

*Guidelines*  
*for a*  
*Christian Wedding*



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## INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! You are planning on getting married: you have decided that you are ready to make a lifetime commitment to another person. We thank God for bringing you together.

You are now preparing for your wedding day and a life together. We at St. James are here to help you. We hope the materials included here will serve you in your planning for a wonderful celebration, the beginning of your journey together as husband and wife.

There is nothing inherently Christian about marriage. To be *married* in the state of Wisconsin you – the couple – need to have a license signed by a witness. That’s all you need. This is the “social contract” side of marriage, a legally-recognized and protected institution within the laws of our country.

There is nothing inherently Christian about a wedding, either. The two of you could design any sort of event you’d like, and just about at any place. Many people have weddings without the blessing of sacred music, requesting a pastor to preside, or offering any prayers.

But because you are reading this, you are considering a wedding in a *church* (a church is not a building, but a *community of people* whose identity rests in the love of Jesus Christ). This consideration shapes everything we do as we discuss with you your wedding day and your future life together as husband and wife. A *Christian* wedding means you have decided to be intentional about welcoming God into your lives, and focusing on God during your wedding, as we all gather to celebrate God’s love made known to us in Jesus, given in faith by the Holy Spirit.

Planning for a wedding can be an exciting time; it can also be a sacred time. And yes, we know, a stressful time. Cultural traditions, individual tastes, and family expectations can add up to pressure, and confusion.

We at St. James want to help you plan for a wedding that provides a wonderful beginning in your life together. We also want to help you plan and prepare for your *marriage*. The guidelines St. James has established for weddings are done not only to be consistent with our mission, but to help you celebrate God’s love in your life most fully. Our goal at St. James is not that you will have a “perfect wedding.” Our hope is that your wedding be a time of celebration, joy, and thanksgiving, with Jesus Christ at the center of all we say and do.

The decision to hold a wedding service at St. James Lutheran Church will be determined *after* a pastor of St. James meets with the couple making the request. Upon approval, a “Wedding Covenant” will be signed by the couple and the pastor. The officiating pastor will then set up a schedule for a series of meetings with you to help you plan for your wedding.

Please know that once a covenant is signed, we commit ourselves to uphold you in our prayers. We also ask that as you make considerations and decisions for your wedding and marriage, that you take time together as a couple for prayer: asking for God's guidance, presence, and blessing. If you have questions, please contact one of the St. James pastors.

## A CHRISTIAN WEDDING

A Christian wedding is necessarily connected to the Christian Gospel: God's love made known in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, Christians are claimed by this love: God's self-giving becomes the very foundation and pattern of love. God's complete faithfulness to us empowers us in our promises to one another, especially in marriage.

But unlike God, we are broken people. We need a love bigger than our own to heal us and renew us. It is because of God's forgiveness, made known in Jesus and given by the Holy Spirit, our love can be restored, reconciliation made possible, and new life together a reality.

A wedding is a service of worship: it is when we gather to share the story of God's love, thank God for the gifts of faith, and ask God's blessing upon your life together. The focus of the wedding is not on the couple, but upon the one who created you, who brings you together, and promises to love you not only for a lifetime, but forever.

Those who gather with you promise their love, support, and prayers. They are more than spectators, but fellow-participants in worship.

A wedding is also a time to thank God for the gift of marriage: for the two of you – your particular story, your unique relationship. Therefore a wedding is a time when you can help shape the worship to reflect who you are in Christ. There is no one-size-fits-all wedding. This is why careful planning is a gift you give to yourselves and to those gathered with you on your wedding day.

Weddings at St. James follow a general pattern: Gathering, Word, Marriage, and Sending. Important elements included are prayers, Scripture readings, sermon, and sacred music.

The design of the wedding itself is a crescendo leading to the vows. Indeed, it is the *couple* that *performs* the wedding: it is your promises (and not your love) that make a wedding. A wedding is *Christian* when our promises are rooted in and dependent upon the promises we have already received from God in Jesus Christ, sealed in our baptism.

Therefore, it is promises given to one another, more than your feelings for one another, that are the focus of a Christian wedding, and a Christian marriage.

At a Christian wedding we make a remarkable declaration: "What God has joined together, let no one separate." We claim that marriage is both a work and gift of God, who brings you together and helps

sustain your togetherness in marriage. So it is our hope that the Christian wedding is a blessed and joyful beginning to a Christian marriage – your love fed by the love of Jesus, the one who came in love and revealed true love to you.

