

Wedding Policy

The Dual Parish of:
St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church—Brule, Nebraska
Trinity Lutheran Church—Ogallala, Nebraska

Member Congregations
of the
Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod

Christian Wedding Policies

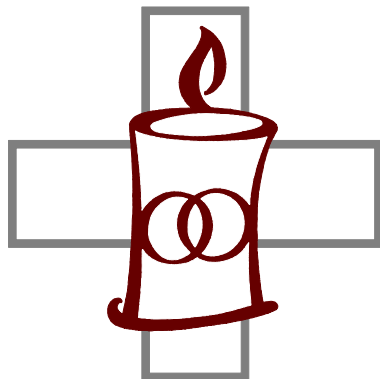
Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

Psalm 127:1 (ESV)

“...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of His body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Ephesians 5:21-33 (ESV)

AS CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN CHRISTIAN CONGREGATIONS, AND WANTING TO GIVE BIBLICAL WITNESS TO OUR BELIEFS ABOUT MARRIAGE, WE DO HERE PRESENT THE FOLLOWING POLICIES FOR WEDDINGS CONDUCTED IN OUR CHURCHES:



Introduction

This booklet ~~is~~ has been prepared for members of our congregations and sister congregations of the LCMS who are contemplating marriage and looking at our churches as the place for the wedding service to take place. We pray for God's richest blessings upon your preparations, the worship service in which your wedding takes place, and your life together as husband and wife.

The following policies are designed to assist you:

- First, to understand the proper relationship of Christ to His Bride, the Church.
- Secondly, to aid you in making both necessary and proper preparations for your wedding, while at the same time, always consulting with pastor when questions arise.

After you have read through this booklet, you are asked to schedule a time to set up counseling sessions with our pastor. He will then be able to discuss details of your wedding with you and answer any specific questions you may have.

God bless you.

The Christian Wedding

The Christian Church's theological understanding, determined by God and based on Scripture, clearly makes weddings the province of the religious community. Though the State has vested interest in marriages through its licensing/recording process, and though society, commercialism, sentimentality and culture have impacted the wedding process, God has a larger claim on the institution of marriage. He clearly asserts ownership. He has given marriage its origin, substance and function.

Scripture clearly establishes the divine institution of marriage. It is a divine order of creation. *"The Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'"* Genesis 2:18 (ESV) So, one of the earliest acts of God toward man, was that of creating a woman, and bringing the one man and the one woman together into a life-long union.

This was something new, and that newness continues. Something new comes into being at marriage. A new family is created, a new home established. New loyalties come into being, and former loyalties are rearranged. To emphasize this point, the Bible goes on to say, *"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 (ESV)

In the New Testament, Jesus reflects the divine institution of marriage in Matthew 19:3-6.

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

Here, He echoes the words of Genesis, and insists on the sanctity and permanence of marriage.

In addition, marriage is often commended by Scripture (e.g., Psalm 18:22),

and the form and function of the Christian marriage is described in some detail (e.g., Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, 1 Corinthians 7).

So clearly is marriage a part of the divine plan, that God's relationship to His people is often compared to a marriage (e.g. Isaiah 54:5, 62:5). And this imagery of the Old Testament is carried through in the New Testament, as the Church is called the bride of Christ (e.g., Matthew 25:10; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:7).

Therefore, in the Christian wedding, God acts toward people on the basis of His promises. Since marriage is a reflection of God's covenant promises to His people, the essence of the marriage is the divinely enjoined and blessed promise made before God, between the husband and wife. In addition, since God's promises are irrevocable, marriage as a solemn promise and reflection of God's covenant is a permanent commitment and should not be set aside, nor taken lightly. And, since marriage is a reflection of God's salutary relationship to His people, marriage is intended to be a state of wholeness designed to enhance the lives of the man and of the woman. Also, since God brought the first man and woman into a relationship and formed them into a oneness which was to become a model for all humanity, ***marriage is not a development of culture nor a human creation, but a divine institution.***

So then, we the people of God, the Body of Christ at St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church and Trinity Lutheran Church, maintain without apology, that marriage is a divine institution of God, and that the Christian wedding service is a worship service, with God as its object and Christ as the center and focus.

