

Guide for Christian Weddings

at Westminster Presbyterian Church Lancaster, PA

Christian marriage is the sacred covenant between one man and one woman, united in Christ, who vow exclusive fidelity to each other for life. Our Session desires to help you build a Christian marriage. Please read these policies completely and refer questions to a pastor. Planning a wedding has typically become quite complex in recent times. We try to assist you in this great event in your life. These guidelines are based on Biblical principles and considerable past experience.

First Appointment and Approval of Marriage: When you make a request for marriage you will meet jointly (if possible) with Dr. John Light. The goal of this first meeting is to know you better and to see if there are any obvious impediments to a marriage. If the pastors see no problem, they will recommend the marriage to the Session at its next regular monthly meeting. Only when the Session has voted is your date officially on the church calendar, reserving the sanctuary. Do not presume the ceremony will be at Westminster until the Session has officially approved it.

At the first appointment pastors will seek background information about your relationship, family history, and especially your own account of faith in Christ. Here are some key standards: 1) Both parties must be professing Christians, giving credible evidence of personal faith in Christ as Savior. There can be no exceptions to this policy. 2) At least one party of the couple must be a communicant member of Westminster Presbyterian Church, or the child of a currently active member. Session may consider approving exceptions to this only for cases involving non-resident former members of Westminster and current members of our several PCA daughter churches in Lancaster County. 3) If either party is under age 21, consent of parents or legal guardians to the marriage should be clearly evident.

If either party has been previously married, remarriage may be possible, but only according to the following Biblical principles:

1) If the applicant's divorced spouse is deceased, remarriage is possible (Rom. 7:1-3). 2) If the applicant was the offended party where adultery occurred (Matthew 19:9), or is a Christian now long deserted by a non-Christian spouse (1 Cor. 7:15) then remarriage may be possible even if the divorced spouse is still living. 3) If divorce took place before the applicant was a Christian and he/she now acknowledges deep repentance, has sought reconciliation to the original spouse if at all possible, and seeks to build a Christian home, remarriage may be possible. 4) Generally, a divorce decree should be final for a year before remarriage occurs and applicants may need to receive Biblical counseling about lingering issues.

Application Form: Attached you will find a **three-page application**. Page one should be completed and given to the pastor at the end of the first appointment. You will get a copy. Copies are distributed to pastors, church secretary, church administrator, custodian, music director, and wedding coordinator. It does not matter in the early stages if you have not determined such specifics as florist, photographer, etc. Pages 2 & 3 can be filled out at a later time.

Wedding Service Used: Pastors will give you a printed copy of the typical wedding ceremony to be used. It is a classic, traditional service. You may *personalize* the service especially in its music, the Scripture to be read, or certain other touches. However, since it is a worship service before God, the basic service order, the wedding vows, and major components of the service must remain intact. The whole wedding is to be conducted with dignity and reverence before the Lord. All weddings at Westminster Presbyterian Church will be conducted by a member of the pastoral staff of this church, or by another Presbyterian Church in America minister whom the Session has approved. A minister from another evangelical Protestant church may be invited to assist at the ceremony with the permission of the presiding pastor. "Interfaith" participation by non-evangelical clergy or leaders of non-Christian religions will not be approved.

Pre-Marital Counseling: After the wedding date is on the church calendar, it is understood that by signing the application the couple is obliged to follow-through with all subsequent counseling meetings advised by the pastor. Failure to do so will mean the pastors will not go forward with the wedding and permission for the ceremony may be withdrawn. Most of this counseling will be with senior associate pastor Dr. John Light, who will seek about five meetings, scheduled at mutual convenience. He will assign some reading and discuss subjects of practical value in building a relationship. If any issue surfaces causing the counseling pastor to seriously doubt advisability of the marriage and the couple cannot be dissuaded from proceeding, Session reserves the right to delay or cancel permission for the marriage.

Engagement is a time of great joy, but also of unique pressures and temptations. It is expected that as believers in Christ couples will seek moral purity and thus will abstain from sexual intercourse during engagement. You are challenged to flee the world's casual attitude toward sexuality as an engaged couple. If it is realized at any time that a couple is living together, or is known to be involved in behavior scandalous to the honor of Christ, you will be asked to repent and cease from such sin. Refusal to comply with this standard may cause the Session to cancel permission for the wedding, regardless of the stage of planning reached.

