

Wedding Manual

Guidelines for Planning Your Wedding at

St. John Lutheran Church

11120 Calhoun Road
Omaha, NE 68152-1327
Office phone: 402-451-2441

Revised December, 2018

United in Christ

Your wedding day will be one of the highlights of your relationship with each other, if not your entire life. The members of St. John Lutheran Church want to help you make your wedding day a joyous occasion, a day of blessing in the Lord.

Christians want to give Christ the first place in their hearts and their lives, especially at such an important time. Your desire to have your wedding in our Church gives evidence of your desire to have your Lord bless your marriage.

The members of St. John strive to assist you in showing your dedication to your Lord by how you will strive to keep Christ central in your marriage, because when He is, He will richly and daily bless you in it.

Thus, having your wedding at a church indicates that the wedding ceremony is not one, but two important events:

1. The formal occasion in which your lives are bound together.
2. An opportunity for you to confess and witness in word and deed that Jesus Christ will be the center of your marriage, as He will be the center of the service.

Union with Christ influences our attitude toward the marriage service. Every wedding in our church is a service of worship. Jesus said, “*My house shall be called a house of prayer*” (*Matthew 21:13*). Our congregation, therefore, takes the attitude, and rightly so, that every worship service held in our church is to be one that gives all glory to God and directs the attention of all present to the Savior Himself.

This means everything, (including choice of music, choice of people in the wedding party, use of soloist, decorations, use of ushers, etc.), are all to be done decently and in order so that when a wedding service is completed, it will have been a thrilling spiritual experience giving all glory to Christ.

About Your Marriage at St. John

At St. John we are interested in your success, not just in a **wedding** service, but in your **marriage**, for now and the years to come.

When we “perform” your wedding ceremony, we are interested in what God is doing in joining two lives together. We must perform it with *good conscience* and *before God*. Therefore, before your wedding we will seek a dialogue with you on two matters:

1. Your relationship with one another.
2. Your relationship with God.

Therefore it is important to us that we have a relationship with those who will be married at St. John. For this reason, we do weddings with a great desire that you as a couple become a regular part of our Christian community. Our premarital counseling will be done with this goal in mind. If Saint John does not meet your spiritual needs, there is the expectation that you will be in regular worship in another Lutheran (preferably) or *Christian* community.

Weddings for those who do not live in Omaha. We occasionally will perform weddings for those who do not live in this area. We are open to these weddings if:

1. There is a significant connection to our congregation (grew up going to St. John's, parents are still here, etc.),
2. The couple is active in one of our sister LCMS congregations in another part of the country.

When you read the steps listed below, you should also refer to the fee schedule and the contact information.

STEP ONE. Contact the Pastor

The first step in planning your wedding service is to contact the pastor at least five (5) months before the wedding date.

At the first session with the Pastor, this manual will be reviewed, along with other information pertaining to the wedding preparations. We here at Saint John use a personality and compatibility profiling assessment to help us determine what ways we can best serve you in our counseling sessions. The cost for this assessment is about \$30 a couple and must be paid in advance. The assessment and initial follow-up needs to occur before proceeding with the wedding plans, or setting a date for the wedding. At that follow-up the pastor will discuss the results of the assessment and detail for you his recommendations. Afterwards an agreement will be made on how best to proceed and your planning may begin. If a professional counselor is recommended, you must sign a release of information so the pastor can be made aware of your progress and how he can best assist in your counseling.

Please read this manual carefully before our next session, and make note of any items that you have questions about. Please note that the Wedding Date will not be confirmed on our church calendar until the assessment and recommendations have been completed. We will make no commitment to a specific date until this process has been completed so it would be best to wait until this time before firmly setting the date for your wedding, including reserving a facility for the reception.

STEP TWO. Pre-Marital Counseling

The purpose of premarital counseling at St. John's is to assist you, on the basis of God's Word, in seeing yourselves as a marriage under Christ. We will discuss the strengths of your relationship, as well as those areas that need attention. The intent is not necessarily to solve all problems or potential problems. Rather, through the counseling we will seek to equip you with tools, which will help you in growing a Christian Marriage.

Premarital counseling may include reading assignments, Bible studies, relationship-building exercises, and, of course, discussion with the pastor and possibly other professionals.

This is required of all couples. The number of sessions, as well as the times and dates will be determined by the pastor when he meets with you. If any problems arise during the counseling sessions that compromise the Christian faith or church practice, they will be resolved to the satisfaction of the pastor before wedding plans proceed.

