

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage

A Planning Guide

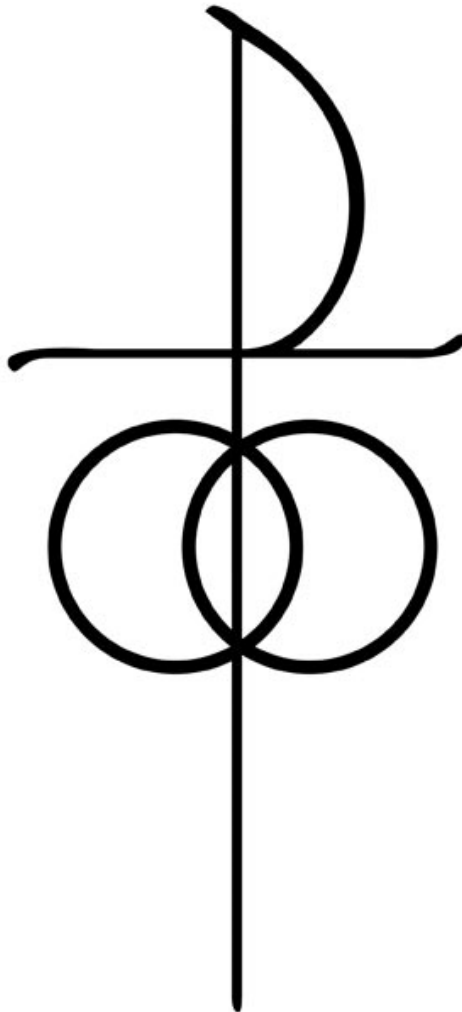


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1. Introduction

Congratulations on this important step in your life together as a couple. It is the intention of the church to help you not only in the creation of a beautiful and meaningful wedding ceremony, but in the laying of a firm foundation for a successful, happy, and lifelong **marriage**. It is our desire to walk with you as you enter into married life. This commitment is in harmony with the statement on marriage in the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene:

The Christian family, knit together in a common bond through Jesus Christ, is a circle of love, fellowship, and worship to be earnestly cultivated in a society in which family ties are easily dissolved. We urge upon the ministry and congregations of our church such teachings and practices as will strengthen and develop family ties. In particular, we urge upon the ministry the importance of teaching and preaching clearly the biblical plan of the permanence of Marriage... Our people should cherish this sacred estate as becomes Christians, and should enter it only after earnest prayer for divine direction, and when assured that the contemplated union is in accordance with scriptural requirements. They should seek earnestly the blessings that God has ordained in connection with the wedded state, namely, holy companionship, parenthood, and mutual love—the elements of home building. (Manual, Church of the Nazarene, Sec. 35)



This document is meant to be a guide and primary reference for the couple and minister as you prepare to become husband and wife. In it you'll find a checklist for the process leading up to the wedding day, basic information sheet, a wedding ceremony planning guide, and some references to help you plan. May God bless you richly as you prayerfully approach this next step in your relationship!

2. Wedding Preparation Checklist

The following steps outline the process from the point you decide to get married until you say “I DO”. This process has been put in place in order to ensure that you receive the best possible pastoral care as you prepare for marriage. It also serves as an organizational tool to help you manage some of the details involved in planning a wedding service.

- Schedule a meeting with your pastor about your intentions to get married. He/she will be able to give you initial spiritual guidance and a general overview of the process.

- Choose an officiant (the clergy who will officiate at the service). If you have a home church, this will typically be your pastor. If you desire to invite a visiting minister to participate in the wedding as an officiant, make this request of your pastor early in the process. Choose a date and potential location for the wedding. If your wedding will be held in a church building, make yourself aware of any wedding policies that the church has in place and reserve the location. Confirm the date and time of the wedding.

- Fill out section 3 of this document (Basic Information Sheet) as much as possible and give to your pastor/officiant as soon as possible. This will ensure clear communication for the rest of the process. Update it as you move forward in the planning.

- Begin the process of pre-marital counseling with a trained Christian facilitator. Options include your pastor, or a licensed family therapist or counselor. The church or officiant may have policies in place that require adherence to a set number of sessions before a wedding will be celebrated. It is best to begin these pre-marital sessions four to six months before the wedding if possible. A minimum of 6-8 sessions are recommended. Depending on where you and your officiant live, it may be necessary for you to find someone other than your officiant to serve as counselor. If you don't know of anyone who is trained, you can search for a marriage preparation facilitator by clicking [here](#).