The Christian wedding service is not intended to offer merely warm wishes and vague benedictions, nor trendy ceremonies and practices, but the uncompromised message of the Gospel. The following sections deal more completely with the Christian wedding as worship.

The Christian Wedding as Worship

The wedding service that you are planning is different from many other wedding services you may have witnessed in the past—in that it is a *Christian* wedding. The very fact that you are reading this booklet, or that you have come to your church and pastor for counsel and guidance, indicates that your primary concern and desire is to have a *Christian* wedding.

A Christian couple wants their wedding ceremony to be characterized not only by dignity, reverence, and joy, but by the very Spirit of Christ Himself. A Christian wedding service, however, imposes particular responsibilities just as it offers particular blessings. These responsibilities are yours because you are Christians. They are also responsibilities of your church.

Let us look, then, at some of the features that will make your *Christian* wedding different.

An Act of Worship

The Christian wedding service is an act of worship. This is the first thing to remember. The Christian wedding is a ceremony in which Christians, particularly you as future bride and groom, come together to offer special thanks and praise and to ask God's blessings upon your life together as soon to be...husband and wife.

As future bride and groom, you have particular reasons for thanks and praise. It was God who brought you together and who will unite you as husband and wife. And it is God who has given you an example of perfect marriage in the relationship between Christ and His Church.

But the Christian congregation gathered with you on your wedding day also has reason to thank and praise God on your behalf. Here the congregation of the 'saints on earth' join with you in thanks and in imploring God's blessing upon this new family unit. For both of you and for those gathered with you at your wedding, the Christian marriage service is *first of all* an act of worship.

The Object – God

The second point to remember is that the object of worship for Christians is always the Triune God. This means that as we worship, our attention is to be drawn *always and only* to God. It is, after all, an evidence of God's grace that we are capable of worshipping Him at all.

This means that God should have first place at your wedding and that the attention of all present should be focused upon Him. As important as you, the bride and groom, may think you are, you will want to be sure that nothing in your wedding detracts from giving God the place of greatest importance.

It is not difficult for things other than God to assume the most important place at your wedding. It may be the music, the flowers, the decorations, the wedding gown; it may even be the way in which you, as bride or groom, conduct yourself. Remember it is your responsibility to see that nothing in your wedding comes before God. It is after all, His blessing that is sought. So it is God that should be uppermost in your wedding service and in the hearts and minds of those who attend.

The Center – Christ

The third point to remember is that the worship of the Christian wedding is centered in Christ. There is no contradiction between Christ as the center of our worship and God as its object. *"I and My Father are One."* John 10:30 (NIV) *"No man cometh to the Father but by Me."* John 14:6 (KJV) It is only through Christ—the sole Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5)—that we are able to approach God in our worship. Worship directed to God must always, therefore, be centered in Christ.

Several sections of Scripture that you will want to read before your wedding day speak of Christ and weddings. One is the miracle performed at Cana of Galilee on the occasion of a wedding where Christ was present (John 2:1-11). Another is that group of Scripture passages which picture the relationship of Christ to His church in the imagery of the Bridegroom (Christ) and the Bride (The Church) (Ephesians 5:22-33). (Additional Scripture selections, such as Psalm 128, 67, or 23, will also be of help.)

These sections of Scripture will help you to remember that the God-directed worship of the wedding service must be Christ-centered.

In summary, remember the *Christian* wedding service in which will be joined in marriage as a couple, in general, and as Christians in particular, is a joyful act of God-directed, Christ-centered worship. By keeping this clearly in mind, many of your questions will already be answered and potential issues already resolved.

The Christian Wedding as Congregational Worship

A Christian wedding is the corporate or congregational worship of all those gathered to thank, praise, pray and implore God's blessings upon you and your marriage. As strange as this may sound at first, it means that your wedding is not for you alone. Those who come to share your joy have an important part to play as well. *Those who attend come not as spectators, but as worshipers.* By emphasizing the congregational nature of the Christian wedding, you will be helping those who come to share your joy by actively participating in worship directed solely toward God.