Worship Attendance It is expected that couples planning a Christ-centered wedding worship service will be worshipping regularly themselves. The gifts of God through Word and Sacrament are greatly needed by all, especially by you as you plan your life

together. The practice of worshipping, praying, communing, and praising the Lord together will give Jesus the room in your hearts and lives to bind you ever more closely in his love.

STEP THREE. Meet with the Wedding Coordinator.

After the date of the wedding has been set, you should contact the St. John's Wedding Coordinator as soon as possible. The wedding coordinator will work with the couple in preparing for the practical aspects of the wedding service. He or she will coordinate:

- unlocking the building
- working with the photographer
- working with the videographer
- decorations, etc.

He or she will be present at the rehearsal and at the wedding in order to work with the wedding party and their role during the service.

Use of Facilities

In addition to the sanctuary, the bride and her attendants may use a designated space, specified by the Wedding Coordinator, and for storage, dressing, and preparation. This room does not have a lock. The kitchen is available for refreshments during the rehearsal for free, and at rehearsal dinners and receptions for a fee.

THE WEDDING SERVICE

First, this is a *Christian Marriage Service*

There is a difference between going to the courthouse and coming to our church for your wedding. By coming to our church, you are asking for a Christian marriage. That is the *only* type of marriage service we "perform."

That means that the vows are not merely witnessed before a wedding officiate, but are witnessed before God and His people. God Himself ordained marriage. "*The man shall be united to his wife and they shall become one flesh.*" (Genesis 2:24). What makes it uniquely Christian is that two people who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ are joined together. Jesus Himself is the center of their bond. It is Jesus' love that provides the glue to make their marriage strong and resilient! This is the type of marriage relationship that we hold up as the model when we perform wedding ceremonies.

The Pastor will want to talk with you about your personal relationship with Jesus. If you're not sure about this relationship, there's no need to be embarrassed. When we talk, I could answer your questions and also share with you from God's Word how we can know for sure if we have a relationship with God.

Therefore, the wedding service is, above all, a Christian Worship service, every bit

as much a worship service as a regular Sunday morning service. Therefore, the wedding will be planned in such a manner that in all things Jesus is central.

One of the pastor's responsibilities as the pastor of this congregation is to make sure that the worship services use music and resources which reflect Christian teachings.

Therefore, anything pertaining to the worship service must be cleared with the pastor. It is expected that at all times the wedding party will conduct itself in a manner befitting a Christian Church.

Even if the participants in the wedding do not share the faith of the bride or groom, we expect that out of respect to them and the members of the church, they will conduct themselves in a reverent manner, and so not give offense either to the Lord or His worshipers.

Order of Service

This is the order of a typical wedding service. The actual, specific service will be laid out in the course of the premarital counseling. *Items in italics are optional.*

SERVICE OF WORD

Prelude (*Vocal or instrumental music*)

Seating of parents

Processional (*Hymn or instrumental*)

Invocation

Welcome and Prayer

Scripture Readings

Sermon

Hymn or Vocal Music

SERVICE OF MARRIAGE

Exchange of Vows

Exchange of Rings

Marriage Announcement

Unity Candle (Hymn, vocal, or instrumental music)

Prayer and the Lord's Prayers

Hymn or Vocal Music

Marriage Blessing and Benediction

Recessional (*Hymn or instrumental*)

Music at the Service

Vocal music used during the wedding should reflect a distinctive Christian message that gives honor to Christ. Music with secular messages is to be left for the reception. Also, your reception is a good time to play those special "romantic" songs.

Even music without words should be chosen carefully to make sure that it is appropriate for worship, and does not distract from it. A simple test is to ask yourself if the music would be appropriate on a Sunday morning worship.

The couple should not choose any music nor make any arrangements for musicians before reviewing music with the pastor. This includes instrumental music for the processional, recessional, prelude, and postlude. The pastor can provide suggestions on instrumental music.

Hymns and praise songs provide wonderful opportunities for the wedding guests to worship with you, singing praise to the Lord. For suggestions of familiar praise songs, as well as wedding hymns set to familiar tunes, please ask the pastor.

Our Equipment

Sound equipment must be handled by the Music Director only. Any guest musicians may use the sound equipment (after meeting with our Music Director), but no other equipment nearby. Do not move any equipment, including the projector. Notify our staff in advance if you desire any movement of equipment in the building.

The proper use of kitchen equipment needs to be cleared with the wedding coordinator. The use of kitchen equipment requires the signing of a financial responsibility and liability release form provided by the wedding coordinator.