- Read section 4 of this document carefully. The template will serve as a guide as you work together with your officiant in the planning of the wedding service. Jot down initial ideas, notes, and questions you may have about the ceremony. Meet with your officiant to begin planning the service.

- Contact musicians, Scripture readers, bridesmaids, groomsmen, ushers, candle lighters, ring bearers, etc. you intend to ask to be a part of your wedding. If your wedding is held in a church building, there may be a policy in place about choosing a sound engineer and wedding coordinator.

- If you have chosen a wedding coordinator, meet with him/her if possible to discuss their role in the details before, during, and after the ceremony. Their primary role will be to assist with the logistics of the rehearsal, wedding, reception, etc. Choose someone who is organized, assertive, and dependable.

- A few weeks before your wedding, apply for a marriage license from your state. Expect to pay a nominal fee for this document. You will need to bring it with you the day of the wedding.

- 2-3 weeks before the wedding day, confirm the order of service and the list of all participants with your officiant and coordinator. Get copies of any pre-recorded music and/or video to the sound engineer.

- Enjoy the wedding day!

3. Basic Information Sheet

Wedding	Date	Time	Location
Rehearsal	Date	Time	Location
Bride Info.	Last	Middle	First
	Phone		Email
	Religious Affiliation		
Groom Info.	Last	Middle	First
	Phone		Email
	Religious Affiliation		
Officiating Minister	First	Last	
Premarital Counseling	Counselor's Name	Date of last session	
Wedding Coordinator (if applicable)	First	Last	
	Phone		Email

You'll also want to begin gathering the names of other participants that you choose to include such as:

- Ushers
- Bridesmaids/Groomsmen
- Flower/Ring Bearers
- Candle Lighters
- Sound/Video technician
- Reader(s)
- Musicians
- Communion Servers

4. Service Planning Template

This planning template assumes that the Christian marriage ceremony is first and foremost a service of worship. It is in the context of worship that two people come before God and the gathered community of faith to offer their vows to one another and seek God's blessing. The ceremony gives thanks to God for the gift of love and functions to bless and consecrate the man and woman for lifelong commitment and service to each other. Therefore, it is imperative that the wedding service be marked both by celebration and reverence. Keep this in mind as you begin to think about the elements you desire to include.

The order of service reflects the ancient pattern of Christian worship (Gathering, Word, Response, Sending). Resist the temptation to see this as a strait-jacket to your wedding. Instead, this pattern ensures that the service will be rooted in the Christian tradition and contain the essential content of a Christian wedding. This does not however dictate the style of the service which may include traditional and/or contemporary wording, music, visuals, etc. Of course, this section is intended to be a guide and the final order of service will be worked out between you, the couple, and your officiant.

The Basic Shape of a Christian Wedding Service

Gathering

- Entrance
- Greeting/Call to Worship
- The Charge
- The Declaration of Consent (The I Do's)
- Giving in Marriage (Who gives this woman...)

Word

- Prayer of Blessing
- Reading of Scripture
- Homily (brief sermon based on the selected reading)

Response

- The Marriage Vows
- Blessing and Exchanging of Rings
- Holy Communion

Sending

- Blessing
- Declaration
- Presentation of Bride and Groom
- Benediction

Some Things to Consider

Music

Appropriateness – Choose music that is appropriate for a service of worship. It should reflect both the celebratory and solemn nature of the event being celebrated. Songs that speak of the love of God and sacrificial human love are especially meaningful. There are many classical and contemporary songs that can function in this way. Songs that speak *only* of love's romantic feelings are usually best reserved for the reception. Also, don't count out the possibility of including of a song of worship where the entire congregation is invited to sing. This makes your friends and family participants, not just observers.

Quality – If possible, live music performed well is always preferred over pre-recorded music as it adds to the richness and uniqueness of the celebration. Of course, your selection of able musicians and diligence in getting them the necessary music in plenty of time will play a huge part in the quality of music. If you must use pre-recorded music, ensure that you acquire the best recording possible and deliver it in plenty of time to the sound technician.

