12. A couple being married should expect to pay fees associated with being married at the church.

(See Addendum)

The path to Christian marriage involves a journey of blessing, challenge, and self-discovery. Good marriage preparation is essential because it can contribute to a more stable life together. However, it can sometimes be revealed, during the process of preparation, that marriage is unadvisable at this time. An initial consent to marry is never binding should the Pastor discover that the “commitment, responsibility, maturity, or Christian understanding are so lacking that the marriage is unwise.” Such a decision is never taken lightly and is accompanied by pastoral guidance for further counseling as needed. [*Book of Order* W-4.9002b] Taking steps toward marriage is an act of trust and openness before God that should always be open to what might be learned along the way. What has been shared in this brochure is part of the church’s ministry to couples inquiring about marriage, a ministry founded in the gracious invitation to trust the God who loves us deeply and unconditionally. We welcome the opportunity for further conversation with you.

Addendum: Current Fee Schedule for WPPC Weddings

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| WPPC Pastor | Honorarium at the discretion of the family |
| Church Organist | \$200.00 |
| Rehearsals with a soloist/cantor | \$50.00 |
| Additional costs may be added for special instrumental music if requested. | |
| Printing of Worship Aids | No cost |
| Church cleaning cost | \$100.00 |
| Use of building – members | No cost |
| Use of building – non-members | \$150.00 |