

Reformation Lutheran Church

1118 Union Street – Columbia SC 29201

Wedding Policy

Adopted November 1, 2014

Congratulations!

You are planning to wed – to enter into a relationship which God has ordained for the perpetuation and happiness of God's people. Through the ages God has continued to bless those who enter marriage with prayer and live in it by faith.

A wedding at Reformation is first and foremost an act of Christian worship by a Christian community. The presiding pastor is the leader of the worship, and will give it liturgical shape, as she/he consults with the participating couple. Between the pastor and wedding couple those who will also participate and help with the service will be determined.

The church teaches that marriage is a life-long relationship based on the promise of faithfulness and rooted in the love of God. God's faithfulness and self-giving love are important models for your relationship. It is a happy occasion overflowing with joy, and those who celebrate it rejoice in the gifts of God – life, health, strength, sexuality, and family.

A wedding is the ceremony in which a couple exchanges their covenantal vows and asks for God's blessing and presence in their life together. Reformation's wedding guidelines apply equally to all gender combinations. Reformation Lutheran Church adopts this wedding policy as a reflection of its calling to nurture its members for them to grow in faith and love and its understanding that it is in fellowship with other Reconciling Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

What is Marriage?

Luther noted that in the New Testament, neither Christ nor the apostles had any involvement with laws governing marriage. Though Luther did not consider marriage a sacrament, he held it in high regard. He viewed it as a covenant of physical and spiritual fidelity that meets the needs and wellbeing of each person. *The Book of Concord-Law and Gospel*

The Wedding Service is between two persons, whether those persons be of the same sex or of the opposite sex, arises first out of our understanding of the fundamental nature of the universe created by God. God intended that the whole of the creation be relational. That is a key witness of the Genesis stories of creation. Furthermore, the statement in Genesis 2:18 provides an important theological foundation: "*Yahweh God said, 'It is not good that the earth human should be alone; I will make for it a companion as its partner.'*"

You will notice that the translation that was used here is more faithful to the original Hebrew, for the humans in the opening verses of chapter 2 of Genesis are not sex differentiated. The Hebrew word *adam* comes from the Hebrew word *adamah* which means the earth, thus *adam* is an earthen human. What is important is to understand that God declares that the state of isolation is not what was intended for the human creature, but that just as God creates for the sake of companionship, so too shall there be companionship on the earth. In fact, as one reads through the whole creation story, all of creation was intended to be in relationship with all of

creation. God's intent is that the human creature of whatever sex NOT BE ALONE and that therefore all human creatures are created for the sake of mutual companionship on this earth.

As we understand the unfolding of the creation story, we come to greater clarity that God created the universe and human beings out of a sense of God's own sense of wanting good. In other words, not even God is inclusive unless God is in relationship. So, too, we who are created "*in the image of God*," as Genesis 1:26 announces, are incomplete unless we are in responsible relationships. In short, we cannot be human alone!

The realization that one is loved for simply being who you are, not just what you do, can be very freeing and uplifting, regardless of one's sexual identity. Same-sex couples seeking the opportunity to marry also desire to be treated with dignity and love. A committed couple desires to have that relationship acknowledged as important, meaningful, and worthy of the church's blessings and participation. Like all human beings, a person who identifies as LGBT needs and desires that unconditional love offered by God. One strives to experience true love and respect as a fellow human being. As was true for Luther in his understanding and embracing the true meaning of justification, you are "born again."

What is a Wedding?

Because marriage is of God, we are honored as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, to be a part of this loving expression of God's loving intimacy. It should be understood that this is primarily the policy that the pastors follow with regard to same sex as well as heterosexual services. Such services are an act of worship of the Christian community. Even with the God's blessing on marriage, it is also a public and civil event as well.

Because of the holiness of marriage and the promises of the wedding service, it is well that those who seek this form for their marriage take time to reflect, consider what shape this will take. The presiding pastor will provide premarital counseling for each couple appropriate for their needs.

A Christian marriage takes place in the form of worship of the Righteous One who created, redeemed, and sanctifies us all. It is presided over by an ordained pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, or another governing body we are in accord with. The Holy Scripture is to be read, expounded, prayers of intercession to be offered, and the couple gives public witness of their mutual acceptance of the commitment with which they will bind themselves.

The law provides an infrastructure that creates a sense of constancy and order. Gospel offers the redeeming message of Jesus Christ, which provides the basis and guide for creating loving relationships. In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (AP), it also suggests the Gospel approves secular government. We are instructed to follow laws created within the civil realm regardless of who has formulated them. It states: "Christian perfection is not found in contempt for civil ordinances but in the inclinations of the heart, and a profound fear of God, and a strong faith."⁷ The Formula of Concord Epitome (FCE) also informs us that the law is "a divine teaching" . . . The Gospel "urges us to practice love through this obedience."⁸ It is clear from Luther's writings on marriage that his firm stance was that marriage was a civil act. As we consider the issues that surround gay marriage today, how we define and view marriage from a legal and civic standpoint is of critical importance.

