

Wedding and Covenant Services: Policies and Information

First United Church of Christ
300 Union Street, Northfield, Minnesota 55057
507/645-7532 or 507/645-4694
www.firstucc.org

Welcome!

You are about to enter into a joyful and solemn covenant,
and we are looking forward to being part of that important event in your life.

Our Congregation

First UCC is a spirited and diverse community where we worship God, pass along the faith, care for each other, and work at changing the world. Our 450 members come from a variety of religious backgrounds, and some have had no previous church experience at all.

We are committed to peace and justice, and we are proud to be an “Open and Affirming Congregation” that welcomes everyone who wishes to be part of our community regardless of gender, age, economic or marital status, race, physical or mental ability, cultural heritage, or sexual orientation. That means that we celebrate both traditional covenants (heterosexual marriage) and less traditional ones (for gay and lesbian couples).

Who We Serve

We welcome all couples who want to make their covenant vows in the context of a Christian worship service, with prayers, scripture readings, and blessings, usually accompanied by appropriate music. While we want to be sensitive to a variety of theological beliefs and customs, entirely secular services are usually not appropriate in our sanctuary.

We hope that you will join us for Sunday worship while you are preparing for your wedding or covenant service, so that you will know more about us and about our style of worship.

You do not have to be a member of our congregation to have your wedding or covenant service here, though we do prefer that one or both of you have been baptized. Divorced persons and persons of different religious backgrounds are welcome.

The First Steps

The first step in planning a service is to make an appointment with the minister (507/645-7532). At this first meeting you will have a chance to get acquainted, raise questions, and settle on dates for the service and rehearsal.

After you have seen the minister, we'll ask you to contact the church's Office Manager (church@firstucc.org or 507/645-7532) to fill out the paperwork related to reserving the church and paying the appropriate fees. Along with scheduling the wedding itself, remember to schedule time for rehearsal, decorating, picture taking, etc. Please be aware that the church building is used for many purposes and you may have to plan your decorating, etc., around other church activities. If you plans change, please notify the church office as soon as possible and reschedule.

Our Staff

Our minister presides at most of the weddings in our sanctuary. If the minister is not available for your service, s/he may be able to help you locate another minister. Please do not invite another clergy person to participate without first consulting the minister.

The church has a Wedding Hostess who assists at the rehearsal and the service. S/he works with couples to facilitate the practical details such as ushering, making seating arrangements, finding church equipment and supplies, and lining up the processional.

You may also meet other members of our church's staff: the office manager (for paperwork and fees) and the organist (for music).

Our Facility

The sanctuary in our historic building seats 300 people, with the possibility of an additional 50 folding chairs if needed. The pews are arranged in a semi-circle with a center aisle and several side aisles. A magnificent pipe organ and a state-of-the-art sound system are available. The building is not air-conditioned, and even with the ceiling fans, it can be very warm on hot days.

Please be aware that both alcohol and firearms are prohibited on the church premises. A fragrance free area is available for guests with allergies to scented personal products and other chemical sensitivities.

Our front entry hall is spacious enough for a guest book table or receiving line, and Sunday School rooms are available for dressing rooms for the service participants. An elevator serves all levels of the building, and the main floor rest rooms are handicapped accessible.

Our nursery is available for childcare for those too young to be included in the service. We require that you provide at least one (preferably two) adults (over 18 years old) to supervise children in the nursery, and that you leave the nursery in the condition that you found it.

Furnishings

We have tables, flower stands, candelabras, and other furnishings that are available by request. You will need to provide candles, flowers, and other decorations, as well as grape juice if communion is served during the ceremony.

Reservations and Fees

After you have spoken with the church office and/or the Minister (see following), we will ask you to contact the church's office manager (church@firstucc.org or 507-645-7532) to fill out the paperwork for reserving the church and paying the appropriate fees. Reservations are not guaranteed until the fees are paid.

Along with scheduling the wedding ceremony, remember to schedule time for rehearsal, decorating, picture taking, and the like. Please be aware that the church building is used for many purposes and you may need to plan your decorating and photos around church activities. If your plans change, please notify the church office as soon as possible and reschedule.