As a member of this congregation and church, you, as bride or groom, are a member of the family of God in this place. The members of St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church and Trinity Lutheran Church are members, together with you, as one spiritual family. It is most natural, then, that you may want to consider having the members of your spiritual family present at your wedding.

A Public Act

The Christian wedding is a public act of the church. Even if your wedding is performed in a so-called 'private' ceremony with only one or two friends present, it is still subject to the public Ministry of the Word.

As part of the public ministry, the Church has a particular responsibility toward the wedding service. The Church has the responsibility to see that the service is carried out in a reverent, dignified manner, in harmony with the

intent of God who instituted marriage. But perhaps even more importantly, the Church has the responsibility to see that the wedding service is in harmony with all aspects of Christian worship—that it is directed first of all to God and that it is Christ-centered.

A Celebration of the Entire Church

The worship that you as future bride and groom offer together with the congregation at the time of your marriage is not yours alone. When Christians worship, they are literally joined together with ‘angels, archangels and all the company of heaven.’ While there would be no wedding service without either of you, the service is not just yours. You will invite family, particular guests, and members of your congregation. Your wedding service is a celebration of the entire church.

A Participating Worship

The Christian wedding draws all present into active participation in prayer, praise and thanksgiving to God. While you are honored by the presence of your guests, you are also eager that they share in one of the most joyous and happiest moments of your life. The wedding service is the time when you, as future bride and groom, exchange your vows of love and faithfulness. It is a time when married couples who are in attendance can also give thanks and praise to God for their own marriage.

One of the best ways to realize the strength and the support of the Holy Christian Church at the time of your wedding is to emphasize the corporate, congregational character of Christian worship through the active participation of all those present—for the Christian wedding service belongs to the entire Church.

Place of Worship

Understanding that a Christian wedding is a worship service, it is expected and preferred that the marriage ceremony take place in the church sanctuary. This is also due primarily to the unpredictability of the weather (heat, cold, rain, snow, etc.). Alternatives to this policy may be discussed with pastor, if necessary.

Specific Guidance, Rules, and Applications

In light of these general remarks in regard to a Christian wedding service, the following policies *will apply* to a wedding service conducted at St. John's and Trinity.

1. Either the bride or groom must be a member in good standing of either St. John's or Trinity (or under special circumstances) a member of another Lutheran Church –Missouri Synod (LCMS) congregation. However, even under these circumstances, neither the congregation, or the pastor, is obligated to perform a marriage for every couple that requests it. Couples who have little or no attachment to the church, or give no evidence of such a prospect, who seek to avoid the implication of life-long commitment, who shun the religious content of the wedding service, or who by confession or deed exhibit a lack of repentance and faith, should instead seek to have their marriage legalized outside the church.
2. Our congregations require *a minimum* of six hours of pre-marital counseling, conducted by the pastor, or someone he designates.
3. No additional furnishings (such as arches and other similar items) shall obstruct the view of the altar and the area around the altar for a wedding service, except a kneeler or the kneeling pillow (which may be used during a wedding service), and the unity candle holder (if used).
4. All altar paraments shall remain the color appointed for that particular season of the Church year.
5. A runner down the aisle may be used (if desired) for the procession. A banner for the wedding service may be used and placed in the normal positions as other banners at the front of the sanctuary. Ask a member of the altar guild if there is a banner you may use, or you may use a custom-made one that honors Christ and is preapproved by the pastor.
6. A fresh floral arrangement is appropriate on the stands on either side of the altar. Additional flower arrangements (if used), are placed outside the

altar area. Speak with pastor in regard to placement possibilities. Attaching flowers and/or ribbons to the pulpit, lectern or a communion rail will not be allowed. However, attaching flowers and/or ribbons to pews is an appropriate option. Please keep in mind though that the church sanctuary is worship oriented, and is visually pleasing in itself, and rich in its own décor.