Our “Music Director”

We presently have a very competent Music Director on staff. St. John's uses pre-recorded music at our Worship Services. At this time the Church has **no** organ/piano player on staff.

He is also our sound technician (making the microphones work) and disc jockey (playing any recordings required). Fees for those services are included in the “Music Director” fee.

If you choose not to use our Music Director or sound equipment, there is a bench fee and certain restrictions. Our Director will briefly meet with anyone using the sound system for the service. You can also provide your own keyboardist if so desired.

Decorations

Flowers may be placed on the stands beside the altar, or at other places in the chancel. **No flowers are to be placed on the altar.** Bows or flowers may be applied to the pews. The wedding coordinator can show you what furnishings or equipment are available to use.

The paraments will be changed to white for the wedding. Any other decorations should be cleared with the wedding coordinator.

Any candles you purchase and use must be dripless.

Unity Candle

This is the placement of three candles to represent your lives to this point in time and the union of your lives in marriage. Arrangement for this should be made with the

wedding coordinator. The church provides the candleholder for your use or you can bring in one of your own to the rehearsal. You are required to provide the candles which must be 10 inch dripless tapers.

Photography

The photographer needs to meet with the wedding coordinator before the wedding for instructions. Videotaping of the service is permitted provided no other lighting is needed. The wedding coordinator will designate where the equipment can be placed.

There are a couple of restrictions.

1. No flash pictures are permitted during the wedding service. Flash pictures may be taken up to five minutes before the service and any point after the Benediction (when the recessional begins).
2. Non-flash and photography must be done at the designated areas. The wedding photographer must not be a source of interruption during the wedding service.

Additionally, we ask that you make a special point to instruct your photographer of this information. Please advise your friends that there are to be no flash pictures during the service.

There are other options for preserving your memories.

1. For any group pictures you are welcome to do this before or after the service.
2. Your wedding service may be videotaped, at a stationery, approved position, without additional lighting.

Rice/Birdseed

Throwing rice, birdseed, or other material (confetti, etc) in the church is not permitted. The flower girl may drop rose petals in the aisle as long as the wedding party makes arrangements to have them picked up after the service. The use of birdseed on the church grounds is permitted. Any additional clean-up that the Wedding Coordinator deems unreasonable will incur additional charges.

Other

You may wish to have a guest book table or other items at the entrance of the Church. Please allow our wedding coordinator to help you with these.

Wedding Service Folder

The use of a wedding service folder is optional. There are various ways of doing this:

1. You may have **your own** made. The pastor will need to review it before it goes to print.
2. You may have the church use a **pre-printed** folder that you purchase.

If you want the church to print the worship folder, we will need a list of all the wedding party and participants at least two weeks before the wedding.

Participation by Other Clergy

Other clergy in the wedding service must be rostered from the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and must have the prior approval of the pastor. He will issue the invitation and determine the function of any other clergy or guest participants. Should the wedding party desire the participation of other clergy, it is suggested that they offer a blessing at the reception or participate as a layman, for example, as a scripture reader, musical soloist, or prayer assistant.

Wedding Rehearsal

A wedding rehearsal will be held for all participants, preferably on the day before the wedding. Attendance by vocalists and musicians is optional but highly recommended so they will know their part in the service.

It is important that all are present and on time. It is not fashionable at St. John to be late. Our people expect to be off to other appointments one hour after the rehearsal time.

If some participants are absent at the rehearsal, this needs to be shared with the wedding coordinator in advance so that the absent wedding participants can be properly instructed before the wedding service.

If you wish the pastor, wedding coordinator, or organist to attend a dinner before or after the rehearsal, the invitation needs to be made prior to the wedding rehearsal.

The Receiving Line

St. John has a very small narthex and a front door quite close to Calhoun Road. Therefore, we request that you do not have a receiving line at the exit doors. We also recommend not having the bride and groom usher people out row by row; this takes considerable amount of time, and again our space is limited and a problem can develop if there is an emergency.

However, there are other options for you to consider:

1. Following the service, the reception line can be formed in the fellowship hall downstairs.
2. A reception line can be formed on the grass / church property away from the exit doors, if the weather is good.
3. If you are not holding your reception at the church, and your pictures are taken before the wedding, we suggest having your receiving line at the reception hall rather than at church. In doing this, you will be able to spend more time with your guests.
4. Have no reception line at all. The bride and groom greet guests individually at the reception.

* The usual formation of the line is:

Bride's Mother, Groom's Father, Bride, Groom, Groom's Mother, Bride's Father.