A Christian wedding celebrates both the particularity of your marriage, and points to universality of God's love for all people. Therefore a Christian wedding is not a private ceremony, but rather public gathering of the congregation to worship God.

## PLANNING YOUR WEDDING SERVICE

“Goin’ to the chapel and we’re gonna get married.”

– from *Chapel of Love*, sung by “The Dixie  
Cups,” 1964

The wedding service itself allows for a great deal of freedom within a general framework. It is not, as is sometimes customary in our country, a fashion show or an intrusion on the way to the reception where the real fun begins. The focus of the day for the Christian couple is what Christ has done and continues to do in their lives.

The Wedding Service therefore needs careful planning. Couples should set aside adequate time *together* to carefully select readings, hymns, and music. This can be discussed in more detail with the pastor. What is important is to talk to each other about your faith, what is most dear to your hearts, and what central message you hope to convey through the service.

A Wedding Service usually lasts from 25 to 50 minutes, depending on what is included in the service itself. Weddings traditionally take place on Saturdays. However, there is no hard and fast rule to this custom. You could have a wedding during any day of the week, even during a Sunday morning worship service.

When bride and/or groom are active members of St. James, it is appropriate to celebrate Holy Communion within the Wedding Service. At St. James we practice “Open Communion,” meaning all baptized Christians are welcome to come to the Lord’s Table. When Holy Communion is celebrated, all baptized worshippers will be invited.

The couple is encouraged to involve family and friends in the service. A wedding is an event for the whole congregation gathered, not just for two people. Inviting others to read Scripture, to offer music, and to bring their blessings can be a meaningful way of including family. We encourage congregational hymn singing to allow expression of faith and joy for all gathered.

St. James sanctuary comfortably holds 400 people. It is fully air conditioned.

A typical wedding service includes the following elements:

GREETING / INVOCATION (Spoken by the pastor.)

SCRIPTURE Read by either the pastor or a reader chosen by the bride and groom. Scripture choices are included in this booklet.

SERMON /HOMILY Given by the pastor.

EXCHANGE OF VOWS (There are several options included in this booklet).

EXCHANGE OF RINGS

PRAYERS / THE LORD'S PRAYER

THE BENEDICTION (Spoken by the pastor.)

HOLY COMMUNION The celebration of Holy Communion is especially fitting within a marriage service. When Holy Communion is celebrated, it must be open to the entire congregation and not limited to the bride and groom or just the wedding party.

THE WEDDING BULLETIN

Bulletins help the congregation gathered to participate more fully in worship, but are not required.

St. James does not print wedding bulletins for you. The couple is responsible for ordering and printing bulletins. The couple must receive final draft approval from the pastor before printing.

Please refrain from using secular poetry or details about the wedding party on your bulletin. Religious symbols are appropriate for the front cover. Three final copies of the bulletin are due in the church office no less than ten days before the wedding.

— Sample Wedding Bulletin —

*The Marriage Service of*  
**Jane Doe and John Brown**

Saturday, August 9, 2004  
1:00 p.m.

St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Verona Wisconsin

Prelude

Processional

Invocation

Prayer of the Day

Reading

Scripture

Wedding Meditation

Vocal / Instrumental / Hymn: *(optional)*

The Vows

Giving of Rings

The Blessing

Lighting of the Unity Candle *(optional)*

Vocal / Instrumental / Hymn: *(optional)*

Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

Benediction

Recessional

Postlude

*The Wedding Party*

*Parents of the Bride*

Sam and Rita Doe

*Parents of the Groom*

William & Sara Brown

*Maid of Honor*

Melanie Hanson

Friend of the Couple

*Bridesmaids*

Lindsay Brown

Sister of the Bride

Tracy Brown

Sister of the Bride

Sara Kober

Friend of the Couple

*Best Man*

Robert Brown

Brother of the Groom

*Groomsmen*

Thomas Brown

Brother of the Groom

Robert Doe

Cousin of the Bride

*Personal Attendant*

Christina Doe

Cousin of the Bride

*Ushers*

Dylan Doe

Cousin of the Bride

Anthony Doe

Cousin of the Bride

### **Scripture Selections**

*The bride and groom are asked to choose one or two of the following passages or may choose Scripture passages other than the following.*

#### **Old Testament**

Genesis 1.26-31

Genesis 2.18-24

Genesis 24.48-51, 58-67

Proverbs 3.3-6

Song of Solomon 2.10-13

Song of Solomon 8.6-7

Isaiah 63.7-9

Jeremiah 31.31-32a, 33-34a

Hosea 2.16-20

#### **Psalms**

Psalms 8.3-9

Psalms 27.1, 13-17

Psalms 46.1-3, 10-11

Psalms 139.1-12

Psalms 33

Psalms 34

Psalms 37

Psalms 67

Psalms 100

Psalms 117

Psalms 121

Psalms 127

Psalms 128

Psalms 136

Psalms 145

Psalms 150

#### **New Testament**

Romans 8.31b-35, 37-39

Romans 12.1-2, 9-13 (or 9-18)

