



## **Matrimonial Policies and Practices**

A Guide for Weddings at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

### **INTRODUCTION**

God's blessings and congratulations! That you are reading this guide means that your wedding is upcoming shortly. No one needs to tell you that there's a lot of planning to do between now and then.

That you are reading this booklet also means that you are considering the use of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church and its pastor for your marriage ceremony. There is a wide variety of wedding customs in the world today, and even in our local area. In a Christian wedding, some of these traditions are to be maintained, while others are to be avoided. The purpose of this guide is to provide an outline of what you can expect at a wedding service held at Good Shepherd.

May the Lord our God guide your thoughts and desires throughout the exciting time of preparation.

### **WORSHIP AND WEDDINGS**

To begin with, let's start with a brief discussion of worship and weddings, and what they have in common.

Worship, or Divine Service, is an institution of God; it is the place and time in which He gives us forgiveness of sins by His means of grace: His Word, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion. In fact, the Bible tells us that the Lord is actually present with His people by these means. Therefore, we say that worship is a gift of God for giving us

the kingdom of heaven. As part of worship, respond to God's presence and gifts or grace; obviously, all that we do should be pleasing to Him—according to His will and with the purpose of giving Him all glory and praise (1 Peter 3:15).

Marriage is also an institution of God; it is a gift by which He provides companionship and intimacy for man and woman, as well as a stable environment for the birth and training of children.

However, marriage is not merely a matter between the couple or immediate family. Christian marriage takes place within a congregation and a community: by marrying, bride and groom pledge and acknowledge their responsibility to be of active involvement within the church to which they belong and the community in which they live. Marriage, therefore, is a gift of God for the purpose of keeping order in this world and keeping society structured; it is a civil ordinance, but one instituted by God Himself.

A wedding service combines both the civil act of marriage and the grace-filled action of worship. As they stand before the altar, the bride and groom speak their vows *in the presence of God*, as well as human witnesses. They acknowledge that marriage is an institution of God, sustained by His gifts of Word and Sacraments.

*It follows, therefore, that everything that is done in the wedding service should be pleasing to our Lord—according to His will, to give Him all glory and praise.*

When a couple requests a wedding at Good Shepherd, this request is an acknowledgment that they share this understanding of both marriage and worship, and that their wedding service will be planned accordingly.

## **PREPARING FOR THE WEDDING DAY**

### **AVAILABILITY**

In keeping with our position that Scripture is the inerrant Word of God and the final authority for all matters of doctrine and practice, we adhere to the Bible's definition that marriage is an exclusive, lifelong commitment between one man and one woman. Therefore, Good Shepherd only recognizes marriages between a biological man and a biological woman, and the pastor(s) of this congregation will only participate in weddings which solemnize such marriages. Furthermore, the facilities and property of Good Shepherd are only available for hosting such wedding ceremonies.

Because Christian marriage takes place within the context of a congregation, it is expected that either the bride or groom—and far more preferably both—are active members of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. (Members of sister LCMS congregations who wish to reserve our pastor and/or facility are asked to submit a

request in writing to the board of elders.) If either is not a communicant member, both are encouraged to attend adult information class at Good Shepherd prior to their wedding.

If neither are communicant members, then both are asked to complete adult information class prior to reserving the pastor and facility for their wedding. This class is normally offered twice a year, in the spring and fall. Couples will want to plan early, as the class offers thorough instruction in the teachings of Scripture.

### PREMARITAL PASTORAL CARE

As soon as possible, couples should contact the church office to meet with the pastor for an initial consultation before making reservations or proceeding with other plans.

Since marriage is a serious and lifelong endeavor, the couple is to meet with the presiding pastor for several hours before the wedding. It should be noted that these sessions are not designed to be times of psychological evaluation or counseling; the pastor is not a licensed counselor. Rather, these sessions provide opportunity for a theological study of marriage. In many situations, it is highly advised that a couple seek pre-marital counseling from a licensed professional counselor, and the pastor is able to provide some names.

The Lord uses marriage as an illustration of His love for His Church, and in all things the Lord keeps His bride pure (Ephesians 5:25-32). Engaged couples are likewise expected to practice sexual purity prior to marriage. If the couple is living together or engaging in sexual relations before marriage, or if one or the other has divorced for unscriptural reasons, these matters must be dealt with in a Christian manner before the wedding can take place; otherwise, the facilities and pastor will not be available for the wedding.

Given our Lord's command to "abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess. 5:22); this also applies to couples who are living together even if they abstain from sexual relations before they are married.

