

First Presbyterian Church, Tallahassee, Florida

Revised and Adopted by the Session September 27, 2020

Wedding Policy

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 . . .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.

– *Book of Order (2019/2021) W-4.0601.*

As a service of Christian marriage is more than a social convention. It is an ordinance of the Church and a witness to the world of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The session of First Presbyterian Church has adopted this policy in order:

- to enable couples married at First Presbyterian Church to understand the nature of their Christian commitment;
- to ensure that the facilities of the church are used in keeping with the Directory for Worship of the *Book of Order*;
- to bear a faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A. Who may be considered for marriage at First Presbyterian Church?

Couples who are willing to approach their wedding with the understanding that marriage is an act of Christian discipleship and to undergo a discernment process with the pastor or other counselor may apply for marriage at First Presbyterian Church. Both members and non-members of First Presbyterian Church may apply.

B. Discernment Process

The discernment process may begin as early as one year, but no later than four months, prior to a proposed marriage date.

- Those wishing to begin the process of discernment must first complete an application. When the application papers are returned to the church office a *tentative* date for the wedding may be placed on the church calendar. **This date should not be publicized, nor should invitations be sent until the discernment process is completed and the pastor's approval has been given.**
- The couple meets with the pastor of First Presbyterian Church.
- The pastor may refer the couple to a counselor to help the couple prepare for marriage, or the pastor may conduct the counseling. If the counseling is not conducted by the pastor, the couple must give permission for the counselor to provide a report to the pastor.
- The couple meets again with the pastor. If the pastor is convinced of the couple's commitment, responsibility, maturity, and Christian understanding, the pastor may

approve the marriage. (*Book of Order* W-4.0602.) If the pastor deems the marriage unwise, he or she shall assure the couple of the Church's continuing concern for them and not conduct the ceremony.

- If the pastor approves the marriage, the wedding date is confirmed on the church calendar.

C. The Marriage: A Service of Worship

Christian marriage should be celebrated in the place where the community gathers for worship. As a service of Christian worship, the marriage service is under the direction of the pastor. With the approval of the session, the Lord's Supper may be celebrated during the marriage service, and the invitation to the Table will be given to all present. With the approval of the session, the marriage service may take place during the Service for the Lord's Day.

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 of the Word and Sacrament[†] 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 of the Word and Sacrament[†] 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.

Book of Order W-4.0603.

D. Ministerial Leadership

Ordinarily the pastor or one of the teaching elders (ministers) affiliated with First Presbyterian Church will have the privilege of conducting weddings in its sanctuary. The invitation for another minister to take part in the service must come from the pastor of First Presbyterian Church. Couples should not invite other clergy to take part in the service before consulting the pastor.

E. Order of Service

The pastor must approve the order of service. All parts of the ceremony should be appropriate to Christian worship and acceptable offerings to God. The amended liturgy of the *Book of Common Worship* is preferred.

F. Extraneous Elements

Because it distracts from the central symbols of the joining of hands and exchanging of rings, the so-called "unity candle" will not be employed.

G. Music

Such music as accompanies the service should direct attention to God, who sanctifies marriage, and special care should be taken to assure that it is suitable and reverent. The singing of hymns by the congregation is encouraged. Secular love songs and music inappropriate for worship will not be permitted. All music must be approved by the pastor or the organist of First Presbyterian Church.

H. Musicians

Like the pastor, the organist of First Presbyterian Church has the privilege and responsibility of leading worship at weddings and shall ordinarily play for all weddings. Another organist or other musicians may be invited to take part in weddings at the discretion of the organist of First Presbyterian Church.

Instrumentalists and vocal soloists shall be under the direction of the organist of First Presbyterian Church.

I. Symbols and Decorations

The baptismal font, Communion Table, Bible, paschal candle, and pulpit are symbols of the faith. They may not be moved from the plain view of the congregation or obscured by flowers, candles, or other decorations. Flowers may not be placed on the Communion Table. The placement of flowers, candles, or other decorations must be approved by the pastor. Decoration of the sanctuary will be at the expense of the wedding party. In keeping with the simplicity of this place of worship and to avoid conspicuous displays, decorations should not be elaborate. The following stipulations apply:

- Tacks and nails may not be driven into church property, and tape may not be used due to the risk of damage to painted surfaces.
- Dripless candles must be used and care should be taken that candles not be allowed to drip on the furniture, floor, or carpet. Candle holders designed to fit in the windows of the sanctuary are available for use.
- Flowers used for weddings must be removed immediately following the service. Couples who wish to provide flowers for Sunday worship should contact the Church Administrator.
- Because of the serious safety hazard they pose, no rice or bird seed may be thrown in the buildings or on the steps of the buildings.
- Wedding parties will be responsible for the order of the church property for the next service. This is especially important for weddings held on Saturdays. All properties of florists, caterers, or other persons employed to assist with the wedding must be removed immediately after the wedding.

