

St. John's Lutheran Church Wedding Policy

Marriage Statement

As Christians, we believe that marriage is a gift from God.

Whether we are really fully conscious of it or not, when a man and a woman promise lifelong faithfulness to each other, something of the Holy is made known to us humans. In marriage, God offers human beings the chance to participate in something sacred. In marriage we are given a glimpse of God and the love God revealed to us in Jesus Christ ... Marriage highlights the good news that God has created human beings to enjoy the gift of relationship, the gift of community...

A marriage is one of those relationships – one in which two people are drawn uniquely together. At its best, a marriage is a place of trust, intimacy, a place where a man and a woman know each other as no one else does, where they learn to sacrifice and compromise, forgive and love, with all their being.¹

The celebration of the service of marriage, then, is a worship event where those gathered give praise and thanks to God for the union of two special people in marriage, pledge to support them in their marriage, and ask God's blessings on their union.

Who may be married at St. John's?

While **a wedding** is most certainly about the engaged couple - a bride and groom vowing to love and honor each other all the days of their lives - **a marriage**, by its nature, goes beyond the two individuals who have committed themselves to each other. At the very least **a marriage** cannot help but involve a couple's family and friends. And, for people of faith, **a marriage** also includes the involvement and support of a faith community.

Marriages have everything to do with the larger community, with the whole Body of Christ, the whole people of God. Marriage is a relationship where we are empowered to live out our baptism, where we are nurtured for our mission to be disciples of Christ... Before anything else, we are chosen by God to be God's very own – and in that act, chosen by God to abide in God's great love with one another.... Our relationships are lived out in a larger community... we all have important things to offer this incredible network of intertwined life. .. In grace God gives us the gift of community.²

We expect therefore, that the bride and groom will both be (or become) active members of our faith community (*see notes for exceptions) so their marriage can be cared for and nurtured by the pastors and people of St. John's on an ongoing basis. More importantly, active participation in the worship life of a faith community provides opportunities for the Word of God and the gift of the Lord's Supper to spiritually nourish couples so they may be strengthened in their promise to live a "faith-filled" marriage.

*Notes:

1. If either the bride or groom is already an active member of another congregation, or of a different faith tradition, then please speak with the pastors about your particular situation.

¹ *Now Bring Your Joy To This Wedding: Couples in Premarital Preparation*; Norma S. Wood and Lisa M. Leber, (Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing Company, 2002); 9-10.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

2. Special circumstance requests by non-parishioners, who are active members of another ELCA congregation, to hold a wedding at St. John's may be brought to the pastors for consideration. The requesting couples' pastor will also be contacted and it would be expected that the couple would attend premarital counseling sessions with their home congregation pastor. Please understand that permission will be given at the discretion of the pastors of St. John's.
3. Other requests to hold a wedding at St. John's by those who are not currently active in a church may also be brought to the pastors for consideration. If approved, premarital counseling sessions with the pastors will still be required.

Preparation for Marriage

Premarital Counseling Classes

Getting married is one of the most important decisions you will ever make. Too often marriage is entered into casually, or without a couple openly and honestly thinking through all aspects of a marital relationship, with very sad results. The United States has one of the highest divorce rates in the world. Divorce causes lifelong pain for those it touches, especially if children are involved.

In the church we are deeply committed to doing all that is possible to see that the marriage vows a couple makes "before God and Church" are able to endure the tough times, so their relationship might rejoice in the good times. It is our hope that couple will share a long, healthy, happy and holy life together. Therefore, we require all couples preparing for marriage at St. John's to participate in premarital counseling with the pastors (this also applies to those for whom this is not a first marriage).

The procedure for premarital counseling is as follows:

1. Once your requested wedding date has been approved by the pastors, you will be informed of the date of the next Premarital Counseling Group Session. These sessions are held twice a year and include an informal introduction to the pastors, the wedding coordinator, and the premarital counseling program, as well as an opportunity to ask questions about St. John's wedding policy. It is also a wonderful opportunity to meet other couples who are at the same place in their journey and perhaps to begin some lasting friendships. Finally, at the end of the session, the pastors will meet with each couple to schedule their first premarital counseling couple's session (between the couple and the pastors).
2. Each couple will meet with the pastors three times (in addition to the group session). An additional class may be held for couples who have children from a previous marriage/relationship or at the discretion of the pastors. ***Please Note:*** While the Pastors make every effort to be flexible, it is expected that the couple will make adjustments to their schedule as needed to ensure these sessions are able to be held in a timely manner.
3. Discussions about the wedding service itself will begin during the second meeting, and will be completed at the final meeting. ***Please Note:*** The couple will also need to contact/meet with the organist & the wedding coordinator to plan the music and additional details of their ceremony.

Fees

For those who are members of St. John's there are no fees for the use of the church. If you would like to make a thank offering to the Pastor(s), you may give it directly to the Pastors, or send it to the Church Office.