1 Corinthians 6.13c, 15a, 17-20

1 Corinthians 12.31-13.13

2 Corinthians 5.14-17

Ephesians 2.4-10

#### **Old Testament**

Ephesians 3.14-19

Ephesians 4.1-6 (or 25-32)

Ephesians 5.1-2, 21-23

Philippians 2.1-13

Philippians 4.4-7 (or 4-9)

Colossians 3.12-17

#### **New Testament**

1 Peter 3.18-24

1 John 3.18-24

1 John 4.7-16a (or 16b-21)

Revelation 19.1, 5-9a

#### **Gospels**

Matthew 5.1-10

Matthew 5.14-16

Matthew 7.21, 24-29

Matthew 19.3-6

Matthew 22.35-40

Mark 10.6-9

John 2.1-11

John 15.9-12 (or 9-17)

## ***Marriage Vows***

*Couples may choose from a variety of vows which they believe express most clearly their promises to one another. Below are possibilities you may use or adapt. Final vows are subject to approval of the pastor. Vows during the service may be memorized or read phrase-by-phrase to the couple by the pastor.*

1. I take you, name, to be my *wife/husband* from this day forward, to join with you and share all that is to come, and I promise to be faithful to you until death parts us. (From *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.)

2. I take you, name, to be my *wife/husband*, and these things I promise to you: I will be faithful to you and honest with you; I will respect, trust, help, and care for you; I will share my life with you; I will forgive you as we have been forgiven; and I will try with you better to understand ourselves, the world, and God; through the best and the worst of what is to come, until death parts us.

3. I take you, name, to be my *wife/husband*, I promise before God and these witnesses to be your faithful husband/wife, to share with you in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to forgive and to strengthen you, and to join with you so that together we may serve God and others as long as we both shall live.

4. name, I take you to be my *wife/husband* from this time onward, to join with you and to share all that is to come, to give and to receive, to speak and to listen, to inspire and to respond, and in all circumstances of our life together to be loyal to you with my whole life and with all my being until death parts us.

5. I take you, name, to be my *wife/husband* from this day forward, and these things I promise to you before God and these witnesses: I will share my life with you, I will love and care for you, I will respect and trust you, I will forgive you as we have been forgiven, and with the help of God I promise to be faithful to you as long as God gives us life together, that our love, united in God, will strengthen us to serve others. This is my solemn promise.

6. In the presence of God and this community, I, name, take you, name, to be my wife/ husband; to have and to hold from this day forward: in joy and in sorrow, in plenty and in want, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live. This is my solemn vow. (From *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*)

*Innovations.* As long as the focus is on God's love and not one's own, couples are encouraged to be creative in wedding planning. For example, some couples choose to incorporate prayers for the sick, or remembering loved ones, especially when grief is close at hand. It is appropriate to have flowers or candles in memory of loved ones, and to include their names in the prayers. Some couples choose to have an offering (or their Wedding Registry) given to a charitable organization. You may request a petition for your marriage in the Sunday morning prayers.

## WEDDING MUSIC

Music in a wedding echoes music in any worship service: it is an appropriate expression in response to God's love made known to us in Jesus Christ. While the focus of music is God, music can be our own expression of the joy and delight of our faith in God. Martin Luther, in his *Foreword* to a collection of choral motets, wrote in 1538, "Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world."

As you plan your wedding, please know that music selection in a Christian wedding therefore begins not with the question, "What music do we want?" but "What music do we believe will best glorify God?" *Please do not ask to have secular music sung at your wedding.* As you proceed, you will want to consider how your Scripture selections fit together with your music selections: what is the important message we wish to convey in and through our wedding?

Please know there are no restrictions on the *genre* of music you select. Some couples enjoy traditional, classical music. Others prefer popular, jazz, country, or rock forms. The issue for Lutherans is not the form or style of the music, but the message the words convey. You may choose to employ soloists, vocal or instrumental ensembles, or a band to provide music. Please give consideration to the ability of the musicians to play or sing with confidence. Music without words (such as processional and recessional music) should reflect the joy of the day. Music for entertainment has no place in worship.