7. *No flash photography* will be permitted during the worship service. Pictures may be taken as the bridal party enters the church, and as they recess following the service. All pictures during the worship service will be done from the back of the church or the balcony. Videotaping will be permitted, as long as no special lights are used *and* it is accomplished from the back of the sanctuary. Photographers are to speak to pastor *before* the day of the wedding if there are any questions.
8. *All music for the service must be approved by the pastor.* Music used will be worshipful and Christ-centered. The church has music available from which selections may be made.¹ Talk with the pastor early in the planning process in regard to selecting music. One of the parish organists who provide the music for the ongoing worship life of the congregation will usually be responsible for providing the music at the wedding service. Exceptions may be made, but only in consultation with, and approval by, the pastor. If solo music is desired, that, too, must be discussed with pastor, and the soloist needs to visit with the pastor in order to coordinate when the solo will be sung during the worship service. *Again, please remember that the wedding takes place within the context of a Christian worship service.*
9. In regard to remunerations for the organist, soloist, or any other musician...proper etiquette would dictate that they should receive any gifts for their services on the night of the rehearsal. The church is not responsible for the compensation of the organist, soloist or any other musician. This is an arrangement strictly between you and them.

¹ See Appendix A for more specific information in regard to music.

10. The congregation is encouraged not to throw anything at the bride and groom inside the church. Birdseed and bubbles may be used outside of the church (no rice).
11. The inclusion of a flower girl and/or ring bearer may be permitted, *so long as it does not become a distraction and misplaces the focus of the service from Christ and the cross*, to individual people. Please remember that the worship service belongs to the congregation, and that everything done should glorify Christ, and serve the worship.
12. When a bulletin for the worship service is used, it may be selected from a number available through the church's publishing house. If the bulletin is selected from the church's publishing house, the congregation will supply the proper number and prepare them at no cost to you. Speak with the pastor if you have any questions.
13. The church building is not rented or loaned for weddings conducted for individuals who are not members of St. John's or Trinity or individuals who are not in good standing with a sister congregation of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.
14. The fellowship hall is available at no charge for receptions following a wedding service at St. John's and Trinity. Please check the Kitchen and Fellowship Hall Policy for guidelines in the use of the fellowship hall. If you desire to make a donation to help cover heating/cooling, and electrical expenses, it would be appreciated.

Conclusion

Please take careful note of all the items in this booklet, and then bring any questions you may have and discuss them with the pastor. Reading this information and visiting with the pastor before any firm plans or arrangements for your wedding are made will enable you to plan efficiently and avoid potential issues. Remember, your wedding will take place within a Christian worship service, and that service belongs to, and is the responsibility of, St. John's and Trinity, and Her called pastor. And so, we close as we began, by praying for God's richest blessings on you and your future as husband and wife.

This policy supersedes all other such guidelines, policies, and/or handbooks published in the past.

Adopted by the Board of Elders from St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church—Brule and from Trinity Lutheran Church—Ogallala.

Revised: 29 August 2025

Ratified by the Voters Assembly at St. John's, 26 October 2025

Ratified by the Voters Assembly at Trinity, 26 October 2025

Appendix A - Music for the Christian Wedding

Music is an integral part of Christian worship. It is possible to conduct a wedding service without music, and that is acceptable, but it is unusual.

Music for your wedding may include three types:

1. Processional and recessional music
2. Congregational hymns
3. Special music presented by solo, choirs or smaller groups.

Whether you use one, two, or all three types, will depend on the size and general nature of the worship service.

If the wedding service has no other music, it will usually have a processional and recessional for the bridal party. Music for the processional and recessional should be consistent with the solemn, yet joyful dignity of the wedding, within a worship service. Such selections as Bach's, "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring;" Purcell's, "Trumpet Tune;" and Clarke's, "Trumpet Voluntary" are examples. The parish organist will also be able to suggest other suitable selections, and/or others, from which you may make your choices.