Couples involved in sexual sin are invited to repentance and the forgiveness of sin by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Fruit befitting such repentance is either (1) to move apart until the wedding, or (2) to be married in a private ceremony right away, and then celebrate it with a public ceremony which recognizes the private wedding later on.

Individuals preparing for marriage may be troubled by past sins, sexual or otherwise; and a troubled conscience can have adverse and lasting effects on marriage and love between husband and wife. Those preparing for marriage are encouraged to make use of private confession and absolution prior to their wedding day.

## THE WEDDING SERVICE

The wedding ceremony itself is a time when families interact: not just the families of bride and groom, but also the family of the congregation. Because Good Shepherd is home to the congregational family, it is expected that all ceremonies be conducted out of deference to the established practices of the congregation. This may mean that some requests, even if acceptable elsewhere, might be declined if considered to be unhelpful to congregational life here.

Concerning particulars of the wedding service, this general rule applies: *Whatever is acceptable for a regular Sunday worship service is also acceptable for the wedding.*

### CLERGY

In accordance with Scripture and by agreement with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church and its pastors do not practice unionism. This means that only pastors who are members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod may take part as an officiant in the wedding. (An officiant is one who officiates a part of the wedding service, such as one who preaches, solemnizes the vows, prays, reads the Scripture lessons, etc.) If the couple wishes to make use of the services of an LCMS pastor from another congregation in addition to those at Good Shepherd, they should first gain permission from the pastor at Good Shepherd. The pastor at Good Shepherd is normally to be involved in the wedding.

### ORDER OF SERVICE

Weddings at Good Shepherd follow the established form and order for marriage found in one of the Agendas (Service Books) of the Synodical hymnals, either *Lutheran Service Book*, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, *Lutheran Worship*. These rites correctly keep Jesus Christ at the center of the marriage ceremony and present the gift of marriage in a sound, scriptural manner. The wedding vows are to be used verbatim from these orders of worship. There are Scripture readings that are traditionally used with the wedding ceremony; the couple can obtain a copy of them for prior examination. If they wish to substitute one or more of these texts, they may do so in consultation with the pastor.

As this is a service in the presence of God, no readings except from Scripture may be used. The service will include a brief sermon, and couples are invited to discuss possible Bible texts with the pastor.

### MUSIC

Music is certainly appropriate for a celebration such as a wedding. In a Christian wedding, the music is to correctly proclaim the Word of God and should be Christ-centered in nature. Secular music, no matter how beautiful the tune or words, should be reserved for the reception or some other time. Good Shepherd encourages the use of hymns from its hymnal; other lyrics should be examined by the pastor, and need to be beneficial to the ongoing ministry of the congregation.<sup>1</sup> Instrumental music should be of a classical/sacred nature as well. Other music is best left for the reception.

All music, instrumental or vocal, is to be proclamation and praise before God. It is not a performance for entertainment, or to showcase talented friends and family. So that undue attention may not be drawn to the artist, and in keeping with Boise Fire Department regulations (about blocking exits), we require that all music be played and/or sung from the choir loft. The only exception is the use of the piano. A list of suggested wedding music may be obtained from the pastor.

### CONDUCT OF THE WEDDING PARTY

Once again, the guiding rule is this: The wedding is a worship service in the presence of God. Conduct and dress should be similar to that worn to a Sunday morning service. As the rehearsal and service are held in the sanctuary of the church—the room set apart for worship, those present are asked to be respectful and reverent. Practical jokes are not to take place during the rehearsal or the service.

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<sup>1</sup> Some notes on some popular wedding pieces illustrate this point. Couples are sometimes surprised when a church does not permit the famous wedding marches of Richard Wagner and Felix Mendelssohn. Wagner's wedding march ("Here Comes the Bride") is from the opera *Lohengrin*. The hero Lohengrin marries Elsa; however, by the end of that very act, he leaves to other pursuits and Elsa drops dead on stage. In life and music, Wagner despised Christianity and desired to replace it with paganism and Nordic mythology.

Mendelssohn's wedding march is a popular recessional. A Lutheran who composed sacred music, Mendelssohn also composed some secular pieces, including the operatic piece *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for which he wrote the wedding march. Mendelssohn never intended that it be included in Christian weddings, as it is used in the musical to celebrate a wedding between the queen of the fairies and an ass.

As time passes, instrumental music sometimes loses its original significance, and thus these pieces may be used without their baggage in some churches. At present, that time has not yet arrived at this congregation, but plenty of other processional music of a sacred nature is available.