Wedding Planners

A church wedding is a religious service planned and directed by the minister or pastor who is presiding, not by a wedding planner or family member.

If you are using a wedding planner, please check your plans with the minister and church Wedding Hostess before the rehearsal to be sure there will not be any confusion. The presence of the church's Wedding Hostess is still required.

Weddings Conducted by Visiting Minister or Pastor

If you have chosen to have another minister or pastor conduct your wedding, please call the church office. We will verify the arrangements with the guest minister or pastor, and give him/her additional information about the church.

The visiting Minister or Pastor will be responsible for meeting with you, providing pre-marital counseling, planning the service, signing the marriage certificate (if appropriate), and any follow-up.

You and the guest minister will also need to be in contact with our Wedding Hostess. We encourage you to meet with her at least two weeks before the rehearsal to clarify plans for the service.

Please note that if you have a visiting minister or pastor, the presence of the church's Wedding Hostess is still required.

Weddings Conducted by our Minister

The first step in planning a service with our minister is to make an appointment with him/her. At this first meeting you will have a chance to get acquainted, raise questions, and settle on dates for the service and rehearsal.

Preparation Conferences

You will meet with the minister at least two (and usually three) times before your wedding or covenant service. These conferences have several purposes:

- for the minister to get to know you better, so that your service will be more personal.
- for you to reflect together on the strengths and challenges in your relationship, especially those that might get in the way of your keeping your covenant promises.
- to plan the service itself.

During these conferences, either you or the minister may decide that more sessions are needed, or that a referral for further counseling is in order.

Planning the Service

Covenant services can be as elaborate as a complete Sunday service, or as simple as the recitation of vows to each other. Most couples choose something in between those two extremes, but every service requires careful thought and planning.

You are welcome to participate in that planning as much as or as little as you prefer. Some couples choose their own readings, write their own vows, and make suggestions for other parts of the service; the minister is always glad to provide suggestions or examples. Other couples opt to leave those choices to the minister.

Readings: There are usually two or three readings included in the service, at least one of which is from the Bible. You may want to choose something meaningful in your relationship, or something that portrays your hopes for the future.

Music: Our organist, Theo Wee, will meet with you regarding the selection of music for your service, including suggestions for vocal and/or instrumental music if you wish. Please contact her at least two months in advance to confirm her availability. If she is not available, she will suggest a capable substitute. If you want to have someone else serve as an organist, please discuss this with the organist before inviting someone else to play. She can also help you locate other musicians (vocal or instrumental).

Sound System: The church has a basic sound system with a wireless microphone for the minister and a microphone on a stand for readers; this is set up by the Wedding Hostess. If you have other sound system needs (mikes for vocal or instrumental musicians, recording the service, playing recorded music, etc.), we require the presence of a church sound technician which requires an additional fee. The technician does not usually allow non-church equipment to be wired into the system.

Sanctuary Lighting: Our sanctuary has several preset lighting schemes; the Minister or Wedding Hostess can help you to choose the appropriate one. Please do not make any other changes in the lighting controls.

Vows: Most couples choose traditional words for these vows, but if you would like to write your own, please discuss them with the minister during your conferences.

Communion: We invite you to consider celebrating Holy Communion as part of your service, and we will be glad to discuss what that means and how it might be done. You must provide the grape juice.

Attendants: It is traditional to have at least two attendants, but you may have as many or as few people “stand up with you” as you prefer. You are welcome to invite people of any age to be part of the service, but please remember that very young children are sometimes unpredictable.

Children: If either of you have children, be sure to talk with the minister about the most appropriate ways for them to be included in the service.

Ushers: It is very helpful to have at least two ushers who are not otherwise participating in the service. For large services, plan on one usher for every 75 persons attending. Not only do they help seat the guests, they take care of several other important duties. Ushers will be trained by the Wedding Hostess.

Programs: You are welcome to prepare a program, listing the order of service and the names of the participants.

Decorations: You are welcome to decorate the church for your service, using flowers or other appropriate materials. Please do not damage our building or furnishings – so no nails, thumbtacks, or duct tape! We also ask that you use no confetti, rice or birdseed. Only artificial flowers may be strewn down the aisle, as real flowers stain the carpet.