A St. James organist or piano accompanist is available to you. The couple will arrange a meeting at least two months ahead of time to discuss and select wedding music. Note: recorded music is not allowed. If you have a soloist, you must provide original music (photocopies are not allowed) to the accompanist, and the soloists should meet with the accompanist at least one month before the wedding. You may include other musicians with approval from the accompanist. Your music selections must be approved by your accompanist *and* the pastor officiating your wedding.

## PREMARRIAGE COUNSELING

Each couple will meet with the pastor presiding at their service. The number of sessions (usually three) will be determined by the pastor. The purpose of this time together is to discuss your expectations for marriage, help prepare you for your life together, explore dynamics of your relationship, and get to know one another better. Because we care about your life together *following* the wedding, we wish to explore with you areas of strength and areas of growth *before* the wedding. Please know you are welcome for conversation about your marriage in the months *after* the wedding as well. Pastors reserve the right to refuse to marry.

## RESERVING A DATE FOR YOUR WEDDING

You may reserve a date for your wedding after you have filled out a “Marriage Request Form,” received approval from a St. James pastor.

Weddings at St. James are open to all couples whether members of St. James or not. Active members of St. James (those who worship regularly, are involved in the life of the congregation, and contribute financially) may reserve a wedding date at any time (up to 18 months in advance).

Non-active members and those who are not members may reserve the sanctuary not more than 6 months before their wedding with approval from a pastor and the Parish Administrator. We encourage you to worship at St. James at least two times before your wedding.

General wedding times at St. James are 11 am, 1 pm & 3 pm. on Saturdays. Exceptions can be made to these times only within six months of your wedding date if there are no other weddings or events scheduled. Saturday evening weddings (7:00 pm.) are also an option. We ask that no weddings be scheduled during Holy Week (the church has traditionally discouraged weddings during Lent). Note: the sanctuary needs to be cleared from 4:15 – 6:15 for the Saturday 5:00 p.m. worship, therefore 3:00 pm. weddings need to have pictures taken before the ceremony.

Couples who worship regularly at St. James may wish to provide a general invitation to the congregation to the wedding.

Weddings are conducted by one of the St. James pastors. You may select one or a pastor will be assigned to you. Visiting pastors may serve as assisting ministers upon approval.

To inquire about possible dates, please first contact the Parish Administrator. If a date is available, a tentative reservation will be made. The couple must next fill out and send in the “Marriage Request Form,” then contact a pastor to meet and discuss their wedding plans. Once the pastor agrees to proceed, the couple may and pastor will sign the “Marriage Covenant.” Finally, once non-refundable deposit (50% of the applicable wedding fee) has been made, then your date will be officially reserved.

## WEDDING FEES

For Wedding Fee purposes, *members* of St. James are those persons who are actively involved in the congregation through worship, stewardship, and participation (or children of the same).

A 50% non-refundable deposit is required to have your wedding date scheduled.

### Non-Member Fees:

Pastor: \$400 (includes three premarital sessions)

Organist: \$200 (plus \$50 for each soloist)

Soloist: \$150

Wedding Coordinator: \$200

Custodial Services: \$100

Building Usage: \$200

Member fees will be discussed with the member couple and pastor. Fees rates above for organist, Wedding Coordinator, and custodial services apply.

All final payments, three copies of the wedding bulletin, and your Marriage License, need to be in the church office at least 10 days before the wedding.

## MISCELLANEOUS

*Dressing Rooms.* Bride and bridesmaids may use the Library; the groom and groomsmen the music room off the Fellowship Hall downstairs.

*Lost or stolen items.* St. James is not responsible for lost or stolen items during the service.

*Photography.* Formal pictures may be taken prior to and following the wedding. These pictures should be completed within one-half hour before the service, and one-half hour following the completion of the guests departing.

Photographers are reminded that taking pictures during worship is a privilege not a right, and must agree to abide by St. James' policies. Every attempt will be made to work with your photographer. Flash photography is allowed through the Processional, and again beginning at the Recessional. Photographers must remain behind the last-filled pew during the service. They are not permitted in the Chancel area, and not permitted to roam during the service.

Flash photography from the congregation is not permitted whatsoever during the service. You may wish to include this in your bulletin. Videotaping is allowed from the balcony only. No special lighting may be used.

*Rehearsal.* The wedding rehearsal is a brief run-through of the service. Rehearsals are generally at 6:00 pm. the evening before the wedding. If there are two Saturday weddings, rehearsals will be at 5:00 pm. and 6:00 pm. Office doors will be open one half-hour before your rehearsal time. Please ask attendants, ushers, musicians, readers, and others to be on time.

