

United Church of Christ, First Congregational

11 West Main Street, Norwich, New York 13815
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WEDDING POLICY

May 2008, May 2014 addendum attached. Revised April 2025

"A Christian marriage ceremony is a service of worship offered to God. The essence of marriage is a covenanted commitment that has its foundation in the faithfulness of God's love. The marriage ceremony is the glad occasion on which the couple unite as partners in the mutual exchange of covenant promises. The minister acts as an official representative of the church and gives the marriage the church's blessing. The gathered congregation of family and/or friends joins in affirming the marriage and is offering support and thanksgiving for the new family."
[UCC Order for Marriage]

The couple must meet with the Pastor before he will agree to perform the wedding. Age, maturity, denominational affiliation, length of relationship, previous marriages, family situation, etc. are all considerations in deciding whether a church wedding is appropriate, but none of these factors alone is an automatic impediment.

MEETING WITH THE PASTOR

It is expected that the couple will meet with the pastor for at least three sessions to discuss personal and family background, wedding details, future plans, the meaning of marriage, etc. A follow-up of the visit with the pastor about six months after the wedding is recommended.

SCHEDULING

Please contact the Parish Coordinator to check the availability of your wedding date with the church calendar and the Pastor.

The church schedules a total of three hours of building use for wedding ceremonies. Please plan to abide with these guidelines unless prior arrangements are made.

Arrangements can be made for the wedding party to dress at the church before the wedding service. Please notify the Parish Coordinator at least one week prior to the rehearsal day.

CEREMONY

While the wedding is a religious ceremony, ample consideration is given so that the wedding may be a personal, unique, and special celebration for the couple. The couple is invited to share in the writing and planning of the service.

Family and friends may be invited to share in the leadership of the service with readings or prayers.

Bulletins for the service including listing of participants can be arranged through the church office. A variety of bulletin covers are available. Contact the Parish Coordinator at least one month in advance.

WEDDING REHEARSAL

Generally a rehearsal is held on the night before the wedding. Promptness is essential. The rehearsal will be approximately forty-five minutes long. The time is arranged in consultation with the pastor.

MUSIC

Normally, the church organist will play for the wedding and should be contacted a minimum of one month prior to the wedding. Under special circumstances another trained organist (e.g. a relative or friend of the family) may play under the supervision of our organist. The church organist will be available to meet with the guest organist to provide an orientation to the instrument. A \$50 courtesy fee will be charged. A wide and splendid variety of wedding music is available in the sacred liturgical repertoire. The organist will share different suggestions and possibilities, and will be responsible for providing such sheet music. Popular and contemporary music is possible. The organist will decide whether such music is adaptable and appropriate for the organ, and the couple will be responsible for providing such sheet music. Arrangements for other types of music can be made (e.g. soloists, piano, guitar) in consultation with the pastor and the organist. The church can provide the names of soloists, if so desired.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Because the wedding is a religious and sacred ceremony, once the service has begun, no pictures may be taken, except for the official photographer who may take pictures without a flash or from the choir loft.

The wedding party may gather before or after the wedding to pose for pictures. Videotaping is allowed from the choir loft and must be cleared through the pastor.

DECORATIONS

For safety and insurance reasons, all decorations used in the wedding must be approved by the church office at least one month in advance. Decorations may not be attached to pews, other furniture or parts of the building with nails, tacks, or other substances that will mar the finish.

MISCELLANEOUS

The church is available without set charge for receptions. Maximum capacity is one hundred for a sit down dinner in the Founders Room, one hundred and fifty for a light buffet or refreshments. The couple is responsible for arranging catering, although a church group may provide these services if requested.

The use of confetti or rice is not permitted anywhere within the church or on church grounds. Birdseed may be used outside of the church. Smoking is not permitted within the church. Alcoholic beverages are not permitted within the church or on church grounds. Guests or members of the wedding party under the influence will be asked to leave the premises.

HONORARIA

Payable the day of the wedding:

Pastor - \$175

Organist (if used) - \$150

-additional \$25 for preparation and rehearsal with a soloist.

-additional \$50 courtesy fee if meeting with a guest organist

Soloist fee (if provided by the church) \$50

Custodian (if ceremony is at the church) - \$100

Building Fee (for non-members only) - \$200 payable to United Church of Christ

Financial adjustments can be made, and no one is refused for inability to pay. Honoraria for smaller weddings or weddings in the chapel will be adjusted accordingly.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

PARISH COORDINATOR: Cheri Oakley - 334-3434 (church)

ADDITION TO WEDDING POLICY APPROVED BY BOARD OF DEACONS 5/20/14.

This is a church. Therefore, a blessing of a marriage can be performed with no involvement on the part of the state.

However, most of the time a couple does wish to have a legal aspect to their wedding.

Therefore, it needs to be noted that even though a wedding ceremony is being celebrated at the United Church of Christ, First Congregational and that ceremony is presided over by a pastor, aspects of that marriage are governed by the laws of the state. Therefore, in the case of the legal procedure, the couple will need to get a license. A license is not valid until 24 hours after it has been issued. It remains valid for 60 days.

When that license is presented to the pastor (something which should happen at the wedding rehearsal, but certainly before the ceremony begins) the pastor at that point becomes an officer of the state for the ceremony. If the license is not presented the pastor can bless the union but cannot act on behalf of the state. Therefore if, for whatever reason, there is no license, the religious ceremony can happen but the pastor will make it known to those gathered to see the ceremony that what is happening does not represent a marriage in the eyes of the state. The pastor will also make it known to those present why the ceremony does not meet the standards for a legal marriage in the eyes of the state.

As an officer of the state, it is against the law for the pastor to return the license to the couple. After the ceremony the pastor will place the license in the mail on the next day the post office is open. i.e.: if the marriage is on a Saturday and the following Monday is a holiday, the license will be placed in the mail on Tuesday. Additionally, the pastor will not simply drop the license in a post office box. The pastor will take the sealed document into the post office and deposit it there. Generally, most jurisdictions take about two weeks to process the license once it is received. Note: it is wise of any couple to obtain at least one “official” copy of the license from the issuing body. There is usually an additional charge for copies. Often more than one copy will be needed.

All “official” witnesses to the ceremony, i.e.: those who sign the license as witnesses, must be at least 18 years old.

When the time comes for the ceremony, if either party who presents themselves for the ceremony appears to be incapacitated by some substance, be that substance legal or illegal, it is against the law for the pastor to perform the ceremony. While it is likely the pastor will use grace as a guideline in making such a judgment, the law is very clear about that aspect of the proceedings. As an officer of the state the pastor cannot violate the law. Further, because the pastor is acting as an officer of the state and by law, the pastor is deemed to be the sole arbiter in judging sobriety.