

WEDDING POLICY

The Session of Bethesda Presbyterian Church wishes to extend their warmest congratulations and best wishes to you as you begin your preparations for your marriage service. We are delighted that you are interested in being married in this historic house of worship and pray God's blessings upon you.

God has ordained that a man and a woman may enter into marriage, pledging their love and fidelity to each other as long as they both shall live. This relationship is blessed by our Lord, Jesus Christ and therefore it has been declared holy throughout the life of the church. Those who pledge themselves each to the other in the sight of God are promised God's help as they enter into the joys and duties of life together. An ordained minister asked to marry a man and a woman will participate with the couple in counseling and discussion of the privileges and obligations they will assume in Christian marriage. The counseling is required.

It should be understood by all participants that Bethesda Presbyterian Church considers marriage to be a holy institution and therefore the service that initiates it is a worship service. It is a continuing interest of the Session that the spiritual aspect of the wedding not be lost amid the details of preparation and enactment. This interest has given rise to the following guidelines in the hope that they will maintain the appropriate religious emphasis while allowing a meaningful and memorable service.

MEMBERS OF CLERGY

The officiant will ordinarily be the resident minister at Bethesda. However, other ordained and seminary accredited clergy from other Christian faith traditions may assist or officiate. The use of other clergy must be requested in writing to the Clerk of Session and approved by both the resident minister at Bethesda and the Session. No member of clergy is required to perform a marriage ceremony. It will be the responsibility of the minister performing the service to counsel with the couple prior to the wedding. If in the course of discussions with the bride and groom, any officiant has reservations about conducting or participating in the service, he or she may withdraw from participation.

BETHESDA WEDDING DIRECTOR

Couples are required to select a Bethesda Wedding Director from an approved list. The Bethesda Wedding Director is a church member who is familiar with the wedding policy and is available to answer questions prior to your wedding. The bride/couple and the selected Bethesda Wedding Director should confer on the details of the service prior to the rehearsal.

The Bethesda Wedding Director will be present at both the rehearsal and the wedding service, and is responsible for the entrance, exit, and placement of all the participants in the ceremony during the rehearsal and wedding. Should you choose to hire a professional wedding planner, he or she will defer to the Bethesda Wedding Director and officiating minister during the rehearsal and wedding service.

MUSIC

The music which is used in the service shall direct attention to God, who sanctifies the marriage, and special care shall be exercised to assure that all music is suitable for a service of worship. Our regular church musician should be retained if at all possible. This individual is familiar with the instrument, responsible for its care and maintenance, and serves as a consultant for appropriate music selections. The organist and resident minister shall approve all music. The organist's fee includes participation in music selection, the rehearsal, and the wedding service. Should another organist be desired, a written request needs to be made to the Clerk of Session. Vocal or instrumental soloists may be used at the discretion of the bride and groom, the church musician, and the officiating member of the clergy. The music used during the service shall be chosen from the vast library of religious music appropriate for Christian worship services. Music with no Christian significance or pre-recorded music should not be used. It is the couple's responsibility to schedule time with the organist to review the music selection.

THE WEDDING REHEARSAL

All weddings should have a rehearsal prior to the service. Typically, this is done the evening before the wedding. The officiating minister is in charge of both the rehearsal and the wedding and should be present at both. The minister may, at his discretion, delegate duties to the Bethesda Wedding Director, musicians, florists, or other professionals. Though the rehearsal is naturally a time of joy, the demeanor of all participants will be tempered by the reverence called for in all religious services.

FLOWERS AND DECORATIONS

Flowers, decorations, and other appointments should not be unduly elaborate. In all activities surrounding the ceremony, ostentation should be avoided. All appointments should be discussed with the Bethesda Wedding Director and resident minister for their approval. Any florist in good standing in the community may be retained. No decorations are to be affixed to any church property with nails or any form of adhesive. Simplicity in the adornment of fresh flowers, suits the design and character of Bethesda; designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1985. Only dripless candles may be used in the sanctuary.

CUSTODIAN

The church custodian will be responsible for opening and closing the church for the rehearsal and the wedding service. The custodian will also be responsible for proper temperature control in all of the facilities used during the rehearsal and the service; restoring the church buildings their proper function after the service; and tolling the church bell (if desired). Wedding services are not a part of the custodian's normal duties; therefore, an additional fee is charged.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Photographic and video graphic arrangements are made at the discretion of the bride and groom. The majority of the photography should be scheduled so as not to interfere with the wedding itself. If a video recording of the service is desired, the camera operator and equipment must remain stationary and inconspicuous. Absolutely no flash photography is allowed during the service.

LITURGY

The liturgy for the service is the choice of the officiating clergy. Liturgies from other Christian churches may be used provided written permission has been received from the Clerk of Session in consultation with the resident minister.

USE OF CHURCH FACILITIES – COVENANT PARTNERS (Members)

Bethesda Presbyterian Church facilities are available for use by covenant partners and close relatives of covenant partners (for the purpose of this policy this includes covenant partners and their children and grandchildren) and also for Bethesda staff and their close relatives for a fee for use of the facilities. This includes all buildings and grounds and other areas as may be needed.

USE OF CHURCH FACILITIES – NON-MEMBERS

Bethesda is a historic church and not to be considered a wedding venue. Nonmembers may request in writing to use church facilities. The non-member must have a familial connection to a covenant partner (member) of the church (other than a child or grandchild) or be a member of another Presbyterian congregation. All requests for wedding services must be made in writing no more than one month prior to the date of service, through the Property Committee and approved by the Session. In line with the church's historic character, there is a facilities usage fee for non-members.

SPECIAL RULES

A Christian wedding ceremony is a service of worship, typically conducted in the sanctuary. Reverence is expected on the part of all present which applies to all church property; buildings and grounds.

The Session of Bethesda has adopted a policy of no alcoholic beverages or smoking or vaping on the premises. The consumption of food and beverages is limited to the reception areas of the church (which includes the meeting room in John Knox Hall, McArn Hall, and Westminster Hall). Please refrain from eating or drinking in the Parlor and the Bride's Room. All areas used by the wedding party should be returned to their original condition.

Please note that Advent Season begins four Sundays before Christmas. During the Advent season, the church will be decorated with Chrismon trees, poinsettias, and candles. Persons wishing to be married during the season should be aware that the church will be decorated in this manner, and these decorations will not be removed for the wedding.

Wedding plans must be finalized no later than two weeks prior to the services so that all participants can be notified.

The couple shall provide a copy of Bethesda's wedding policy to all retained professionals assisting in the wedding.