Finally, because marriage is God's gift to all creation, the civil government has responsibility to oversee and determine the legality of all marriages. The Church respects the task of the

government and will comply and see to it that the couple complies with the laws of the state of South Carolina in obtaining a marriage license. The officiating pastor will require that the license be presented to her/him in advance of the rehearsal.

Who may be married at Reformation?

Marriage within the church is the prerogative of Christian persons. Marriage in Reformation Lutheran Church is a privilege afforded couples whenever at least one partner is an active member of the congregation.

Requests from non-members to be married at Reformation require approval of the pastor. Reformation welcomes non-member weddings and recognizes that people of other faith traditions may not be familiar with our expectations for the wedding service. While there is much room for flexibility in your wedding, the guidelines herein are offered to make the occasion more enjoyable for you and to the glory of God.

Date and Time of Wedding

Dates and times for weddings held at Reformation are to be approved by the pastor. Consideration will be given to your request based upon the availability of the facilities and the pastor. Weddings held during Holy Week and the week of Christmas are strongly discouraged.

Use of Facilities

Use of any Reformation Lutheran Church facilities must be approved by the pastor.

The furnishings and equipment of Reformation belong to its members. All such items should be left in the same condition in which they were found. Couples will be required to pay a \$100 facility deposit, which will be returned if all facilities, furnishings and equipment are left in the condition in which they were found.

Smoking is not permitted in any church buildings or on the steps leading to the sanctuary.

Who Will Officiate?

Pastoral ethics require that Reformation's pastor conduct the wedding. By agreement, another pastor may be invited to share in the wedding or act on behalf of the pastor of Reformation. Any requests for another pastor to officiate must be approved by Reformation's pastor.

Pre-Marital Counseling

Marriage is a lasting covenant which should not be entered into lightly or for the wrong reasons. For these reasons, pre-marital counseling with the pastor is required for all couples, unless other arrangements are agreed upon. The number of sessions will be determined by the pastor based on the needs of each couple. Pre-marital counseling offers the opportunity for a couple to realize the religious significance of the marriage covenant and to learn more about themselves in their relationship with each other and with God. These sessions should be completed before the wedding service is planned in detail.

Wedding Ceremony

Your wedding is a service of worship, celebrating and confirming your commitments to each other, the congregation's commitment to support you in your life together, and God's commitment to keep you in the bonds of love. Consequently, all that is done is to be consistent with the present worship practices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Reformation Lutheran Church.

Generally, the outline for the wedding service as found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* will be followed. The couple may write their own vows or add things to the service, with the approval of the pastor. The simple Christ-centered wedding service is conducive to beauty and a worshipful atmosphere.

The Sacrament of Holy Communion may be celebrated as a part of your wedding service. All those gathered for the wedding ceremony will be invited to the Table.

Those couples who want a simple ceremony with a small group of family or friends should meet with the pastor and discuss their desires and possibilities.

Wedding Music

Because the wedding is an act of worship, music for the ceremony deserves careful consideration. The music chosen should reflect common Christian understanding of marriage. There is a vast store of hymns, songs, and sacred music from which to choose. The pastor and the church organist and/or staff pianist will meet with the couple to assist them in identifying music that suits their taste.

The organist and/or staff pianist of Reformation will normally play for weddings at the church. In cases where an outside organist is desired, permission must be secured from the pastor in consultation with the director of music. Should an outside pianist be desired, permission must be secured from the pastor in consultation with the staff pianist. Additional musicians or soloists may be utilized. Please note that the use of taped music or prerecorded accompaniments is discouraged.

Music performed at a service of Christian marriage is understood to be an act of worship, offered to God in devotion, thanksgiving and praise. All music used during the ceremony (including prelude and postlude) must be approved by the pastor.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship is a helpful guide as you consider your selections of music.

It is recommended that the couple meet with the pastor, organist, pianist, and/or musicians at least one month prior to the wedding, if possible, to plan appropriate music for the ceremony.

Wedding Rehearsal

A rehearsal helps familiarize the wedding party with the service and the facility. Everyone – the couple, attendants, ushers, parents, organist and/or pianist, other musicians, and clergy – should be present for the rehearsal to ensure that the wedding goes smoothly.

The rehearsal is normally held one or two nights before the wedding itself. The date and time must be approved by the pastor. For an adequate and satisfactory rehearsal, please allow at least one hour for a small wedding and at least one and a half hours for a larger wedding. The rehearsal will be conducted by the pastor.

Photography

Because of the church's belief in the spirituality of weddings, photographers and wedding attendees are asked to adhere to the following guidelines. No flash pictures are to be taken during the ceremony. Non-flash pictures and filming may be taken during the ceremony from the balcony in the rear of the sanctuary. (This should be indicated in the bulletin.) Any requests for variances must be approved by the pastor in advance.

Photography in the sanctuary must be completed at least 45 minutes before the ceremony is to begin. Photos may be taken after the service and at other times as arranged with the wedding party and families.

The use of a video camera is permitted in consultation with the pastor regarding the location of the camera.