Special Restrictions

Our church facility and its property is a smoke-free environment. Alcohol or nonprescription drugs or substances *are not allowed* in the building or on church property. Demonstration by the bride, groom, or wedding party of being under the influence of alcohol or nonprescription drugs/substances on church property and/or in the possession of the same, puts himself or herself in jeopardy of having the wedding canceled. This is a policy established for the safety and well-being of everyone involved.

Fees

Below are the fees for the weddings at St. John Lutheran Church. It is expected that fees will be paid before the wedding, preferably at the rehearsal, unless other arrangements have been made.

The member fees apply when the bride and/or groom are members of St. John's. Membership must be attained no less than 3 months before the wedding date. Part of being a member is *regular* attendance at Sunday worship (at least three times a month or more). The usual process of membership will apply and the pastor will explain the various paths to membership at the counseling sessions. (Note that regular worship attendance before membership is part of that process and some paths to membership require additional classes). If you are planning on becoming members you should begin that process as soon as you decide and well in advance of the 3 month membership requirement.

| | Members | In Active/Non-members |
|--|-----------|-----------------------|
| Prepare/Enrich | \$30 | \$30 |
| Sanctuary | No charge | \$150 |
| Kitchen | No charge | \$100 |
| Reception at Fellowship Hall | No Charge | \$150 |
| Music Director | \$200 | \$200 |
| This includes Sound Tech service Practice with soloists | | |
| Bench Fee (if our Director is not used) | \$75 | \$75 |
| Pastor | Donation | \$300 |

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|-------------|
| Wedding Coordinator | \$75 | \$50-150 |
| Reception Coordinator | \$150-300 (depending on the size of the reception) | \$150-300 |
| Custodial services* | \$50 | \$50 |

The Prepare/Enrich assessment fee and a deposit of 50%_ of the remaining Fees is required at the time an agreement is signed and the church date secured, with full payment due no later than the date of the Wedding Rehearsal, or a date mutually agreed to by the Bride and the Wedding Coordinator.

*** Additional charges may be required if excessive clean-up is required at a rate of \$25/per person/hour.**

Off-Site Weddings

If you are planning a wedding out of the church building, and would like our pastor to officiate, you need to contact the wedding coordinator first to go over the details. The pastor’s fee (in addition to the regular stipend) for offsite weddings is \$25 for members and \$50 for non-members unless extensive travel is required. Members and non-members alike are still required to go through all the premarital counseling. A wedding assistant will not be assigned unless you request one. If requested, his or her fee is \$75-150.00 depending on the services required.

Weddings performed by other (Non LCMS) clergy.

Saint John reserves the right to limit who may perform services in their sanctuary. The substituting pastor must be a pastor of a Christian congregation or at least rostered by their respective denomination. The pastor of Saint John shall offer final approval after conversing with the substituting pastor and reviewing the service materials. The decision to have other clergy perform the service must be made before the third counseling session. We do not wish to present barriers to other clergy, but we do want to ensure the worship conducted in our sanctuary is done in good order and is God pleasing. Note that the wedding coordinator is required even if we are not performing the pastoral services and will be in attendance during the rehearsal and before and during the wedding service. The wedding coordinator will need to be on hand to unlock and lock the building.

Those desiring non-clergy to perform the services are advised to seek any of a number of other beautiful wedding settings in the Omaha area.

Cohabitation Policy

Increasingly, men and women are choosing to live together prior to marriage. We learn from God’s Word that marriage is the life-long union of one man and one woman as husband and wife. Marriage is part of God’s created order: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24, Matt. 19:5-6, Ephesians 5:3 1)

Elsewhere we read, “But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband” (1 Cor. 7:2). And, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.” (Hebrews 13:4)

Simply stated, a couple that lives together as man and wife, without being married is sinning. God’s Word is clear: “[17] You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. [18] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. [19] They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.” (Eph. 4:17–19) The Lord Jesus himself once helped a woman living with a man who was not her husband to recognize that what she was doing was sin. (John 4:16–18)

Luther writes in the meaning to the Sixth Commandment, “you shall not commit adultery. *What does this mean?* “We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other.” (*Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation, CPH, 1991*)

All of this is another way of stating the obvious: men and women are not to live together as husband and wife, unless they are actually husband and wife. This is as true for 80-year olds as it is for 18 year olds.

