

**Guidelines for a
Christian Wedding Service at
Grace Lutheran Church
Menno, South Dakota**



*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

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Table of Contents

Lutheran Beliefs on Marriage	3
Book Your Wedding Date	5
Wedding Dates and Times	5
Premarital Counseling	5
Premarital Meetings.....	5
Living Together Before Marriage	5
Use of Facilities	7
Building Use Policy	7
General Information	6
Authority.....	6
Qualifying Conditions.....	6
Wedding Worship Service	8
Worship.....	8
Music in the Service/Soloists.....	8
Photographs/Video	8
Conduct	8
Reception.....	8

Congratulations on your engagement! May God richly bless your plans!

At Grace Lutheran, we would like to assist you in planning a Christian wedding. This is your wedding and the pastor and the members of Grace Lutheran Church want to help you make this day both memorable and meaningful.

This booklet is designed to assist you in planning a Christian wedding day, the rehearsal, and your reception. It is also intended to better inform you of what is expected of you and what you can expect from the church.

Lutheran Beliefs on Marriage

Your wedding is an opportunity to witness to others your commitment to Jesus Christ and to share your faith with those you love. We provide this booklet so you will better understand the guidelines for weddings at Grace Lutheran Church.

At Grace Lutheran Church we believe that it is our responsibility before God to help people form Christian marriages, not just to perform Christian weddings. It is that understanding that shapes our wedding guidelines.

Because God has ordained marriage and defined it as the covenant relationship between a man, a woman, and Himself, Grace Lutheran Church will only recognize marriages between a biological man and a biological woman. Finally, the facilities and property of Grace Lutheran Church shall only be used to host weddings between one man and one woman.

Those who do not intend to form a marriage, and build a home where Jesus Christ is Lord, would be better served by secular officials such as judges or other representatives of the state who have the legal authority to perform weddings.

Grace Lutheran Church reserves the right to accept or deny any applicants who seek to utilize or reserve Grace Lutheran Church facilities. Permission that is granted to applicant(s) to utilize Grace Lutheran Church facilities or property shall not be transferred or passed to any alternative individual, group, or organization without the express written permission of Grace Lutheran Church.

Taken directly from the *Common Confession* of the North American Lutheran Church and Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ:

We believe and confess that the marriage of male and female is an institution created and blessed by God. From marriage, God forms families to serve as the building blocks of all human civilization and community. We teach and practice that sexual activity belongs exclusively within the biblical boundaries of a faithful marriage between one man and one woman.

A church wedding is first of all a Christian wedding, asking Christ's blessing upon the marriage. It's not just a social event: rather, it is first a spiritual worship service of the church, in which the pastor and congregation unite in prayer with the wedding couple to share their joy. It is also a legal act in which the pastor acts as an official of the state.

The regulations and guidelines for a Christian wedding shall always be those of the Church (in accordance with NALC beliefs and guidelines) and the State in which the wedding will occur.

Should the beliefs and/or guidelines contradict one another, these congregations will always default to the policies of the North American Lutheran Church (NALC).

Therefore, the music, vows, readings, prayers, and sermon are to reflect the Christian faith, and must be approved by Grace Lutheran Church and agree with the traditions of the North American Lutheran Church. The setting of the church and the ceremony are to communicate that marriage was created by God and that God promises to bless it.

The Order for a Wedding (ReClaim p. 102) is a service of the church, just as Holy Communion, Baptism, Ordination, and the Burial of the Dead are services of the church.

The church, therefore, has both the right and the responsibility to oversee the marriage service so that it is conducted in accordance with the provisions of the authorized liturgy of the NALC. The marriage service is not the private option of the couple being married, their families, friends, or professional wedding counselors.

The social aspect of the marriage is to be kept separate from the marriage ceremony. This is to take place at the reception or later. The pastor will marry couples who are members of this congregation or of another Lutheran congregation. The pastor may marry couples if only one is a member of the Lutheran church and the other is a member of another Christian church, but the pastor is bound by Scripture not to marry couples if either one is not a Christian (2 Corinthians 6:14-15; 1 Corinthians 12).

You have asked for the privilege of being married in the church. You can be married elsewhere and without a Christian ceremony. Pastors are not the only persons licensed to perform marriage ceremonies. However, your desire to be married in a Lutheran congregation by a Lutheran pastor with a Lutheran marriage rite (worship service) indicates you want your wedding and your marriage to be Christian—built on Christ.

Getting Started

Book Your Wedding Date

The most important first step is to call the pastor at the church office (605-387-5241) to schedule your wedding date.

Wedding Dates and Times

Regularly scheduled functions of the congregation or related organizations take precedence in the use of the church property unless other arrangements are made.

Premarital Counseling

The pastor is happy to provide premarital counseling to couples who wish to pursue it. It involves an online assessment for each person (bride and groom) to fill out. The cost is \$35 and the couple can opt to pay for it by credit card when they log in to their assessment online. Currently, the curriculum used is PREPARE/ENRICH. Visit www.prepare-enrich.com for more information. *Premarital counseling is NOT required in order for couples to get married in Grace Lutheran.*

Premarital Meetings

Currently the pastor does require pre-marital meetings—a minimum of three—to iron out the details and plans of the wedding worship service and to stay connected to the couple leading up to the wedding day. During these meetings, we will discuss various aspects of Christian living, your relationship, marriage, common problems of marriage, the worship services, and other practical questions.