Placement – There are several appropriate moments to include music in a wedding service. The template below will highlight some of these. A key point to remember: *Music should never drive the wedding service but should function to serve the action that is taking place.* Ask yourself, "What is taking place at this point in the service?" and then, "What song would serve to highlight this moment?"

Amount – Three to four songs is usually sufficient for use in the service, not counting any background music you may want as your guests are seated. If you find yourself with more songs than you need, plan to narrow them down. It is better to have 4 well-placed, appropriate songs than 6 songs that are simply there to fill time.

Holy Communion

If you choose to include Communion in your wedding service, all present will be invited to participate as we believe the sacrament to be a means of God's grace and a holy meal of fellowship with other Christians, not a private meal to be shared just by the wedding party or the couple. The celebration of the Lord's Supper can be an element in the service where the Gospel is communicated in symbol and those in attendance are invited to respond. Every effort will be made in the liturgy to ensure that all present know that this is an *invitation* to respond, *not* an obligation, and that no one will be made to feel uncomfortable if they choose not to receive. If you know you will have friends and family in attendance who are not Christian, you can discuss this with your officiant.

Furniture

Do not plan to move any furniture in the church without first consulting the pastor or representative from the church. The pulpit or lectern is typically placed on the side where the Scriptures can be read. The Communion Table is reserved for the celebration of the sacrament. Therefore, it should not be used as a holder for wedding candles, pictures, or other objects. If you choose to include a unity candle, it should be placed on a separate table or stand near the Communion Table.

Candles

Candles or candelabras may be desired in the wedding service. Know the policies of the church regarding candles and be sure to place them where they are accessible but will not interfere with the ceremony itself.



Unity Candle – Many couples choose to include a unity candle. Often, the mothers of the bride and groom will light two candles on either side of the unity candle. During the service, the bride and groom will each take their candle and together, light the unity candle as a symbol of their two lives becoming one. The two outer candles should remain lit to symbolize the individuality that each person brings to the relationship. See the above comment about the placement of the unity candle.

Remembrance Candles – A wedding is a joyous event and yet they can also remind us of the absence of loved ones who have passed away. To honor their memory, a tribute could be included in the printed bulletin. Another way to remember loved ones is to light candles in their memory. This can be done by anyone and can take place during the lighting of the other candles or at another appropriate place in the service. Like the unity candle, a remembrance candle should be placed on a table or stand separate from the Communion Table.

Video

A video presentation with images and music can add a personal touch to a wedding and tell the story of the couple. This is best placed at the beginning of the service or as part of the prelude. Fight the temptation to include every picture ever taken of your relationship! Narrow it down if you must. Aim for a video that is no longer than 4-6 minutes. Anything longer than that will probably lose the attention of the viewers. Be sure to deliver the final form of the video to the sound/video technician at least two weeks in advance so they can preview it and troubleshoot any potential issues.

Family and Friends


It is a wonderful thing to involve your family and close friends in the wedding service. Most will be honored that you have asked them to participate. You may consider asking a family member or friend to light candles, serve as a bridesmaid/groomsman, read Scripture, serve as an usher, play an instrument, sing, or pray a blessing.

Readers – Choose readers who have confidence and experience with reading in public. Be sure they receive the Scripture text several weeks in advance so that they may practice the reading.

Children – The presence of children in a wedding can add a touch of joy to the service. However, children's behavior on the day of the ceremony can be unpredictable depending upon their mood. While the presence of young children can be endearing, it can also quickly become a distraction. Therefore, it is wise to have a plan to include children and yet not expect the same of them as you would an adult. An increasingly common practice is to have the children participate in the procession (flower girl and ring bearer) and then move down to the front row at an appropriate time. There you can have quiet activities for them to do until they join the wedding party again near the end of the service. This keeps children from wandering on the platform.


The Wedding Service


Indicates options that may be included in the service if you desire. Check the box to include the element. This does not mean there are no other elements that can be included. These options reflect some of the most common options and indicate where they are most appropriately placed in the service.

 Indicates points in the service that are particularly appropriate for the inclusion of musical selections.

Notes

Gathering

 **Prelude/Pre-service music** – approx. 30 minutes before wedding

 **Candle lighting** – Approx. 5-10 minutes before wedding

 **Seating of the Family**

 **Entrance of Wedding Party**

 **Video Presentation**

 **Bridal Procession**

Greeting/Call to Worship

The Charge

The Declaration of Consent

Circle one: *“I Will”/“I Do”*

Giving in Marriage

Who gives this woman to be married to this man?