In regard to hymns for the entire congregation to sing, many are available. Certain hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH), Lutheran Worship (LW), or Lutheran Service Book (LSB) are acceptable. Hymns focusing on marriage, trust, new obedience and invocation are particularly appropriate. This is a list of some hymns you are asked to consider:

O Holy Spirit Enter InTLH 235/LW 160/LSB 913
All Glory be to God on High.....TLH 237/LW 215/LSB 947
Come Follow Me, The Savior Spake.....TLH 421/LW 379/LSB 688
The King of Love My Shepherd IsTLH 431/LW 412/LSB 709
Love Divine, All Love ExcellingTLH 351/LW 286/LSB 700
O God, Our Help In Ages PastTLH 123/LW 180/LSB 733
Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus.....TLH 409/LW 381/LSB 685
Thine Forever, God of LoveTLH 338/LW 256/LSB 687
All Depends on Our PossessingTLH 425/LW 415/LSB 732

O Perfect Love	TLH 623
Lord, Who at Cana’s Wedding Feast	TLH 620
O Father, All Creating	TLH 621/LW 251/LSB 858
The Voice that Breathed o’er Eden	TLH 622
O Blessed Home Where Man and Wife	TLH 624
Oh, Blest the House, Whate’er Befall	TLH 625/LW 467/LSB 862

Other hymns may also suggest themselves, depending on the season of the church year, or a particular worship theme for your wedding.

Special music may also be included in the service, presented by solo, or a special group. A hymn from our hymnal is also a good choice for special music. Other suggestions may be offered to you by pastor or the parish organists.

Extreme care should be exercised in the choice of both the soloist and the music to be used. Much of the material frequently heard as solos at weddings is *far removed from a Christ-centered, God-directed* expression of worship.

Nebraska District LCMS Marriage Policy

The marriage policy of the Nebraska District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is and always has been consistent with the Synod’s beliefs on marriage. We believe that marriage is a sacred union of one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24-25), and that God gave marriage as a picture of the relationship between Christ and His bride the Church (Eph. 5:32).

The official position of The Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod, as set forth in 1998 Res. 3-21 (“To Affirm the Sanctity of Marriage and to Reject Same-Sex Unions”), is that homosexual unions come under categorical prohibition in the Old and New Testaments (Lev. 18:22, 24; 20:13; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-10) as contrary to the Creator’s design (Rom. 1:26-27).

These positions and beliefs can be found on the LCMS website (www.lcms.org), along with other statements, papers and reports on the subject of homosexuality and same-sex civil unions and “marriage.” Our pastors will not officiate over any marriages inconsistent with these beliefs, and District property may not be used for any marriage ceremony, reception or other activity that would be inconsistent with our beliefs and this policy.

Passed by the Nebraska District Board of Directors on
September 11, 2015

Additional Resources

NOTE: Resource information for this booklet was taken from the following publications:

1. Planning A Christian Wedding, by Rev. Paul M. Krause, published by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri.
2. A Marriage Manual for Church Weddings, by Ref. Arthur E. Graf, published by Faith Publications, Waco, Texas.
3. Planning The Wedding Service, Rev. Carl Schalk, published by Concordia Theological Seminary Press, Fort Wayne, Indiana.
4. Planning A Christian Wedding Service, published by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri.
5. The Shepherd Under Christ, by Rev. A.W. Schuetze & Rev. I.J. Habeck, published by Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
6. Information on Marriage Policies for Member Congregations, LCMS International Center, St. Louis, Missouri.
7. NE District LCMS Marriage Policy, NE District Board of Directors, Seward, Nebraska
8. Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. Human Sexuality : A Theological Perspective : A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. [St. Louis]: [Concordia Publishing House], 1981.
9. Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. Human Sexuality : A Chaste and Decent Life : A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. [St. Louis]: [Concordia Publishing House], 2022.
10. Alliance Defending Freedom. Protecting Your Ministry : From Sexual Orientation Gender Identity Lawsuits. [Place of publication not identified]: Alliance Defending Freedom, 2014.
11. Alliance Defending Freedom. Supplement, Protecting Your Ministry: 10 Best Practices. [Place of publication not identified]: Alliance Defending Freedom, 2014.