

Planning a Wedding to Remember

Westminster's Policy and Guidelines

The congregation, session, and staff of Westminster Presbyterian Church rejoice with those planning to unite in marriage. We rejoice even more that you have chosen to establish your marriage relationship in covenant with God and that you wish to celebrate this covenant in a service of worship. We are pleased to make our facilities available for this sacred and joyful occasion.

Westminster Presbyterian Church is not a wedding chapel, but a church, a holy house of God set apart and hallowed. When you request the use of Westminster Presbyterian Church for your ceremony, you acknowledge that the wedding service is first and foremost a service of the church and a regular offering of worship.

When you request to be joined in marriage at Westminster Presbyterian Church you also acknowledge that marriage is a divine institution, established by God in creation and blessed by Jesus, his son, at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Your wedding is first and foremost a religious and holy service with deep spiritual significance. We hope this guide will help you in making your wedding a special and sacred experience.

Weddings at Westminster

Weddings at Westminster Presbyterian Church are generally limited to those who are members of the congregation. Exceptions to this policy are at the discretion of the ministers. It is expected that couples desiring to be married at Westminster Presbyterian Church will receive premarital counseling with the officiating minister or an approved counselor or agency.

Who May Officiate

Due to issues related to appropriate use of the facility and sanctuary, the Session has determined that ordinarily a Westminster clergy shall serve as the officiating minister at weddings. In some circumstances, a Presbyterian Church (USA) clergy not associated with Westminster may be approved by the session to officiate. Extraneous circumstances that require an ordained clergy from another tradition or denomination may be requested. Credentials and clearance for approval must be obtained by a Westminster clergy and the Session.

Pastoral Responsibilities

Contact with a minister on the church's staff shall ordinarily be made at least 3-6 months in advance of the wedding. The ministers of this church are happy to officiate at a marriage service when their schedules permit, where there is no impediment to the marriage, and where there is serious intention to establish the marriage on Christian principles. To this end, a counseling period, including several visits with the officiating minister, must be arranged well in advance of the wedding (Book of Order, W-4.9000).

Under extenuating circumstances, such as those living out of town or in military service, exceptions for the 3-6 month notice will be made if facilities are available on the day desired, but even in such cases a minimum of 30-days notice is required. Counseling of the couple must still be arranged with the minister who will officiate.

When Weddings May Be Held

Weddings may be held on any day excepting for the following: Sunday mornings, during Holy Week or on Thanksgiving Eve, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve, or New Year's Day. The latest time a Saturday wedding may be scheduled is 6:00 p.m. This allows for preparing the sanctuary for worship on Sunday.

Securing the Church Facilities for Your Wedding

It is of utmost importance that you contact the church office manager as far in advance as possible to tentatively schedule a wedding date and time on the church calendar. (We suggest 6 months or more.) Wedding information forms, provided with this guide, should be filled out as completely as possible and returned promptly to the appropriate persons (pastor, office manager, or wedding site coordinator). You must complete and turn in these forms to secure the following:

1. The date and time of your wedding is placed on the church calendar.
2. The date and time of your wedding is cleared with the officiating minister.
3. The date and time of your wedding is cleared with the minister regarding music/organist/soloists.

Procedure for Securing Church Facilities and Staff

1. Contact the church's office manager to see if the wedding date(s) you have in mind are clear on the church calendar. If the date is clear, the office manager will tentatively set the date on the church calendar.
2. When your date is chosen and you ask for a tentative date to be set on the church calendar, complete the Building and Facilities Use Application for Weddings included in this guide. This form is to be returned to the office manager, who in turn, forwards the application to the minister for review and approval.
3. Simultaneously, the office manager will consult with the minister, who will make further contact with the wedding party to begin his/her pastoral responsibilities. (See "Pastoral Responsibilities" section.)
4. After meeting with the Pastor, contact the church's office manager to secure the church's pianist/organist for your wedding date. When the church's organist/pianist is secured you will be given a contact number for the pianist/organist.
5. Once the wedding has been approved by the minister, and the calendar cleared, please fill out the Wedding information sheets and return them to the church office. The Wedding Site Coordinator will then be in contact with you to confirm the information sheets have been received.

Fees and Charges

1. Both members and non-members are required to place a deposit of \$100 with the church's office manager immediately to secure the date on the church calendar and to cover possible damages to the sanctuary, fellowship hall, kitchen facilities and equipment (if used). The deposit will be used if repair is required or if exceptional cleaning is required. Otherwise, upon the wedding site coordinator's certification of no breakage or damage, the deposit will be returned within 15 business days following the wedding date.