Wedding Music: Our director of music, Frank Dodd will serve as organist for all weddings held in the church, or he must approve a substitute before that person is asked to participate. Music selected for a wedding service should be appropriate to what would be used for Sunday worship, since a wedding *is* truly a worship service. All music chosen and the manner of its performance is therefore subject to the approval of Westminster's director of music and pastors. Texts of either instrumental or vocal music are to be Biblical and worshipful, centering on praise to God. Secular texts are normally romantic or sentimental expressions of the bride and groom's love for each other. Plan to save such pieces for your reception music, not in the wedding service. Music with no verbal text should still evoke dignity, prayer, praise, or reverential themes. Soloists should not use electronic taped background accompaniments. Organ, piano, or other accompaniment can readily be provided.

Following your initial meeting with the pastors, and when you know the wedding is approved by Session, contact Frank Dodd at church to begin initial music plans. Use the information on page 2 of your wedding application as the basis for this phone call. We recommend that you not engage any musicians until you have talked with him.

Westminster Wedding Coordinator: A number of women from our congregation are trained and experienced in the procedures of weddings held here. The Pastors' Secretary will tell you the women available. Contact her immediately after your initial meeting with the pastor to make the arrangement (717.569.2151 or office@westpca.com). We require you to use one of our coordinators. The coordinator has proven to be of enormous practical benefit at the rehearsal and wedding ceremony. A fee is asked for the wedding coordinator, see page 4. If an outside professional wedding coordinator is hired, we still require that our coordinator meet that person in a prior consultation, and our coordinator should be paid \$50 for this service. It must be understood that our presiding pastor has full authority over the service order and of the conduct of the rehearsal and wedding ceremony.

Printed Wedding Bulletin: A wedding bulletin is a useful way to show the order of the service (attached to the application), list participants, express thanks to parents, give your new address, etc. Bulletin samples from past ceremonies are on file in the church office, our secretaries will show them to you. Covers can be purchased online, or you may design your own. Production and cost of a bulletin is your responsibility. However, before printing it, please show a final draft of contents to both the presiding pastor and music director, to be sure all is in order. At the time of rehearsal, please place two copies in the secretary's mailbox. The church office appreciates any leftover copies to place on file.

We request you to include this statement in your bulletin: *Because our wedding is a worship service, please cooperate by not taking flash pictures after the bride is at the front and the ceremony begins. The church requests that no rice, birdseed, flower petals or confetti be thrown anywhere on church property. Thank you.*

Flowers: A florist should be selected as soon as the wedding date is known. The church has two standing (6') black wrought iron candelabras you may wish to use; we will provide candles for these which burn for several hours. If you intend to use a "unity candle," you or the florist must provide it. We have two wooden pedestals about 36" high which may be used for flower stands. If you intend to rent an aisle runner, our center aisle is 90' long. (It is your choice, but we find that the plastic aisle runner usually provided today can snag people's heels and may be a real problem to use.) Flowers or ivy may be attached with care to the candelabras, pew ends, or pulpit – but please do not use nails, tacks or scotch tape. Ask the church administrator for guidance in this area. Please arrange for a friend or relative to remove all flowers, gifts, decorations, and other personal property immediately after the ceremony so the church can be cleaned. The custodian will be waiting to proceed with what must be done to prepare for Sunday services.

Photography / Videotaping: You should stipulate to your photographer that no flash pictures are to be taken once the wedding ceremony is underway, with the bride at the front. Videotaping is permitted, but must be unobtrusive during the service, preferably with a camera on the side balcony. Under no circumstances may anyone roam about with a camera during the ceremony, or use distracting high intensity video lights. We will have a trained sound technician present to monitor microphone levels during the wedding (pastors wear a wireless microphone). The sound technician will gladly make you a free CD.

Use of Activity Room for Reception or Rehearsal Dinner: When a reception or other meal is desired to be at the church, indicate this on your application and discuss arrangements with the church administrator. He will coordinate set-up of the room with the custodian according to your needs.