J. Photographs and Video Recording

- Flash photos may be taken in the sanctuary before or after the service by arrangement.

- Photographs may be taken in the narthex before members of the wedding party enter the sanctuary. Photographers may not enter the main floor of the sanctuary during the service. The service begins with the first note of music played and ends with the last note.
- Photographs are not ordinarily permitted during the marriage service. However, by prior arrangement and with the express permission of the pastor, time exposures not requiring flash or distracting noises may be taken from the balcony by a professional photographer or by some other designated person.
- Permission from the pastor is required to use electronic equipment such as video or tape recorders. The use of this equipment must not distract from the service of worship.
- It is the bridal couple's responsibility to make this policy known to their friends and the photographer. It is the pastor's prerogative to stop the service if the photographer enters the main floor of the sanctuary or if the service is being interrupted by photographs or video operation.

K. Rehearsals

If a rehearsal is held, the pastor shall be the director. Rehearsals for Saturday weddings will take place on Friday at 5:30 p.m. "Wedding consultants" or other persons playing a supportive role shall be under the direction of the pastor.

L. Children in the Wedding Party

The use of children under the age of six years as ring bearers or flower girls is discouraged.

M. Intoxicants

No one, including the bride and groom, under the influence of alcohol or any other intoxicant shall be allowed to take part in the rehearsal or the marriage service. The minister has the prerogative of canceling both rehearsal and wedding if this restriction is not observed.

N. Approved Florists and Photographers

Only those florists and photographers who have filed with First Presbyterian Church their written agreement to abide by the church's policies may provide service to weddings at First Presbyterian Church.

O. Use of Westminster Room for Reception

If available, the Westminster Room and the kitchen may be used for receptions. This includes the use of punch bowls, dishes, etc.

No alcoholic beverages may be served on church property.

P. Custodial Services

A member of the custodial staff must be present during rehearsals, weddings, and receptions.

The custodial fee is included in the fee for the use of the sanctuary.

It is the responsibility of the wedding party to provide servers for the reception. The custodial staff of the church is not responsible for serving food, washing dishes, or other catering tasks.

Q. Dressing Rooms

Church School rooms may be used for dressing by the bridal party, but they must be reserved through the church office.

R. Parking

A limited number of spaces in the church parking lot is available for use by the wedding party.

S. Scheduling

Weddings shall not be scheduled on the Saturday of Springtime Tallahassee, the Festival of Lights, or during the season of Advent. Downtown parades and events at various times during the year also block convenient access to the church. The couple should contact the City of Tallahassee regarding these events, which are beyond the control of the church, and can be scheduled at short notice.

T. Security

If requested by the wedding party, the sexton will lock dressing rooms during the service. Overnight storage on church premises of any property, including food and serving dishes, is discouraged. First Presbyterian Church is not responsible for lost, damaged, or stolen property.

U. Fees and Honoraria

- The conducting of weddings for church members is an expression of the pastor's ministry to the congregation. No honorarium is desired or expected from church members. A suggested honorarium from non-members is \$150.00. This is not a fee for services, and no couple shall be denied the services of the pastor because of inability to give an honorarium.
- The fee for the use of the sanctuary for non-members is \$1,150.00. If the organist of First Presbyterian Church does not play for the wedding, the fee is \$850.00.
- The fee for the use of the Westminster Room and kitchen for non-members is \$200.00.
- The fee for the use of the Westminster Room and kitchen for members is \$50.00.
- There is no fee to members for the use of the sanctuary. The fee to members for custodial services is \$200.00.

- A deposit of \$200.00 shall be submitted with the Wedding Application. This deposit does not guarantee approval of the wedding and will be returned if the wedding is not approved or is cancelled no later than 30 days prior to the scheduled date.
- The balance of fees shall be submitted 30 days prior to the wedding.
- In most circumstances in which the pastor does not conduct the pre-marital counseling, there will be a fee which shall be paid directly to the counselor.

V. Complying with Public Health Requirements

All provisions of this policy are subject to adaptation to comply with social distancing requirements or to otherwise respond to public health concerns. During any period in which the church is limiting in-person gatherings, access to the sanctuary and church grounds may be limited for the safety of the congregation, staff, and guests. Couples contemplating marriage are encouraged to consult with the pastor about current limitations on gatherings. Ultimately the session has authority to either allow or deny the use of church property for a marriage service (*Book of Order W-4.0602*).

SUMMARY OF FEES AND HONORARIA

SERVICE	MEMBERS	NON-MEMBERS
Pastor of First Presbyterian	None	\$150.00 (suggested)
Organist	300.00	included in sanctuary fee
Sexton	200.00	included in sanctuary fee
Sanctuary	None	\$1,150.00 (\$850 without First Presbyterian's organist)
Westminster Room/ Kitchen	\$50.00	200.00
Counseling Fees	arranged with counselor	arranged with counselor