

Marriage Blessing Booklet

First Presbyterian Church
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“God is love, and those who abide in love, abide in God, and God abides in them.” ~ 1 John 4:16

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to First Presbyterian Church! We celebrate with you your decision to go beyond marriage as a legal contract with the state and to make a covenant with the Lord your God and the church. To ask for God’s blessing on your marriage is a witness to your love of Jesus Christ and your invocation of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen the bonds of love between you.

This booklet assists couples with marriage blessing arrangements at First Presbyterian Church, (hereafter referred to as FPC) Iowa City, Iowa. Its intent is to help every couple and their families plan a joyous occasion. As with all services in a Presbyterian Church, these procedures have been approved by our Session (the official board). We ask you to read these pages carefully. Some items will not apply to your marriage blessing; questions are welcome.

Marriage blessings in our church are acts of Christian worship. The church, dedicated to the praise of Almighty God, affirms the sacredness of the marriage covenant.

After meeting the criteria laid out in this booklet and receiving a copy of the signed marriage license from the state of Iowa, couples are deemed ready to receive and celebrate the marriage blessing of Jesus Christ’s church. The legal aspects of marriage are arranged and performed through the county courthouse before the marriage blessing service.

THE COORDINATORS

Every couple planning a marriage blessing through FPC is required to utilize our coordinators. At your first meeting with the coordinators you will have an opportunity to discuss the many details of the marriage blessing. These include: size of party, reception plans if you want to use our fellowship hall, sanctuary decorations, ushering, use of dressing rooms, rehearsal plans, photography & videography, etc. The coordinators will have a checklist of these and other items and will include your personal expectations for the marriage blessing. Coordinators are members of FPC who assist the couple in planning their marriage blessing in accordance with these policies. Both coordinators will be present at the rehearsal, prior to and throughout the service. It is necessary to employ both coordinators to assure continuity and fluidity in the event that one coordinator becomes unavailable due to illness or injury.

THE CHURCH STAFF

The staff of FPC is glad to be of help in planning your service. It is advisable to plan as far ahead as possible when arranging a marriage blessing because of schedules for the sanctuary and other rooms, and for the staff members who are to take part.

Pastor – Rev. Dr. Samuel Massey at pastorsam@mchsi.com

Organist – interim period, organist suggestions will be provided upon request.

Office Manager - Tammy Foster at fpcchurch@mchsi.com

Church Sexton - Gerald Hill at gerhill@aol.com

Marriage Blessing Coordinators – Our coordinators will contact you after you have contracted your date with the Office Manager.

Director of Music and Liturgical Arts—Darlene Bergman at fpcmusic@mchsi.com

CLERGY AND COUNSELLING

Normally the FPC pastor performs marriage blessings at FPC. Other Presbyterian Church (USA) clergy or clergy of corresponding denominations may be invited to perform a marriage blessing or to assist the FPC pastor if they are willing to abide by these guidelines. Invitations to clergy to participate in or perform a marriage blessing must be approved by the pastor of FPC, and the pastor will extend the invitation to the clergy if the way be clear, in keeping with customary courtesy among the clergy.

In accordance with Presbyterian Church (USA) governance, all persons receiving a marriage blessing at FPC receive counseling. Normally, the FPC pastor confines his portion of this counseling to the Biblical, theological and ecclesiastical understandings of the marriage covenant, which includes preparation of the marriage blessing as an act of worship. In addition, couples are advised strongly to seek professional faith-based coursework or counseling on the emotional and familial dynamics of the covenant of marriage. The pastor can assist couples in obtaining adequate professional assistance in this regard. It is recommended that all counseling be completed early in the planning process.

In addition to counseling, normally all non-member couples are required to complete the membership classes of FPC in order to understand the faith, worship, and work of FPC, although they are not required to join. Membership is defined as being active members or the children of active members. By prior arrangement, if one member of the couple is unavailable when the course is offered, that person may meet with the pastor individually to meet this requirement.

SCHEDULING YOUR MARRIAGE BLESSING SERVICE

Before any public announcements are made, scheduling should be cleared with the pastor, organist, and the church office. You will need to fill out a contract and return it to the church office. It is important that you indicate the time of day, because there are sometimes two marriage blessings arranged for the same date. Saturday marriage blessings are scheduled up to, but no later than 6:00 p.m. There is a \$100 deposit, refundable if notice of cancellation is given at least 30 days prior to the marriage blessing date. This must be submitted to the church with the contract before the marriage blessing can be confirmed on the church calendar.