The church building is to be respected as a house of worship. We expect the wedding couple and families to enforce several standards: **1) No smoking** is permitted anywhere within our building. **2) No alcoholic beverages** are to be served on the church premises. **3)** Please ask friends and family not to throw rice, birdseed, flower petals or confetti on the property, inside or out; it is a difficult clean-up chore. **4)** Church equipment is to be used only by the permission of the church administrator or kitchen chairman. **5)** Appoint trusted friends to take away all wedding gifts, flowers, decorations, and other personal property, immediately after your ceremony and/or reception are over. The custodian needs all rooms cleared so he may clean up in preparation for Sunday.

Final Appointment before the Wedding: When all pre-marital counseling appointments are complete and most arrangements appear to be final, **you should call the church administrator to initiate a final meeting, ideally about a month before the wedding.** The bride's mother is welcome at this meeting. The church administrator and the wedding coordinator will attend. This meeting will review all practical arrangements. Come prepared to tell us what time the church needs to be opened for flower deliveries, caterers, photography, and so on. If your bulletin is ready for printing, this is a good time to drop it off for the pastor and organist to review before final printing.

The Rehearsal: Normally the rehearsal is the night before the wedding. It takes no more than 45-60 minutes once all parties are present. When setting the rehearsal time, take into account whether people must travel a long distance to arrive, and also the travel time needed to reach a restaurant afterward for the rehearsal dinner.

License: Be sure to obtain your marriage license in advance. You may do so by applying in person together at any courthouse in Pennsylvania. You will receive the license immediately, but it has a waiting period of three days. It then must be used within 60 days. Pennsylvania does not require a blood test or physical exam. **Please remember to bring the license to the rehearsal.** The pastor will complete it after the ceremony and return one part to you, one part to the church, and one part to the county authorities, which completes your legal marriage registration.

Application for Christian Marriage

Westminster Presbyterian Church, 2151 Oregon Pike, Lancaster, PA 17601-4604

For office use only

Session Approval: _____
date

We hereby apply for permission to be married in the Westminster Presbyterian Church. We have read the "Guide for Christian Weddings" and agree to conform thereby.

Signature of Groom: _____

Signature of Bride: _____

(Please print in **black ink** or type in black ink)

Wedding date: _____ Approx. time _____ Rehearsal date _____ Approx. time _____

Full name of groom: _____ Age: _____ Phone: _____

Address of groom: _____

E-mail address of groom _____

Member of what church? _____

Married previously? _____ If yes, widower or divorced? _____

Occupation: _____ Employer: _____

Full name of bride: _____ Age: _____ Phone: _____

Address of bride: _____

E-mail address of bride _____

Member of what church? _____

Married previously? _____ If yes, widower or divorced? _____

Occupation: _____ Employer: _____

Do you want a wedding reception at the church? If so, approximate time of reception? _____ Approx. # guests _____

Caterer: _____ Phone: _____

Do you want a wedding rehearsal dinner at the church? If so, when and what time? _____ Approx. # guests _____

Caterer: _____ Phone: _____

(Remember to submit Facility Use forms for rehearsal dinner and/or wedding reception. Forms are found on the literature rack.)

Officiating Pastor _____ Assisting Pastor (optional) _____

(Your choice of an officiating pastor should be cleared with Dr. Light.)

Wedding Coordinator: _____ Phone: _____

Your address after the wedding: _____

Phone: _____

This second page should be used for planning your wedding music. Contact Frank Dodd (church, 569-2151) to begin initial planning. You do not need to have soloists or music pieces known at the time of this phone call. Frank will help you with your ideas and will be able to offer suggestions.

The following information will be needed as we meet to finalize your music. Bring this page with you at that time.

Organist: _____ Phone: _____

Vocal Soloist(s) _____ Phone: _____

_____ Phone Number _____

Instrumental Soloist(s) _____ Instrument _____ Phone: _____

_____ Instrument: _____ Phone: _____

Selections which you already are thinking of (organ, vocal or instrumental):

Are you considering a hymn(s) within the service? If so, which ones are you selecting?

Are you using a unity candle? _____ Music during the lighting _____

Are your mothers lighting the side candles? _____ When and how? _____

Do you want the hour chimed? _____

Are you planning any solos during the service? _____ Who/What? _____

Are you having a receiving line? _____ Or dismissing the guests yourselves? _____ Or neither? _____

Is your photographer taking pictures in the sanctuary prior to the prelude and service? _____

If so, please tell your photographer that the music begins 30 minutes before your wedding time and the sanctuary needs to be cleared by that time. Inform your photographer that no flash pictures are permitted after the bride is at the front and the ceremony begins.