2. All other fees are due no later than two weeks before the date of the wedding and turned in to the church's office manager. Fees to the pastor, wedding site coordinator and/or organist are paid to them directly on the date of the wedding rehearsal.
3. The use of the sanctuary is free to members or to children of members for weddings, provided a minister of this church participates in the service or has given his/her approval to preside and such has been approved by the worship committee and the session. Other fees apply. For specific fee information, please see the "Wedding Fee" lists included in this guide.

The wedding site coordinator will assure that the facilities are clean, open at the proper time, have lights and air conditioning/heating on. Note: the sanctuary is the only part of the church building that has air conditioning.

4. A Facilities Service fee is required for both member and non-member weddings for the church's custodian to prepare the sanctuary and fellowship hall (if used) for the wedding ceremony, and to clean up following the ceremony and reception.
5. Members and children of members, giving an honorarium to the minister acknowledges their extra duties and hours involved in the entire process.

The Marriage License

A marriage license is required before the ceremony can be performed for weddings at Westminster Presbyterian Church. For information on marriage license procedures, go to:
www.ewashtenaw.org/government/clerk_register/cr_vitals_marriage_info.html.

The marriage license is to be delivered to the officiating minister at the time of the wedding rehearsal. The best man and maid (or matron) of honor are usually designated to sign the certificate. This should be done immediately after the ceremony. The officiating minister will take care of filing the license as required by the State of Michigan. Westminster Presbyterian Church must be provided a copy of the completed wedding license for our permanent records.

The Wedding Service

The marriage ceremony is a service of worship before God. Reverence shall be expected on the part of all present. Listed below are suggestions to help with planning the Order of Worship for the wedding ceremony. The minister and staff are flexible concerning many points of the wedding service; therefore, you should contact them early if you have any special requests.

Celebration of the Lord's Supper

Celebration of the Lord's Supper at the marriage service requires the approval of the Session, and care shall be taken that the invitation to the Table is extended to all baptized present. (Book of Order, W-4.9003)

Wedding Service Bulletin

The couple may wish to have an Order of Worship bulletin prepared and printed for general distribution at the wedding ceremony. The arrangements of typing, printing will be the responsibility of the wedding couple. The Order of Worship must be set in consultation with the officiating minister.

Wedding Music

Music is the second language of the church, expressing and drawing out emotions and ideas which words may sometimes fail to do. The choice of wedding music is an important part of the service. It is expected that the selection of music (sung or played) will be appropriate to the sacred nature of the wedding service of worship and that reverence and discretion will be the principal guidelines.

Musicians participating in the wedding service will normally be members of the music staff (or choir) of Westminster Presbyterian Church. It is recommended that the church organist/pianist be employed for the wedding. To employ the church's music staff for the wedding, contact the office manager once the wedding date has been established and the \$100 deposit has been received. It should not be assumed that the staff would automatically be available. An appointment will be made with the church's organist/pianist to discuss and select the music for the wedding after your meeting with the minister to assist you in selecting music that is appropriate for your wedding service.

A vocal soloist or other instrumentalists can add a special touch to any wedding. The approval from the minister and director of music must be acquired before any arrangements are made with these individuals. The church's music staff may recommend qualified soloists and can also assist in securing a qualified guest soloist. If a guest organist/pianist is desired, he/she must be professionally qualified to use the pipe organ, and prior approval must be sought from the minister and the director of music. All arrangements for organists, soloists, other musicians, and the selection of music shall be made in consultation with the minister of the church and the director of music.

Much good music, instrumental and vocal, has been written while keeping the true significance of the wedding service in mind. The messages of these selections range from silent devotion to exuberant joy. Secular music may be considered upon request, but is not generally considered appropriate. For those songs having special meaning to the wedding couple, it is suggested that arrangements be made to have them played at the reception.

Wedding Site Coordinator

The wedding site coordinator of Westminster Presbyterian Church is required for all weddings, with the exception of simple weddings with less than 25 people attending and no rehearsal. The coordinator will assist the minister and the bridal party with arranging details for the wedding for members and non-members alike. The site coordinator will help in advising the couple and family on church policy, in planning the rehearsal, and in supervising and coordinating the wedding (and reception, if held on church property). The wedding site coordinator's expertise and experience will assist in taking some pressure from the shoulders of all participants.

The wedding site coordinator will make contact with the wedding party when the wedding information forms have been returned to the church office. These forms should be completed and returned to the wedding site coordinator no later than 2 months prior to the wedding date. Members and Non-members will pay fees for the wedding site coordinator's services. The coordinator is willing to meet you at the church to go over the forms with you before submitting them to address any questions you may have. If you have wedding participants who have special assistance needs (i.e. wheelchair accessibility), please inform the wedding site coordinator.

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You must advise the wedding site coordinator the time you need the church building open prior to the scheduled time of your wedding for the delivery of flowers, photo sessions, and dressing for the wedding. Let the wedding site coordinator know your plans for decorating too so she can be there to offer assistance.