ABOUT THE MARRIAGE BLESSING SERVICE

The minister will discuss the marriage blessing with you and advise you as to any additions to the service (such as scripture readings) you may desire. In dress and manner, the party should remember that the marriage blessing occurs in a church and is an act of worship.

If a flower girl or ring bearer is to take part in the marriage blessing, she/he should be old enough to carry out these duties. Children vary in their abilities and should be chosen carefully.

The number of ushers needed for your marriage blessing depends on the number of guests attending. The coordinators will help you estimate attendance.

Birdseed may be thrown outside the building only. (For ecological reasons, we no longer use rice or release balloons.) **Potpourri, dried flowers and confetti are not allowed** due to difficulty in cleaning.

Please inform the coordinators if you want to use the church nursery during your marriage blessing. The party will need to provide sitters and supervision for all children and FPC is not liable for injury or misconduct.

Our church and grounds are smoke-free / alcohol-free / drug-free. Smoking, alcohol* and drugs are absolutely prohibited outside and inside the church.

**Consumption of alcoholic beverages or illegal substances by any member of the marriage blessing party on the day of the rehearsal or service is reason for cancellation of the service. There is one exception; couples who have their reception in Ryerson Fellowship Hall may obtain special permission from the church's Worship Council for a champagne toast.*

MUSIC FOR YOUR MARRIAGE BLESSING

Marriage blessing music at FPC should embody the same high standards applied to the music generally chosen for worship. The Office of Worship of the Presbyterian Church (USA) maintains a list of suggested music and we have copies available for your use. **Music should focus upon God and emphasize the faith of the Christian community rather than romantic love or sentimentality.** Any questions should be addressed to the coordinators and/or the Director of Music and Liturgical Arts.

FPC's approved organist will play for all marriage blessings in our church. This ensures having a competent musician and makes possible the best music arrangements for your marriage blessing. If the FPC organist is unable to play because of schedule conflicts, he/she will secure another competent musician, in consultation with the couple. If you wish to hire a different organist, this must be approved by the Director of Music and Liturgical Arts. The party should discuss the selection of music with the organist as early as possible. All music is to be approved by the FPC organist 6 weeks prior to the marriage blessing.

If you wish to use piano in addition to/replacement of the organ, there will be an extra cartage fee of \$100. The piano can be moved by FPC approved personnel only. If you wish the piano tuned (at your expense), the FPC approved piano technician is John Bixler at 319-331-6164 or jbix@inav.net.

Guest instrumentalists and vocalists can be a wonderful addition to your marriage blessing. **However, all music to be used must have the approval of the Director of Music and Liturgical Arts.** The soloist, if there is one, is usually chosen by the couple. If you do not know of a soloist and wish to have one, the coordinators can offer recommendations. Copies of the solo music shall be provided in the proper keys. Remember, photocopies are subject to copyright laws and are therefore not acceptable. Solo rehearsals are arranged with the approved organist in advance, apart from the regular rehearsal. The couple is responsible for contacting the organist to determine the time and fee.

THE MARRIAGE BLESSING REHEARSAL

A rehearsal with the pastor and organist is scheduled for the day preceding the marriage blessing at a time to be arranged. Out of courtesy for all those involved in the rehearsal and because of other events planned for the evening, it is important to be on time. The coordinators will be present to assist at the rehearsal and at the marriage blessing. All members of the marriage blessing party are expected to be present and on time. Soloists will rehearse with the organist at a separate time prior to or following the rehearsal as previously arranged by the couple. The processional and recessional procedures are rehearsed with music. Selected sections of the marriage blessing liturgy, the ring ceremony, ushering procedures, lighting of candles, etc., are reviewed at the rehearsal. The sequence of key participants to enter during the processional, designation of ushers to usher in mothers and to care for lighting of candles, etc., should be determined prior to the rehearsal. The pastor will direct the rehearsal, in collaboration with the coordinators.