Circle one: *Family/Father/Other:* _____

Circle one: *“We do”/“Her mother and I”/Other:* _____ ”

-  **Song of Worship**

Word

Prayer of Blessing

Reading of Scripture Lesson(s)

Old Testament
New Testament
Gospel

Possible Scripture Lessons	
<p>Note: At least one Scripture lesson needs to be included but it is certainly appropriate to choose up to three (an Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel reading). One or two readers may be selected to read the passages.</p>	
<p>Old Testament Lesson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 1:26-28, 31a <input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 2:4-9, 15-24 <input type="checkbox"/> Song of Solomon 2:10-14, 16a, 8:6-7 <input type="checkbox"/> Isaiah 43:1-7 <input type="checkbox"/> Isaiah 61:10-62:3 <input type="checkbox"/> Isaiah 63:7-9 <p>New Testament Lesson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 12:1-2, 9-18 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Corinthians 13 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians 2:4-10 <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians 3:14-19 <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians 4:1-6 <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians 4:25-5:2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33 <input type="checkbox"/> Philippians 2:1-2 <input type="checkbox"/> Philippians 4:4-9 <input type="checkbox"/> Colossians 3:12-17 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 John 3:18-24 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 John 4:7-16 <input type="checkbox"/> Revelation 19:1, 5-9a <p>Gospel Lesson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 5:1-10 <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 5:13-16 <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 7:21, 24-29 <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 22:35-40 <input type="checkbox"/> Mark 2:18-22 <input type="checkbox"/> Mark 10:6-9, 13-16 <input type="checkbox"/> Mark 10:42-45 <input type="checkbox"/> John 2:1-11 <input type="checkbox"/> John 15:9-17

- Response to the Reading (after the final reading)**

Reader: This is the word of the Lord.
People: Thanks be to God.

Homily - Brief commentary on Scripture and personal words to the couple.


The Apostles' Creed or The Nicene Creed**Exchange of Vows (circle one)**

1. In the Name of God, I, *N.*, take you, *N.*, to be my wife (husband), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.
2. I take you, *N.*, to be my wife (husband), and I promise before God and all who are present here to be your loving and faithful husband (wife) as long as we both shall live. I will serve you with tenderness and respect, and encourage you to develop God's gifts in you.
3. *N.*, in the name of God, I take you to be my husband (wife) from this time onward, to join with you and to share all that is to come, to give and to receive, to speak and to listen, to inspire and to respond, and in all our life together to be loyal to you with my whole being, as long as we both shall live.
4. Or personally written vows that include words of commitment to lifelong relationship before God.


 Blessing of Rings **Exchanging of Rings (circle one)**

1. *N.*, I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
2. *N.*, I give you this ring as a token of my love and as a pledge of my constant fidelity.
3. *N.*, I give you this ring as a sign of our marriage. With my body I honour you, all that I am I give to you, and all that I have I share with you, within the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

  **Song of Worship**

-
- 
- Sacrament of Holy Communion including the Lord's Prayer**
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- (All present are invited to receive at the Lord's Table. Care will be taken that no one will be pressured to participate and no one who chooses not to participate will be embarrassed.)*

Notes

-  **Unity Candle** – If Communion is celebrated, the candle can be lit by the bride and groom after they have received Communion. If there is no communion, this is a suitable place to include the unity candle.
- The Lord's Prayer (if no Communion is celebrated)**

Sending

Blessing

Declaration of Marriage

- Presentation of the bride and groom by name (and kiss)**

“I present to you _____.”

Benediction

-  **Recessional**

5. Resources

Marriage Resources

- Focus on the Family Marriage & Relationships - <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage.aspx>
- Prepare/Enrich - <https://www.prepare-enrich.com/>
- *Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts* by Les and Leslie Parrott

Wedding Ceremony Resources

- Classical Wedding Music - <http://myweddingmusic.com/ClassicalWeddingSongs.asp>
- Wedding Hymns - <http://www.yourchurchwedding.org/hymns-media-player.aspx>
- Wedding Hymns - <http://www.wedding-songs-galore.com/wedding-hymns.html>
- Wedding Music Library - <http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/music/guides/wedding/>
- Wedding for Guitar - <http://www.guitarplace.com/MI075.html>