Decorations for the Wedding Service

The church has candelabras, pew candles, and a kneeling bench available for rental. Please make arrangements for their use with the wedding site coordinator. Pew bows or other decorations wishing to be placed on the pews need to be secured by elastic or ribbon. No tape or thumbtacks may be used. The church will furnish candles of a dripless variety for the chancel candles, candelabras, or pew candles (if rented). The communion table should be used only for the wedding candles. The Unity candle and the two taper (family) candles to be provided by the wedding party.

When weddings occur on Saturday, flowers are often left for the church service on Sunday. This designation should be made on the wedding site coordinator's wedding information sheet so that the church office is advised and an appropriate word of thanks may be printed in the church's Sunday bulletin.

Care should be taken so that the furnishings of the church are not marred by water or careless handling of pots and vases. Nothing damaging to the building or the furniture will be permitted.

Recording the Wedding Service

Photography

Wedding pictures are an important part of the occasion. Please have your photographer talk with the officiating minister before the wedding. Below are some suggestions to minimize distractions during the ceremony:

1. Pictures may not be taken while the ceremony is in progress.
2. Pictures of the bride entering the sanctuary and of the bride and groom leaving the sanctuary are permissible.
3. Couples are encouraged to have pictures taken before the ceremony, as much as may be possible.
4. Pictures may be taken following the ceremony.
5. The minister may reenact any part of the ceremony for the photographer following the ceremony.

Videotaping

The service may be videotaped without the use of additional lighting. The service of worship must be free of distraction. Please have your video photographer talk with the officiating minister before the wedding.

It would be helpful if the person to videotape the ceremony was present at the rehearsal to find the proper place to stand (or sit) in order to get a good picture without further movement during the ceremony. The minister or wedding site coordinator will assist the person in finding an appropriate location. The video photographer should enter the chancel from a side entrance before the start of the ceremony.

Wedding Rehearsal

The wedding rehearsal is under the direction of the officiating minister and normally takes place the evening before the wedding, lasting approximately one hour. All members of the wedding party are expected at the rehearsal; parents of the bride and groom should also be present. It is important that the rehearsal take place on time, so it is requested that all participants be present 15 minutes before the set time of the rehearsal. The wedding site coordinator will be there to assist with procedures during the rehearsal. Soloists are optional and rehearsal time(s) should be arranged with the church organist/pianist, and the church's office manager.

No food or drink is allowed in the sanctuary. No smoking or alcoholic beverages allowed in any part of the church building or on church property. Please inform wedding attendants and family members of this ahead of time.

Preparation for the Wedding Service

The wedding site coordinator will assign a dressing room to be used by the bridal party before the wedding ceremony. Water will be provided in the dressing room. Wedding dresses should remain in the keeping of some member of the bride's family. The church cannot accept the responsibility for such articles. All clothing, clothes racks, boxes, etc., must be removed from the church's facilities immediately following the ceremony and the dressing room left in the condition it was found. It is expected that the groom's party will arrive for the wedding dressed for the wedding. A room will be provided for the groom's party to relax in while waiting for the ceremony to begin.

Wedding Day Procedures

The wedding site coordinator will go over timing guidelines for the wedding day with the couple prior to the wedding and again at the rehearsal with the wedding party.

Wedding Reception

The church's fellowship hall may be rented for the reception and will accommodate approximately 100-125 people for a sit-down style reception, or 200-250 persons otherwise. Please indicate your request for rental of the fellowship hall for your wedding reception on the church's Building and Facilities Use Application, and on the wedding site coordinator's forms.

All arrangements concerning the reception are to be made with the wedding site coordinator. All food, drinks, decorations, napkins and tablecloths shall be furnished by the wedding party. Kitchen use will consist of warming ovens and serving only; no oven use. Arrangements for use of the dishwasher may be obtained by speaking with the wedding site coordinator in advance of the wedding. Arrangements for the removal of articles brought in specifically for the wedding service or reception are the responsibility of the wedding party and must be removed immediately following the wedding or reception.

If music is to be used during the wedding reception, be sure to advise the wedding site coordinator. No smoking or alcoholic beverages allowed in the church facility or anywhere on the church property. No rice or confetti may be thrown within the church building or on the grounds. The church suggests using birdseed or bubbles outside only. It is more compatible with the environment. No confetti to be used for the reception.

Invitations of a Social Nature to Minister and Spouse

These are expected if you desire his/her attendance at the rehearsal dinner and wedding reception and/or dinner. A written (or verbal) invitation is acceptable.

Following the Wedding

The receiving line may be held in the narthex (foyer) or at your reception, if you prefer. At large weddings it is sometimes preferable to have the receiving line at the place of the reception due to long delays guests may experience at a church receiving line.