Candles: We will supply you with two 7- candle Candelabras and/or a wooden unity candle stand. You must provide your own dripless candles.

Legal Requirements: Couples who desire to be legally married must present a valid marriage license to the minister at the rehearsal.

The Week Before the Wedding

During the week before the service, you will need to check out a key from the church Office Manager. Office hours are usually 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Tuesday through Friday. You are responsible for unlocking and locking the building for decorating, delivery of flowers, photography, and such. You will need to arrange to pick up a key, which requires a \$50 refundable deposit. The Wedding Hostess will lock up after the service. Please return the key before leaving the facility on the day of your wedding.

The Rehearsal

The rehearsal is generally scheduled for the evening before the service. It is important for all participants (including family members) to be present. Unless the service is especially complex, the rehearsal usually lasts 45-60 minutes.

The Minister will direct the rehearsal. The Wedding Hostess will be present to help iron out details and otherwise prepare for the service itself, prepare the ushers for their duties, and be responsible for the set-up and operation of our sound system.

Be sure to bring to the rehearsal:

- the marriage license, if appropriate
- fees for the organist and honorarium for the minister (in separate envelopes)
- any recorded music (tape or CD) that you and the music minister have agreed upon
- copies of the program (if used) for the minister, organist and sound technician.

Just Before the Service

You are welcome to use Sunday School classrooms on the middle level of the building as dressing rooms. Please be careful with cosmetics, as they can stain tables, walls, or carpets.

We invite you to use the church and its gardens for photography. **Please plan for the picture-taking to be completed at least 45 minutes before the service begins.** Check in advance with the wedding hostess if you wish to take pictures following the service.

We encourage you to provide simple refreshments for participants before the service – but please, no red, orange, or grape drinks. Please be sure all leftovers are discarded or taken home. You may want to assign a friend or relative to take care of this detail.

During the Service

You may have flash photos taken during the entrance and exit (processional and recessional), but not during the rest of the service. Videotaping is permitted, but the camera must remain stationary and not require any special lighting.

After the service

Please be sure to arrange for someone to pick up all of your belongings before going to the reception.

Remember to check for

- flowers (If you wish to leave a bouquet for the altar feel free to do so.)
- flower boxes or wrappers
- candles (If you have no use for the candles you can set them in the kitchen and the church will reuse them for church functions.)
- aisle runner
- clothing
- food or drinks
- mirrors, hairdryers, makeup
- leftover programs.

You can return the church key to the wedding hostess or put it in the box by the office door. Your deposit check will be mailed to you upon receipt of the key.

How Much Does it Cost? - see appendix A

A Final Word

We enjoy ministering to our community by providing a sacred place in which covenant services and marriages may be celebrated and blessed. We look forward to serving you, and pray for God's blessings on your vows and your long lives together.

Notes

APPENDIX A

Fee Schedule

All fees are nonrefundable, are set by the church Board of Trustees, and are meant to defray church expenses.

If they represent a hardship, please consult with the minister, who will make special arrangements to be sure that no one is turned away for financial reasons alone.

Fees paid directly to First UCC (due when the reservation is made)

Basic Fee:

Members \$50.00
Nonmembers \$250.00

Wedding Hostess Fee:

First UCC Minister \$100.00
Visiting Minister \$150.00

Custodian Fee: \$75.00

Sound Technician Fee:

Required for sound system use beyond the basics \$75.00

Damage Deposit: \$100.00

This is returned in full if there is no damage to the building and everything is returned to the condition it was found. If there is a larger than usual cleaning required, that fee will be deducted from this amount.

Fees Paid directly to others (due at the rehearsal):

Organist \$200.00
(includes consultation, rehearsal, and service)

Other Musicians \$ _____
As negotiated with them

Minister's Honorarium \$250.00-\$300.00

An honorarium to the minister is traditional and appropriate. The amount of the honorarium should reflect the minister's 15-20 hours of time spent on each service (preparation, conferences, writing the service, presiding at the rehearsal and service), the financial means of the couple, and any special circumstances (such as travel).

Miscellaneous

Key deposit \$50.00 (this will be refunded upon return of the key)



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