*Ave Maria* ("Hail Mary") another popular song for weddings, both classical and beautiful. However, it is a prayer directed to Mary for help and intercession, a teaching which is contrary to Scripture. It also is not approved for weddings at Good Shepherd.

If the bridal couple chooses to kiss during the ceremony, it is requested that the kiss be short and chaste.

#### THE REHEARSAL

Out of deference to the pastor and others who are assisting with your wedding, please encourage the wedding party to arrive on time for the rehearsal, which normally lasts no more than an hour. As this is a rehearsal of a Divine Service in the presence of God, the pastor will preside over the rehearsal and render the final decision on matters pertaining to the service.

#### DECORATING

Real flowers on the altar are requested, though silk may be used. Arrangements may not obscure the cross.

Bows or flowers may be affixed to the pews; please do not use disappearing tape, but the cheapest you can buy. The friends or family of the wedding party must remove all flowers and decorations before they leave the premises. Flower arrangements that are suitable can be left for the piano or narthex for the following Sunday if so desired.

#### HOLY COMMUNION

At times, couples request that the Sacrament of Holy Communion be celebrated as part of the wedding service. This presents some serious considerations. Good Shepherd Lutheran Church practices closed Communion; in other words, it requests that only confirmed members of the LCMS receive the Lord's Supper at its altar. Because a wedding service usually involves many friends and family members of many different churches and faiths, it is inadvisable to offer the Sacrament only to some at the wedding service.

It is also improper to offer the Sacrament of the Church only to the bridal party. We therefore discourage offering the Lord's Supper at the wedding.

#### FLOWER GIRLS & RING BEARERS

Flower girls are permitted; however, they may not scatter flower petals or other confetti as they process. Because of their usually young age, couples which include a ring bearer are encouraged to use a faux set for his trip up the aisle.

#### UNITY CANDLE

A unity candle is permitted, though the candles and stand must be provided by the wedding party.

### MARRIAGE LICENSE

The bridal couple must obtain a wedding license from the county clerk prior to the wedding. *If the pastor does not have the marriage license in his possession, the wedding by law may not take place.* The license should be delivered to the church a few days prior to the wedding ceremony so that the appropriate information may be inserted.

### PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO

Because this is a worship service in the presence of God, nothing should distract those who are present. Flash bulbs and the movement of photographers do exactly that. Therefore, we request that no photography take place between the invocation and the benediction of the service. The photographer may take a flash photograph as the bridal party processes up the aisle; however, once the service has begun, photography should be limited to time exposures from the balcony. If the wedding is videotaped the camera should be mounted in the balcony or inside the sacristy, in deference to those who attend.

One tradition holds that photography may not take place before the wedding, since it would be bad luck for a bride and groom to see each other on the wedding day before the ceremony begins. We take no position on the timing of photography before or after the service, other than to note that we and our times are in the hands of a gracious God, rather than capricious fortune. The wedding party should keep in mind that photography after the wedding often places a hardship upon reception guests, who must then wait quite a while before the reception begins.

### THE RECEPTION

Members of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church are welcome to reserve the fellowship hall for the wedding reception. Prior arrangements must be made to secure the church and fellowship hall. Please check with the church secretary at 343-7212 to get your name on the calendar. There is always the possibility that the sanctuary or fellowship hall may already be booked for some other purpose.

The Parish Fellowship Board oversees the receptions in the fellowship hall and will help upon request with any serving. However, arrangements for cakes, refreshments, and food are to be made and purchased by the bridal couple. The bridal party will want to make such arrangements as soon as possible.

Decorations in the fellowship hall are to be put up and taken down by the friends or family of the bridal party. All tables and chairs are to be arranged by the friends or

family of the bridal party under the direction of the Parish Fellowship Board, and returned to their original places following the festivities.

Please refrain from throwing rice, birdseed or any other item on the church property.

Smoking should take place only outside of the buildings. The use of alcohol on the church grounds, except for the Sacrament of Holy Communion, is prohibited. We wish to note that this is not a matter of pietism or dogma; sadly, it is one of liability. The bride and groom alone may toast one another with a glass of champagne.

## **FEES**

It is certainly appropriate to compensate those who have assisted in the wedding ceremony, including the organist, soloists, musicians, custodians, and wedding coordinators. Compensation should be placed in a separate envelope for each person, and delivered in person by the best man.

The pastors do not charge a fee for the pre-marital pastor care or for the wedding service itself. However, an appropriate honorarium is certainly acceptable.

There is no fee for the use of the facilities.