While culturally cohabitation is gaining acceptance, it needs to be understood that God views such behavior as sin, and when we willfully sin, we place our eternal salvation in jeopardy; “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” (Hebrews 10:26) It is God’s desire that His people repent of their sin when they know that sin is present. Repentance means not just simply feeling bad, but it also means a change of behavior. Couples who are living together, who wish to be married at Saint John Lutheran Church will seek counsel with their Pastor on how best to resolve this situation. For example, a couple living together may be asked to separate prior to marriage. They may choose to marry quickly, and privately with their Pastor and just a few witnesses. They may choose to be married elsewhere by an officer of the court, and then hold a public recognition of a civil marriage at Saint John. ***Regardless of the solution, it is important that a couple come to recognize their sin, and seek, with their Pastor, a way to address that sin in a God pleasing fashion prior to marriage.***

Couples who recognize their sin need to hear God’s word of promise, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9), and know that if they choose to be married, they should do so in joyful confidence of God’s forgiveness and His blessing on their marriage.

Definition of Marriage

Saint John defines marriage as the vows between one woman and one man. We will not perform marriages that violate our religious principles.

Helpful Information

Witnesses

State law requires validating signatures of two individuals who witnessed the wedding. The best man and the maid (matron) of honor are chosen for this purpose. Prior to the ceremony the officiating pastor will meet with the stated individuals for the signing of the necessary State papers for this purpose.

Marriage License

A marriage license in Douglas County in the State of Nebraska is obtained at the County Clerk's office in the Civic Center at 1819 Farnam, Room HO8, Omaha. A driver's license or birth certificate is required to verify date of birth. You will also need your mother's maiden name. Both the bride and groom must be present to sign the application. The fee for the marriage license is \$15 cash (no checks). The license may be obtained anytime with no time limit imposed. For additional information you can call 444-6745, at the Civic Center. **We ask that the license be brought to the pastor no later than two weeks before the wedding date.** This is important in order to give St. John ample time to complete our portion of these documents.

After the Wedding

As mentioned above, we have an interest in your journey together. Here are some tips for a spiritually rewarding married life:

Worship Together

Worship together. Do this Sunday after Sunday. In all the things that you will now be doing together, in all the places that you will now be going together, put this at the head of the list. You will experience the truth of Jesus' words: *"Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it."*

Pray Together

Pray together! Do this every day! Set aside a given time each day when you will listen to God as you read His Word and you will speak to Him in prayer. Establish your family worship. You may wish to set up a worship center with cross and candlesticks. Keep your Bible and devotional books in full view to remind you and your guests that God is God in your life and in your home.

Fellowship

Join in the fellowship of your church! Then be active together in your church activities. There is joy in doing things for Christ and your neighbor. Labor with love and devotion and see how richly God can bless His own.

To that end, we are ready to serve and minister to you at all times in the future. Please do not hesitate to call on us.

Make your church and your community a place where you, and the children that God

may give you, can grow in grace and live in peace. And may the Savior's love hold and bless you in your love for each other.

Our Prayer For You

As a couple entering the holy estate of marriage, our prayer for you is that God will bless and enrich your lives with His grace, strengthening and supporting you with His love and goodness. May you draw ever closer to Him and to each other as you take this most important step, reflecting His steadfast love in your lifelong faithfulness to each other. God bless you now and always!

Contact Information

Rev Ronald E. Holling, Pastor. Email: ronaldholling2@netzero.net
Cell Phone: 402 670 0447

Josh Wilson, Music Director, sound technician, disc jockey for worship service.
Phone 402 378-2132. Texting appreciated.

Dan Lindblad Wedding Coordinator; Office: 402 451-2441, Cell: 402 657 5634
email secretary@stjohnomaha.com

Carrie Briles, Reception Coordinator, Phone: 402 455 4435; email:
dcbriles@yahoo.com

Tami Wells, Custodian; Phone: 402 657 1489; e-mail: trwells@unmc.edu

For St. John Lutheran Only, not to be published here

The Pastor or the Wedding Coordinator fills out fee sheet. The monies are forwarded to the church Treasurer.

Church Treasurer writes checks for those listed below involved, unless they have made other arrangements.

Prepare/Enrich fees, sanctuary, kitchen and reception go to St. John's General Fund

From this, an extra fee is paid to the Custodian [\$50], and he is informed in advance of the wedding that he will be needed. [There maybe other duties, in addition to cleaning before and after the wedding service, for higher fee, of course]

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| Pastor's fee or donation | to Pastor. |
| Organist or Bench fee | to Organist. |
| Wedding Coordinator fee | to Wedding Coordinator. |
| Reception Coordinator Fee | to Reception Coordinator. |