

***Brown Memorial Park Avenue
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Wedding Handbook:
A Guide for Couples
Who Wish to be
Married in the Church***

Approved by the Session
May 11, 2010

This booklet explains the basic elements of and procedures for a marriage ceremony at Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church. Our greatest concern is that your wedding in its beauty and sincerity will reflect your deepest conviction, and ours, of the nature of Christian marriage. To avoid misunderstandings at a later date, we call your attention to the responsibilities and fees, which we will expect you to assume, and to the few restrictions which we believe to be important. We do not mean these guidelines to be punitive, but we find it necessary to state them. Each item has been generated because of a past experience.

Our community believes that God created us in God's image,
and gave us marriage so that two people may help and comfort
each other,
living faithfully together in plenty and in want,
in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health,
throughout all their days.

God gave us marriage
for the full expression of the love between two people,
for the well-being of human society,
for the ordering of family life,
and for the nurture of children.

Those joined together in marriage are called to a
new way of life,
created, ordered, and blessed by God.
This way of life must not be entered into carelessly,
or from selfish motives,
but responsibly, and prayerfully.

When you ask to be married in this church, you are seeking the blessings of God on your marriage in a service of worship. The sanctuary is not a rental facility. It is the primary gathering place for the community of believers who come together each week to worship God. When you ask a minister of this church to conduct a marriage ceremony, you are not asking him/her to pronounce you husband and wife as a civil officer may do, but that God may bless your marriage. This foundational distinction between the legal contract of civil marriage, defined by the state, and the covenant of Christian marriage, defined by religious communities is important to understand as you discern your own hopes and desires for your marriage and the wedding ceremony.

The ministers of the church have oversight for all weddings at Brown Memorial Park Avenue. Ordinarily, a minister will meet with a couple before agreeing to conduct the service or scheduling it on the church's calendar. The minister will offer to the couple some options for the wording of the service. While the minister has the final say over the form and content of the service, the couple will be encouraged to offer suggestions, ideas, and hopes for all aspects of the service.

Personnel

It is expected that a Minister of Brown Memorial PA and the Minister of Music of Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church will officiate at your wedding ceremony. Permission may be granted by the above staff of the church for other people to be involved. The minister is solely in charge of the ceremony and will work with you in creating a service that is both reverent and meaningful to you. In case the minister is not available, the Session must approve the officiating minister.

Counseling

All couples who wish to be married at Brown Memorial Park Avenue must complete the application three months prior to their wedding. Couples will be expected to attend at least three pre-nuptial counseling sessions with the minister before the date of their wedding. These will be scheduled at the convenience of the parties involved. A pastoral counselor or licensed therapist may also be used with the agreement of the minister. If the minister is convinced that commitment, responsibility, maturity, or Christian understanding are lacking to the point that he/she believes the marriage to be unwise, the minister will work with the couple until he/she is satisfied that the couple is ready for marriage. He/She may refer the couple to certified marriage therapists or some other professional for further guidance. If the issues are not resolved further, the minister will not conduct the ceremony. All such issues will be discussed openly with the couple with ample time given prior to the date set for the wedding.

Church Membership

When neither member of the couple is a member of the church, the couple will be invited to attend worship services. While you will not have to join the church, we ask that you consider membership, because we believe that marriages are stronger and healthier when they benefit from the support of a church community.

The Service

The wedding ceremony is a worship service of joy, reverence, hope, faith, and love. The minister will recommend services from the church's worship heritage, and will plan with the couple approaches to the service designed to express your particular relationship to one another and to God. Couples will work with the minister to design their service, making sure that the music and vows reflect the importance of this event.

Music

Music suitable for the marriage service directs attention to God and expresses the faith of the church. Recognizing that the wedding is a service of worship, the only criterion for music is that it be suitable for worship. Musical selections must be discussed and chosen in consultation with the Minister of Music. Under normal circumstances the choir of the church does not sing at weddings.

Rehearsal

The minister sets the time and date for the wedding rehearsal and conducts the rehearsal. Everyone involved in the wedding, including parents, should attend. Promptness in arriving for the 45 minute rehearsal is important. **Church personnel will secure the building and leave one hour after the wedding rehearsal is scheduled to begin – there are no exceptions to this important provision.**

Flowers, Decorations, and Candles

You are welcome to use a florist of your choice for decorating the sanctuary. Floral arrangements may be taped or wired to the pews or other parts of sanctuary. They must be in watertight containers. The church is able to provide for the use of pew candelabras (a total of 12 candelabras) for an additional fee. You are responsible for supplying 8" taper candles in the color of your choice. Flowers that you do not wish to take with you may be donated to the church for its ministry with its homebound members.

