

Weddings at First Presbyterian Church of Kalamazoo

Introduction

Congratulations on your decision to be married! We are delighted to know that you are interested in having your wedding at First Presbyterian Church of Kalamazoo. We believe that “marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family” (*Directory for Worship*, from the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church USA). For that reason we take very seriously our role in assisting couples in planning for their wedding day and in preparing for their lives together in God’s love. The staff of First Presbyterian Church wants your wedding to be lovely and meaningful.

Marriage is a civil contract, and some guidance is given in this booklet for obtaining a marriage license. *Christian* marriage, within our faith tradition, is a covenant through which a couple is called “to live out together before God their lives of discipleship ... publicly witnessed and acknowledged by the community of faith.” (*Directory for Worship*)

Couples seeking to be married at First Presbyterian Church should contact the church office as soon as possible. Our pastors will be consulted for availability. No wedding is officially scheduled on the church calendar until one of the pastors has given consent to officiate. Guest pastors can be a part of the wedding at the discretion of the presiding pastor, and this booklet provides some direction for those situations.

A wedding in our tradition may be characterized as one of simple dignity. “Flowers, decorations, and other appointments should be appropriate to the place of worship, enhance worshipers’ consciousness of the reality of God, and reflect the integrity and simplicity of Christian life” (*Directory for Worship*).

The key to understanding wedding ceremonies in a Presbyterian Church is to remember that a wedding is, first and last, a service of worship. The information provided here, including all policies and procedures, should assist couples in planning for a wedding that is simple, joyful, beautiful, and appropriate for our faith tradition.

Reserving a Date and Time for the Service

All reservations for a particular date and time for a wedding will take place after initial conversation with the presiding pastor. When application for a wedding is made the church office will forward information to the presiding pastor assigned for your intended service. The total time of dressing, wedding and photographs shall not exceed 3 hours, scheduled in order that the building may be vacated no later than 8:00 p.m.

Not every day or weekend is a good time for a wedding at First Presbyterian Church. Sundays, for example, are ordinarily not good days for weddings. Weddings also may not be scheduled where there are conflicts with the church schedule, which must take priority. In particular, weddings may not be scheduled on the Saturday before Palm Sunday through Easter Sunday (which is the period known in the Christian faith as “Holy Week”) or the month of December. Finally couples are advised to check with the Department of Parks and Recreation and the City Traffic Department for events scheduled in Bronson Park.

Church Membership

In the case when the bride and/or the groom are a member(s) of First Presbyterian Church, the requested date *has first priority up to twelve (12) months* prior to the intended service. Non-members may reserve a date and time of service *but may not receive a final commitment of the date and time until twelve (12) months prior to the intended service*. Every effort will be made to conduct all services for members and non-members should it become necessary to have several services on a single day.

Presiding Pastor and Pre-Marital Consultation

Presiding pastors will be assigned to each service on a rotating basis. Requests will be honored to the extent that schedules permit. All weddings at the church will be conducted under the leadership of a pastor of First Presbyterian Church. The presiding pastor is in charge of the content of the service and of all participants. Approval to include other participants (including other clergy) may be arranged during preparation with the pastor. When a couple requests the participation of a guest pastor, the pastor from First Presbyterian Church will extend the invitation to the guest pastor to assist with the wedding. Life circumstances vary, but ordinarily couples should begin preparation with pastor no less than six months before the wedding.

The pastors at First Presbyterian Church take seriously their responsibility to prepare couples not only for the wedding ceremony, but also for their life after the ceremony. The pastor designated to perform the service will provide pre-marital counseling and help you plan the service. Each pastor will have his or her own strategy for preparing couples. The length and number of appointments may vary depending upon the needs of the couple. Please know that a pastor's schedule may limit the pastor's participation in the rehearsal dinner and reception.

The Service of Marriage

A wedding at First Presbyterian Church is considered an act of worship. The particular order of service used will be the discretion of the presiding pastor. It is appropriate, but not essential, for the service to include special music, hymns, scripture readings, and a brief homily by the pastor. The pastor will review the service with the couple as part of the pre-marital consultation. It will be the intention to make each wedding a unique and personal event always praising and honoring God.

Music

As with all other elements of the wedding, "music suitable for the wedding directs attention to God and expresses the faith of the church" (*Directory for Worship*). The church's organist will provide guidance and suggestions for music appropriate to a service of worship. Options for soloists and instrumentalists should be discussed with the organist. First Presbyterian Church does not allow the use of pre-recorded music.

The couple must schedule an appointment to meet with the church organist, who plays at all weddings or arranges for substitutes. This meeting should take place approximately four months prior to the wedding.

Wedding Coordinator

The wedding coordinator is responsible for helping the couple with preparation of details for the wedding and assisting with coordination of participants on the day of the wedding. Questions about arrangements, fees, equipment, and use of the church facilities may be made through the wedding coordinator. Work with the wedding coordinator should begin several months in advance of the wedding day. An outside coordinator can be helpful to a family in the initial planning for the wedding; however, the church's pastors and wedding coordinators will have total responsibility to conduct all rehearsals and ceremonies.