Living Together Before Marriage

The key to understanding what is morally wrong with living together lies in its contrast to the biblical understanding of the meaning of marriage as the One Flesh union between a man and woman, portrayed in Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5. In Ephesians, Paul identifies marriage as an icon of our relationship with God. An icon in Microsoft language is "clicked on" to open the window so we can see the reality behind it. The biblical model that God intends for us in building a life-long union is an icon that reveals the nature of the faithfulness of God in relationship to his faithful people. What marriage is, living together is not.

Luther wrote of marriage,

A Sacrament is a sacred sign of something spiritual, holy, heavenly, and eternal, just as the water of baptism, when the priest pours it over the child, means that the holy, divine, eternal grace is poured into the soul and body of that child at the same time, and cleanses him from his original sin.... In the same way the estate of marriage is a sacrament.

It is an outward and spiritual sign of the greatest, holiest, worthiest, and noblest thing that has ever existed or ever will exist:[namely] the union of the divine and human natures in Christ. The holy apostle Paul says that as man and wife united in the estate of matrimony are two in one flesh, so God and man are united in the one person Christ, and so Christ and Christendom are one body. It is indeed a wonderful sacrament, as Paul says [Eph.5:32], that the estate of marriage truly signifies such a great reality.

Ephesians 5:31-33

³¹ *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* ³² *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

³³ *However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

Suggested Reading: *The Ring Makes All the Difference: The Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation and the Strong Benefits of Marriage* by Glenn T. Stanton

General Information

Authority

The pastor of Grace Lutheran Church is given the responsibility of ordering and conducting the services of the church to which he/she is called to serve. This responsibility applies equally to the occasional services (weddings, funerals, etc.) as well as to the regularly scheduled worship services of the congregation.

As the called representative of the congregation and responsible for holding worship services which are in keeping with our Christian and Lutheran traditions, the pastor in consultation with the church council, is the final authority on all matters pertaining to the wedding service. Couples should not expect or ask for personal whims to replace the regular rules of worship.

Qualifying Conditions

The purpose of the Christian Church is to proclaim forgiveness. However, where persons do not exhibit repentance for sin, forgiveness cannot be assured. Accordingly, where mistakes have been made by the couple and repentance is indicated, the marriage will not be hindered. Divorces and pregnancies outside of marriage will be candidly discussed with the pastor before permission is granted for a church wedding, as will the sin of living together. These actions do not automatically result in the pastor turning down the request for a wedding. After repentance, confession of sin, and absolution (God's love, grace and forgiveness) can be proclaimed, then the marriage of the couple can begin with a clean slate.

Use of Facilities

Below is the church use policy for Grace Lutheran that goes into further detail about cost for using the facilities, etc. There are rooms that can be made available for dressing prior to the wedding. If you plan to utilize the Sunday school rooms for dressing, please appoint someone to check after the wedding for clothing, cameras, or litter, and to turn off the lights.

The social hall and/or kitchen are available for you to use as well.

Building Use Policy:

For Members/Former Members:

There is no charge for the use of the church for church members or former members. However, a donation may be given. We suggest a gift of \$75 to the janitor for cleaning the sanctuary, and \$75 for cleaning the social hall.

For Non-Members (Includes current in-active members):

For use of the sanctuary, the cost is \$150 plus \$75 for the janitor for a total of \$225.

For use of the social hall, the cost is \$150 plus \$75 for the janitor for a total of \$225.

For using both then, the cost will be \$450.

Use of Alcohol and Tobacco

No alcohol should be brought onto the property or into the building of Grace Lutheran Church. Grace is a “smoke-free” facility and “drug-free” zone. Violators will be asked to leave the property.

Fees for Organist, Pastor and Soloist—for both members and non-members

Organist: A suggested fee of \$100 should be paid to the organist for providing music for the ceremony.

Pastor: Monies given to the pastor are to be considered a “gratuity”—that is a way of showing your appreciation, and are at the discretion of the family. For members, a suggested amount for gratuity is \$125. **Non-members must** pay \$175 to the pastor for the pastor’s services and time spent to prepare adequately for the ceremony.

Wedding Worship Service

Worship

The wedding is a worship service conducted in the name of Christ and in his presence. You have chosen a Christian wedding, distinctly different from a civil wedding. It should in every respect be worshipful, inviting the presence of Christ himself, joyful, yet reverent. No decorations will be permitted to sit on the altar. The reason for this is that for Lutherans, the altar serves as the main focal point, where God paid the ultimate sacrifice through blood shed by Jesus Christ. Therefore, the altar shall not be turned into a mere piece of furniture, but rather, shall be kept holy in a respectable manner.

Music in the Service/Soloists

All music must be approved by the pastor or council ahead of time.

Photographs/Video

No flash pictures may be taken in the sanctuary or chancel area once the procession begins or during worship. Photographers and videographers may not climb over or stand on church furnishings, enter behind the communion/altar rail, or take it upon themselves to rearrange things for their convenience. We also expect that no discarded materials be thrown onto the floor or pews.

Arrangements for posed photos before the service can be made if requested. Please ask your friends and relatives not to take photos during the service. Pictures of the entry of the bridal party as they start down the aisle is permissible. Please keep the pastor informed of your plans.

The use of video equipment, with the camera appropriately placed, is acceptable.

Conduct

Marriage is a very joyful experience. It is also a serious one. You and your wedding party are requested not to attend the rehearsal or the wedding service under the influence of substances such as drugs and/or alcohol. Those failing to abide by this will be asked to leave the church property.

Reception

If the reception is to be held in the social hall, the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the persons to be contacted may be obtained by calling the church office (605-387-5241) or contacting the pastor.

All rules and suggestions are given so that you may have a beautiful and sacred service for the beginning of your married life.