Other people are involved in your wedding who also give of their time and share their ministerial gifts. We ask you to honor their service by giving a check for \$350.00 to Mrs. Bonnie Spellman, Wedding Coordinator, who will distribute it at the time of your wedding. Fees are as follows: \$150 for the organist, \$100 for the wedding coordinator who helps plan and rehearse the wedding, \$50 for premarital counseling materials, and \$50 for the sexton/custodian who cleans the sanctuary. The \$350 is due when you meet with Mrs. Spellman (410-661-5351) and will secure your date for the ceremony.

(Please Note: Additional fees are required for non-parishioners. Information regarding these fees will be provided during your initial contact with the Wedding Coordinator.)

Important Items to Consider:

Wedding Date – We recommend that you call the office at least six (6) to eight (8) months prior to your desired wedding date to be sure your date is available, both on the Pastors' and the church calendar. Please do this **before** making any other arrangements. (Note: many reception locations require more advance bookings, please be sure to call the Church Office to be sure that the Pastors' schedule and the Church schedule are open **before** you book your reception hall.)

Wedding Reception – The Pastors are sensitive to the high cost of wedding receptions and want you to know that it is neither required nor expected that they be invited to your reception. If an invitation is extended, the Pastors will attend as their schedule allows.

Wedding Rehearsal – Your rehearsal date must be coordinated with/approved by the pastors and the wedding coordinator.

Wedding Coordinator – St. John's is blessed to have trained wedding coordinators. You will find that they are invaluable when it comes to the detailed plans for your wedding ceremony, as well as being present to lead the wedding rehearsal. Please contact St. John's Senior Wedding Coordinator, Bonnie Spellman, at 410-661-5351, soon after you have received approval for your wedding date. **Note:** We do not work with off-site "wedding planners."

Music

- **Type of Music** - Instrumental and vocal music are appropriate. There are, however, certain types of music which are not appropriate. A wedding is a worship event, so music should contribute to our worship of God. St. John's organist will work with you to help ensure that the God-centered nature of worship is honored.
- **Organist** - It is required that you use our organist who normally plays for all services. There are many reasons for this requirement, the most important being that organs are very expensive and require instruction on operation. We cannot allow anyone to use these instruments unless our organist is contacted and gives her approval. Please contact Music Director, Martha Requard (410-838-5256), at your earliest convenience to discuss music.
- **Soloist** - If you desire a soloist and do not have one in mind, please contact our Music Director, Martha Requard. She will be glad to help. An additional fee will be required for the soloist. If any rehearsals are needed involving the organist, an additional fee will be required for her as well. Fees will be set by the organist and/or soloist.

- **Hymns** - One or more hymns may be included if the couple desires. Hymns should be selected from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship Service Book and Hymnal*, in consultation with the organist. This avoids any concern regarding copyright infringement.

Communion - Should you desire a Communion Service, bread and wine will be provided at no cost. The Altar Guild will set up, and the Wedding Coordinator will do the clean up.

Bulletins – Depending on the Parish Administrator’s workload, the church may be able to print your bulletin. However, in order to do so, you must notify the office of your request and have all necessary information to the Parish Administrator at least 3 weeks prior to your wedding.

Flowers - For a Saturday wedding, the flowers purchased for our Sunday service may be used – if the couple so desires - at no cost. However - given the flowers are ordered for a particular worship service - special requests for color or style cannot be considered. Additional flowers and/or church decorations will be the responsibility of the couple. Please consult with the wedding coordinator prior to making any plans to be sure they will be appropriate in this setting.

Candles – Our altar candles are lit at wedding ceremonies. If additional candles are requested, St. John's is able to provide three tiered candelabras at no cost. Due to fire regulations, there will be no carrying of candles, or candles in the aisle. Wedding Coordinators are responsible for lighting and extinguishing all candles.

- **Unity Candles** - St. John’s has a unity candle consisting of three single candles and a holder that can be loaned to the couple for their wedding day at no cost. However, if a couple desires a special unity candle to keep, it needs to be provided by the couple.

Use of bird seed, bubbles, etc. - The church does not permit the use of confetti, bird seed, rice, balloons or sparklers for the departure of the bride and groom. The use of bubbles or doves is permitted at the discretion of the wedding party and at its expense.

Photography/Videography - Most professional photographers/videographers will be familiar with the procedures for shooting a church wedding; however, it is requested that they speak with the wedding coordinator prior to the Service. Photographers are asked to keep the photo session following the Ceremony to no more than 20-25 minutes; this allows the wedding party to join their guests at the reception, and is considerate of the wedding coordinators and sexton who stay behind to clean and set up the church. See the attached photography policy for additional details.

Marriage License – Please note that the State of Maryland requires that your marriage license be issued in the County or City where the wedding is going to take place. To be married at St. John’s, **your marriage license must be obtained in Baltimore County.**

Decorum - The members of St. John's consider our worship space to be holy in the sense that it is set apart for worship. Our sanctuary is where we gather each week to worship and praise God, to give thanks for the gifts we have received, and to ask for God’s forgiveness and guidance. Since we consider this a holy place, we ask that you, your wedding party, and your guests respect our church as we do.

If you have further question or concerns, please call the church office at 410-665-1234.

God’s blessings to you in this time of anticipation and preparation!
May your days together be filled with love and joy!