Photography and Videography

Since a wedding is a service of worship, photography during the service is considered inappropriate by anyone except a professional photographer hired for the occasion. Working within the parameters at First Presbyterian Church outlined below is essential. Flash photography, in particular, is not permitted, with the exception of escorting immediate family, attendants' processional, bridal processional, and following the benediction at the end of the service. The official wedding photographer will be able to photograph unobtrusively, but even official photographers need to be reminded of the church's policy. During the wedding service, the photographer must remain at all times behind the last row where the guests are seated, closest to the Narthex, and take only non-flash pictures. Ample time is available both before and after the service for family and individual wedding photographs. Couples are responsible for conveying these restrictions to their photographer and guests well before the wedding date.

If pre-wedding photographs are desired, the photographer should begin no earlier than 1-1/2 hours before the service and must be completed no less than 30 minutes before the service is scheduled to begin. If post-wedding photographs are desired, these should be completed no more than 45 minutes after the conclusion of the service.

Videography of the service may be done from the west or back balcony, with no auxiliary lighting equipment used; and the equipment may not be moved during the service. The videographer must remain at all times behind the last row where the guests are seated.

Decorations and Other Concerns

The sanctuary is in itself a place of great beauty and does not need excessive decoration. The architecture of the worship space may not be altered for the wedding nor the liturgical decorations of the season removed. The church will provide candelabras, isle candles, and kneeler if requested. Decoration such as flowers, candles, bows, etc. are to be kept to a minimum so as not to detract from the service itself. Candelabra and candles are available for an additional fee. Pew bows must be attached with plastic clips (no tape). Please discuss any other decorative ideas with the pastor and wedding coordinator well before the wedding day.

No rice, confetti, birdseed, balloons, or other like materials may be thrown either within or outside the church in consideration of safety, environmental concerns, insurance liability, and building maintenance. Numerous other possibilities can be considered including small bells that your guests may ring or bubbles to be blown as you leave the church. Aisle runners are not used at First Presbyterian Church.

The wedding coordinator should be included in the planning of the decorations. Florists will usually have access to the worship space no earlier than 90 minutes before the wedding. They must be finished with preparing the church at least 30 minutes prior to the beginning of the service.

Bulletins

It is not necessary to have a wedding bulletin for your ceremony. When a bulletin is requested, it shall be produced in consultation with the presiding pastor. Printed copy is due in the church office three weeks prior to the wedding. If it is printed at First Presbyterian Church, there will be an additional charge.

Rehearsals

Rehearsals are scheduled for the late afternoon / evening on the night before the wedding to begin between 4:00 and 6:00 pm, at the discretion of the presiding pastor. Rehearsals start promptly and are usually one hour in length. All who have a role in the wedding are expected to be present, attentive and ready to begin at the appointed hour. Parking is available in the Lovell Street parking lot.

Other Facility Information

Dressing rooms are available for use by the wedding party the day of the wedding. They are available to be seen upon inquiry about our facilities and discussed more thoroughly with the wedding coordinator

Our sanctuary seating capacity is 950.

First Presbyterian Church is a smoke-free environment. No alcoholic beverages are permitted on the church premises.

The facilities of First Presbyterian Church are in constant use by a number of church and community groups. Please be considerate of those who are sharing the use of the building.

Fees

A current schedule of fees is available through the church office. The deposit is due at the time the application is submitted. The balance of the cost is due six weeks prior to the wedding. Details of payment of additional requests will be discussed with the wedding coordinator.

The Marriage License

According to state law, the marriage license must be obtained in the county in which at least one of the couple presently resides. For out of state residents, the marriage license must be obtained in the county in which the wedding ceremony is to be conducted. Our church facility is in Kalamazoo County.

The Marriage License Bureau in Kalamazoo County is located in the County Clerk's office in the County Administration Building, 201 West Kalamazoo Avenue. The phone number is 383-8840. Call them early in your wedding planning so that you have ample time to meet all requirements for application. There is a three-day waiting period after the application before the license can be picked up. The license is valid for 30 days.

No wedding rehearsal shall begin if the marriage license has not been delivered to the church office or wedding coordinator.

Concluding Thoughts

If you have additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the presiding pastor or the wedding coordinator. If you are not members, we invite you to consider First Presbyterian Church as your continuing "church home" after your wedding – a place to grow in love with God and one another through worship, education, friendship and service to others.

Grounded in living faith, receiving diversity as a gift, we seek to reflect Christ's light in God's world. Continually discerning God's vision of grace and peace, we share inspirational worship, spiritual nurture, compassionate service to others, and the pursuit of justice—all to the glory of God.

We wish you every joy and blessing.