Flowers and Decorations

Flowers and plants may not be placed on the altar. Fresh cut flowers and potted live plants are preferred for use in the sanctuary. Silk or dried flowers and plants may be used. There are flower stands available for placement of flowers next to the altar. If potted plants are placed on the stands or on the floor, leak proof containers must be used. Flowers may be left on the stands next to the altar for Sunday worship services only if the flower calendar is vacant for that Sunday. Contact the church secretary for more information.

All decorations must be completed at least one hour prior to the beginning of the ceremony. Bows may be placed on pews using string, rubber bands or monofilament. No tacks or nails may be used. Tape that leaves residue or may cause damage to the pews may not be used. Decorations must be removed immediately following the service.

Two candles are provided on the altar and are used during all weddings. Candelabras may be used as well as a unity candle. Pew torches are available for use in candlelight weddings, with at least a week's notice to the custodian for the purpose of having them properly installed and removed.

Because of safety and environmental concerns, rice, birdseed or confetti may not to be used or thrown on the church grounds or in any facility. The releasing of balloons is strongly discouraged. Bubbles may only be used where there is no risk of creating slippery surfaces and may not be used inside any facility. Live flower petals may be thrown outside. However, the wedding party must ensure that such material will be swept up or into the street immediately following the wedding ceremony and/or reception.

Paraments on the altar, lectern and pulpit will remain the color of the day or season, regardless of the colors used for other decorations.

Those involved in decorating the church are encouraged to discuss plans with a member of the church's Altar Guild. Information concerning whom to contact can be secured from the Pastor.

Dressing at the Church

Facilities are available at the church for the principals and their parties to dress. Dressing at the church prior to the service is encouraged to avoid possible problems of inclement weather and travel.

Wedding Consultants

Wedding consultants can be helpful. However, if used, they should understand that all activities in the church are under the direction of the pastor. While not required, it is recommended your wedding consultant be a member of Reformation Lutheran Church. A list will be provided upon request. The wedding service is a religious rite and, therefore, must be conducted according to the practice of the Lutheran Church. It is advisable that the wedding consultant reads and

understands the Wedding Policies presented herein. Any questions or concerns should be directed to the pastor.

Marriage License

The marriage license must be delivered to the pastor no later than the beginning of the wedding rehearsal. This prevents the possibility of forgetting it on your wedding day.

Church Records

All weddings will be recorded in Reformation Lutheran Church's official record unless the couple requests otherwise.

Invitation to the Congregation

Since your wedding is a service of worship within the whole of the worship life of Reformation Lutheran Church, it is appropriate that your wedding may be announced in the Sunday worship bulletin and that the congregation may be invited to participate in the service.

Bulletins

If bulletins are to be given out during the service, they may either be prepared by you or the church secretary. If you plan to have the secretary prepare the bulletins, you must purchase the appropriate amount of bulletin covers. These are available in most Christian book stores. All information for the bulletin must be received by the secretary at least two weeks prior to the wedding.

Reception

If the wedding party desires to have the reception on the church property, the fellowship hall is available for such purpose for an additional rental/cleaning fee.

Approval for serving alcohol (limited to champagne, wine and/or beer) is required at the time the reservation is made for the use of the fellowship hall. The wedding party assumes all responsibility for insuring that alcohol is provided in accordance with applicable rules of the South Carolina Alcohol Beverage Control Commission (ABC Commission.) You may find it best to use a licensed, insured and bonded vendor. Liability insurance may be required by Reformation Lutheran Church.

Fees

If you or your immediate family is a member of Reformation, there is no fee for the use of the facilities. For all other individuals, additional fees may be assessed. Fees are payable (by cash or check) one week prior to the wedding rehearsal to the individuals directly (pastor, organist, sexton, secretary, soloist/s, sound system operator). For other expenses, cash or a check made payable to "Reformation Lutheran Church" should be sent or delivered to the church at least one week prior to the wedding rehearsal. The couple will be responsible for any unpaid checks and bank fees. Please consult the current FEE SCHEDULE attached.

REFORMATION LUTHERAN CHURCH 2014-2015 FEE SCHEDULE FOR WEDDINGS*

The following fees apply. Fees are due one week prior to the wedding.

	Member	Non-Member
Facility Deposit	\$100 (returned if facility is left in the same condition it was found)	\$100 (returned if facility is left in the same condition it was found)
Use of Church	No fee	\$300
Candlelight Wedding – Candles/Pew Torches	\$60	\$60
Pastor	Honorarium appreciated	\$250
Organist or Pianist	\$250	\$250
Additional rehearsal time in advance of the rehearsal or wedding and requiring additional travel time	\$50 minimum per rehearsal per soloist/instrumentalist	\$50 minimum per rehearsal per soloist/instrumentalist
Sexton		
Wedding only	\$100	\$100
Candlelight wedding set up and removal	\$40	\$40
Reception at the church	\$100	\$100
Bulletin printing – 8 pages or less	\$20 per 100	\$20 per 10
Additional pages	\$6 per page	\$6 per page

**Subject to revision*

Fees for soloists and other instrumentalists are not included. Those fees must be negotiated and paid directly by the wedding couple.