*Unity Candle.* The Unity Candle is a modern innovation (30-40 years old) symbolizing the joining of two families or the “two becoming one” in marriage. It is not an essential aspect of the Christian wedding, and though we discourage its use, is an option you may choose. The newer “Sand Ceremony” does not have a proper place in worship, and is best saved for the reception.

*Wedding Traditions.* Does the bride need to wear white? Does the groom need to wear a tuxedo? No. These are local, modern customs. Rice was originally part of a pagan fertility ritual. Honking of cars has its origins in the belief that loud noises warded off evil spirits. The father giving away the bride comes from a time when women were considered property, not persons. The “Wedding March” is taken from a European ballet that made fun of marriage, and where the groom appears with the head of an ass. The “Bridal Chorus” is an operatic piece which tells of a marriage that ends in divorce. “Ave Maria” is a song to Mary, not to God. These songs are not recommended for a Christian wedding service.

It comes as a surprise to some couples that a Christian wedding does not require a wedding party, a white dress for the bride, or even the giving of rings. And it’s perfectly fine for the groom to see the bride before their wedding. Our advice: be mindful of the history behind the traditions you choose, and those you discard. Make choices that work for you as a couple.

*Alcohol and Smoking.* Alcohol and smoking are not allowed on St. James property. This includes the parking lot and lawns.

*Rice, birdseed, bubbles and pets.* As noted above, the throwing of rice, or substitutes such as birdseed, finds its origins in a fertility ritual, and is not permitted at St. James. The current trends of using bubbles (outdoors) or flower petals (real petals outdoors, and fake petals indoors) are allowed. Involving pets in any aspect of the service is not allowed.

*Children in the Service.* Children may serve as Flower Girl, Ring Bearer, or Attendants. Children under age six may take part in the processional but they need to be seated with an adult during the service itself.

*Nursery.* The St. James nursery is available to use. The service can be viewed on the television in the nursery.

*The Marriage License.* The completed Marriage License must be brought to the Church Office (along with three bulletins and final deposit) no less than ten days before your wedding. After the wedding, the pastor will obtain signatures from two witnesses, and the Parish Administrator will mail the license to the County Clerk. For more information, see <http://www.co.dane.wi.us/coclerk/marriag.htm>.

*Aisle Runner.* St. James does not provide an aisle runner, and discourages their use (from experience, they are more trouble than they're worth). However, should you decide to have one, careful planning is a must. Please note that the aisle runner has no religious significance, and is thought to have originated both to protect the bride's dress in muddy times, and to protect the bride from evil spirits (which were thought to arise from beneath the floor)!

*Wedding Rings.* When rings are given, it is easiest if the Best Man carries them in his pocket. The pastor will ask for them following the vows.

*Visiting Pastor.* Other pastors may participate in the service with the approval of the pastor who is conducting your ceremony. An invitation from a St. James pastor will be extended to the guest pastor.

*Decorations.* Both the nave (where the congregation sits) and the chancel area (where the wedding party usually stands) provide ample beauty and need little adornment. Ribbon and/or greenery may be used for pew markers. However, you are asked not to use tacks, nails or clamps that may mar the pews or any other furniture. Aisle candles are not allowed. Church furnishings may not be moved.

*Flowers.* The use of flowers is optional, but may be used in the service, as they are an appropriate expression of the joy of the day. Placement can be discussed with and must be approved by the Wedding Coordinator. Flowers should be tastefully displayed in vases, and may be left for the Sunday service with permission of the couple. Flowers are never to be placed on the altar (whether alone or as part of a unity candle).

*Flower Delivery.* St. James Church Office is not usually open on Saturday mornings. If this is your delivery time and the building is not scheduled to be open, please make arrangements with the Pastor.

*Altar Candles:* Altar candles are to be lit during the service. We ask the one of the ushers light the candles 20 minutes prior to the wedding. See the Wedding Coordinator for more details.

*Paraments:* The paraments (the fabric hanging from the altar, lectern, and pulpit) are in the color of the church year.

*Directions to St. James.* If you have internet access, you will find directions to St. James at <http://www.stjamesverona.org>.

*Off-Site Weddings:* St. James pastors are available for off-site weddings. The guidelines for a Christian Wedding apply.

*What if we live together?* Christian marriage is fulfilled in the sexual union of a man and a woman, and the norm for Christian sexuality is expressed in the covenant of marriage. Therefore while we strongly encourage every couple meeting with us not to live together before your wedding. The marital research is clear that marital longevity is correlated to couples who do not live together prior to their wedding.

*Updated – Fall 2010*