Unless your soloists are involved with the processional or recessional, they usually do not need to be at the rehearsal. However, you may make other arrangements with them.

Complete this third page of the form and bring it to the meeting with the church administrator and wedding coordinator.

Wedding Party:

Maid/Matron of Honor: _____ Best Man: _____

Bridesmaids: _____ Groomsman/Ushers: _____

Flower Girl: _____ Ring Bearer: _____

Mother of the Bride: _____ Mother of the Groom: _____

Bride's Maternal Grandparents: _____ Groom's Maternal Grandparents: _____

Bride's Paternal Grandparents: _____ Groom's Paternal Grandparents: _____

Other: _____

Wedding Arrangements:

Date and time of wedding: _____ Date and time of rehearsal: _____

Time to unlock doors for rehearsal: _____

Time to unlock doors for wedding: _____, flower delivery _____, arrival of bridal party _____

Photographer: _____ Florist: _____

Is the wedding to be audio recorded? _____ If so, the church administrator will arrange for this.

Is the wedding to be video recorded? _____ If so, by whom? _____

Will you use a wedding program? _____ (samples are available for borrowing from the church office)

Do you want to use the following? Candelabra _____, Unity candle _____, Kneeling Bench _____,

Flower pedestals _____, Guest book stand in narthex _____, Gift table in narthex _____?

Special Musician Arrangements? _____

After the wedding who will remove all remaining wedding items, flowers, and decorations? _____

Notes:

Wedding Fees and Gratuities: The following costs are set by the Westminster Session. Checks for all fees and gratuities must be given to the church administrator at the time of your final appointment before the wedding. This is an important date; do not miss it. Note your final meeting date here.

Set fees and gratuities

- NO CHARGE for the use of the church sanctuary or facility for reception/rehearsal dinner for an approved wedding ceremony.

FEE CALCULATION

- Services of our pastors and church administrator are regarded as part of their responsibilities. NO GIFT IS EXPECTED FOR THEM. A personal thank you note is always appropriate.
- For custodian, for clean up after wedding ceremony: \$100 _____
- For custodian, for clean up after wedding reception/rehearsal dinner: \$125 _____
- Organist (normally Frank Dodd):
 - for music selection, rehearsal, and wedding, with no soloist involved: \$225 _____
 - for music selection, rehearsal, and wedding, if 1-2 soloists are involved: \$250 _____
 - for music selection, rehearsal, and wedding, if 3 or more soloists: \$275 _____

Total check payable to Westminster Presbyterian Church:

\$

- Sound technician, to run the sound system: \$100 _____
(separate check)
- Sound technician, to edit and copy to CD/SD card \$150 _____
(separate check)
- Livestream/camera operator (with recording to SD card) \$75 _____
(separate check)
- Westminster Church Wedding Coordinator: \$140 _____
(separate check)
- *Fee to Westminster coordinator if professional coordinator is used: \$ 50 _____
(separate check)
- Soloists or other musicians. Gift is at the couples' discretion. (We recommend minimum \$100.) (Professional musicians may have their own pre-set fees; be sure to ask.)

*****At your final appointment before the wedding**, you should come prepared to write at least three checks:

1. One payable to the sound technician (name will be provided). We will give this directly to them.

2. One payable to the wedding coordinator (her name will be provided). We will give this directly to her.

3. One payable to Westminster Presbyterian Church. This check will cover the organist/pianist fees, custodian services and facility fees. Organist/pianist and custodian will be paid by the church.

*Additional checks will be needed if the organist is other than Frank Dodd and if soloists or other musicians are used. (Professional artists will submit their own, separate invoice to you for their payment.

Wedding Order of Service

Prelude

Processional

Call to Worship

Invocation

Congregational Hymn (optional)

The Christian View of Marriage

The Giving of the Bride (Family Commitment)

The Questions of Intent (Couple's commitment)

Scripture Reading

Wedding Homily

Exchange of Vows

Exchange of Rings

Unity Candle Lighting (optional)

Prayer of Blessing

Declaration of Marriage

Benediction

Presentation

Recessional