Programs

If you wish to create a program, the minister will work on the content of it with you. **You are responsible for having it produced and making sure it is delivered to the church prior to the rehearsal.**

Parking

You may request the church to apply for parking restrictions on the day of your wedding. Under normal circumstances, the city of Baltimore will restrict parking immediately in front of the church to allow the couple to depart the church unobstructed by other vehicles. Should you desire it, the church will give you instructions for securing permission from the Mt. Royal School (3 blocks away) to park in their lot. **Please understand that the church has no parking facilities of its own, and cannot guarantee any parking whatsoever.**

Seating Capacity

The church can comfortably seat 500 people in the sanctuary. Depending on the size of the wedding, a minimum of two or four ushers is recommended.

Photographer

The photographer may take photographs during the processional and may take non-flash photographs from the balcony or the front door of the church immediately prior to the recessional. For the benefit of all, from the time the minister begins to speak through the benediction, photography of any kind is prohibited. The service may also be video taped as long as natural light is used and the camera is placed on a tripod and not moved during the service. Please have the photographer speak with the pastor prior to the ceremony.

Rice

Since the church doors empty out onto a city sidewalk, no rice or birdseed may be thrown. Rose petals or blown bubbles are welcome.

Church Receptions

The Assembly Room is available for your reception for an additional fee. You are responsible for securing a caterer. The space can accommodate approximately 100 people for a stand up buffet. All silver and plates must be supplied by the caterer.

The Day of the Wedding

On the day of the wedding, the church will be opened two hours prior to the scheduled starting time. The wedding itself will start on time. **If the wedding party is late, additional fees will be incurred.** If the wedding processional has not begun ten minutes after its scheduled starting time, a cash fee of \$50 will be imposed. Each additional ten minutes will incur an additional \$50 fee. **If the wedding party is 30 minutes late we cancel the ceremony.** Forty-five minutes following the conclusion of the service, the building will be secured. Any forgotten items should be picked up during normal business hours, M-F.

Next Steps

Couples who are ready to proceed with their wedding plans should forward the appropriate fees as soon as possible to secure a spot on the calendar. Before any wedding can be scheduled, it must be approved by the Session of the church at its monthly meeting.

Wedding License

The wedding license is due in the church office one week prior to the wedding service. Please note that the church is located in Baltimore City.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs

No smoking is allowed anywhere in the facilities. Also, the use of alcohol, drugs (other than medically prescribed), or tobacco in any form is not permitted in these facilities. Please make sure your guests are aware of this policy.

Wedding Fees

The Sanctuary (This fee is waived for members.)

\$1800

\$1300 rental fee (includes utilities)

\$500 refundable within 30 days following the wedding, less costs for damages. If damages are in excess, the user will be billed, accordingly.

The Pastor - \$250 fee counseling sessions, working with the couple to plan their service, answering questions, leading the rehearsal, and officiating at the wedding service.

The Organist - \$175 fee includes working with the couple to plan the repertoire for the wedding, and playing. Extra fees may apply for more elaborate arrangements. The Minister of Music has first right of refusal.

Church Representative/Consultant - \$200 fee includes being there for the rehearsal and wedding to keep things running smoothly, open and close for both rehearsal and wedding, coordinate time with the florist and photographer, make sure the heat/air is on calm jitters and get the wedding party down the aisle.

Custodial - \$100 fee includes cleaning up after the rehearsal and wedding.

Candles

Communion Table Candles – Free.

Pew Candelabras - \$100 rental fee – the couple will provide 8” tapers in the color of their choice.

Prayer Candles - \$100 for 250 candles.

Receptions

The Assembly Room of the church may be used for wedding receptions for an additional fee of \$400 which includes the additional sexton time and the use of stoves, ovens, and sinks. It does not include use of the dishwasher. All dinnerware and other dining products must be supplied by the lessee or the lessee’s caterer. Use of the church’s caterer is encouraged but not required.

Payment Schedule

A \$900 deposit (checks should be made out to the church) must be received before the sanctuary can be reserved for non-members.

If the wedding is cancelled prior to 90 days of the wedding date, 50% of the deposit will be returned. Cancellations after 90 days will yield no refund.

The remainder of the wedding fees are due in the church office one week prior to the wedding service. Separate checks (or cash) should be made out to the pastor, organist, church representative, and the custodian.

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