OTHER MARRIAGE BLESSING ARRANGEMENTS

Facility and Decorations

The seating capacity of our Sanctuary is 360 on the floor (main level). The balcony will seat an additional 75 people.

The communion table remains in its usual location for marriage blessings as a reminder of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The unity candle and small flower arrangements may be placed on the communion table.

FPC has two brass candle stands. You may choose to use additional decorations on the stands, such as bows, or use candle stands provided by your florist. Candle stands are placed only in the chancel area.

Decorations must be designed so they do not impede access to doors or to the entrance, exit and movement of the marriage blessing party. No glitter should be used on any decorations, flowers or dresses, as this is extremely difficult to clean up.

A kneeling bench is available.

PHOTOGRAPHS, VIDEO TAPES, SOUND TECHNOLOGY

Ushers are asked to advise guests carrying cameras that no photographs of any kind may be taken in the sanctuary during the marriage blessing. If you use a bulletin, please indicate the following: "Guests may take pictures or videotape without flash during the processional and recessional only. No photographs may be taken during the marriage blessing."

Videotaping by the official videographer is allowed from the balcony providing no lights are used and equipment is quiet. A small video camera on a tripod may be placed off the side of the chancel to take close-ups, but no operator is permitted. Remember, this is a religious service; therefore we do not allow videographers to be in the chancel or front of the church.

The official photographer may take flash photographs at the back of the sanctuary at the time of the processional and the recessional. **The photographer must stay out of the aisle and not be farther forward than the eighth pew from the back to take these pictures.** It is the responsibility of the couple to inform their photographer of these guidelines.

All pre-marriage blessing photographing in the chancel must be completed by 45 minutes preceding the scheduled time for the ceremony.

If you wish to use sound amplification, this equipment can be **operated only by one of the church's sound operators.** This person will be at the rehearsal and marriage blessing to set up microphones and run the P. A. system. Please make arrangements through the coordinators in advance for this service.

GIFTS BROUGHT TO THE CHURCH

The couple's families assume responsibility for all gifts brought to the church or reception. Remember that the church is open, as a public building. Normal precautions should be taken to protect gifts. The church is not responsible for lost or stolen items.

Persons should be designated to take charge of gifts before and during the ceremony and to take all gifts from the church building after the marriage blessing. Participants dressing at the church should also secure personal effects during the marriage blessing.

PROGRAMS

The church is not responsible for printing your programs or bulletins for the marriage blessing. Because the marriage blessing is a worship service, some couples want to include an order of worship in their programs or bulletins. If you are including the order of worship in your bulletin or program, please consult with the pastor about the order of worship and where to put any optional items such as readings or solos.

RECEPTIONS

Presbyterian Women of FPC serve receptions held in Ryerson Fellowship Hall if a church reception is requested. Special permission can be given to a couple who wishes to hold their reception in the fellowship hall and have a champagne toast. Consult with the coordinators about these arrangements.

MARRIAGE LICENSE

The State of Iowa requires that you have a marriage license. This is obtained from the county courthouse. For more information call the Johnson County Clerk of Court, 356-6060. FPC requires that couples have a signed legal State of Iowa marriage license prior to the marriage blessing at the church. A copy of the signed license must be presented to the pastor and the coordinators by the Wednesday prior to the marriage blessing, along with the fees.

CHURCH MARRIAGE BLESSING FEES:

Checks should be made out separately and received by the office manager by the Wednesday prior to the rehearsal. (Normally all persons and services listed below are required for a marriage blessing at FPC—soloists are the exception.)

For use of the church building (sanctuary and 2 dressing rooms):\$300 (includes deposit of \$100).

Marriage Blessing Coordinators: \$200 each.

Pastor: Suggested minimum amount is \$200 (for rehearsal and marriage blessing).

Organist/Pianist: \$200 for rehearsal and marriage blessing only. If extra time spent rehearsing with soloists or instrumentalists is desired, contact the organist to negotiate the exact fee.

Soloist/Other Music: Couples will arrange privately with musicians. The coordinators may have recommendations if needed.

Audio Engineer: \$100.

Sexton: There is a \$100 charge for cleaning the sanctuary. If a reception is held in the fellowship hall, there is an additional \$100 Sexton charge for cleaning. An additional sexton fee may be requested if further cleanup is required.

subject to change without notice

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