



# Wedding Handbook



This booklet explains the basic elements of and procedures for a marriage ceremony at Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church. When you ask to be married in this church, you are seeking the blessings of God on your marriage in a service of worship. The sanctuary is not a rental facility. It is the primary gathering place for the community of believers who come together each week to worship God. When you ask a minister of this church to conduct a marriage ceremony, you are not asking the minister to pronounce you married as a civil officer may do, but that God may bless your marriage. This foundational distinction between the legal contract of civil marriage, defined by the state, and the covenant of Christian marriage,

**A Guide for Couples  
who wish to be  
married in the church.**

defined by religious communities, is important to understand as you discern your own hopes and desires for your marriage and the wedding ceremony.

Our community believes that God created us in God's image, and gave us marriage so that two people may help and comfort each other, living faithfully together in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, throughout all their days.

God gave us marriage for the full expression of the love between two people, for the well-being of human society, for the ordering of family life, and for the nurture of children.

Those joined together in marriage are called to a new way of life, created, ordered, and blessed by God. This way of life must not be entered into carelessly, or from selfish motives, but responsibly, and prayerfully.



## Preparing for the Wedding Ceremony

The wedding ceremony is a worship service of joy, reverence, hope, faith, and love. The minister is solely in charge of the ceremony and will work with you in creating a service that is both reverent and meaningful to you. The minister will offer to the couple some options for the wording of the service from the church's worship heritage and will plan with the couple approaches to the service designed to express their particular relationship to one another and to God. While the minister has the final say over the form and content of the service, the couple will be encouraged to offer suggestions, ideas, and hopes for all aspects of the service.

### Minister

The ministers of the church have oversight for all weddings at Brown Memorial. Ordinarily, a minister will meet with a couple before agreeing to conduct the service or scheduling it on the church's calendar. It is expected that a minister of Brown Memorial and the minister of music of Brown Memorial will officiate at your wedding ceremony. Permission may be granted by



church staff for other people to be involved. In case the minister is not available, the Session must approve the officiating minister.

## Counseling

All couples who wish to be married at Brown Memorial must complete pre-marriage counseling at least three months prior to their wedding. Couples will be expected to attend three prenuptial counseling sessions with the minister before the date of their wedding. These will be scheduled at the convenience of the parties involved. A pastoral counselor or licensed therapist may also be used with the agreement of the minister. If the minister is convinced that commitment, responsibility, maturity, or Christian understanding are lacking to the point that he or she believes the marriage to be unwise, the minister will work with the couple until he or she is satisfied that the couple is ready for marriage. The minister may refer the couple to certified marriage therapists or some other professional for further guidance. If the issues are not resolved further, the minister will not conduct the ceremony. All such issues will be discussed openly with the couple with ample time given prior to the date set for the wedding.

## Church Membership

When neither member of the couple is a member of the church, the couple will be invited to attend worship services. While you will not have to join the church, we ask that you consider membership because we believe that marriages are stronger and healthier when they benefit from the support of a church community.

## Music

Music suitable for the marriage service directs attention to God and expresses the faith of the church. Recognizing that the wedding is a service of worship, the only criterion for music is that it be suitable for worship. Ordinarily, the choir of the church does not sing at weddings. Musical selections must be discussed and chosen in consultation with the minister of music. All requests for use of musical instruments must be made to and approved by the church minister of music. Additional fees may apply.

## Sound Systems and Audiovisual Equipment

The church representative must be notified at the time reservations are made if a sound system or audiovisual equipment will be used so that a sound engineer can be requested for an additional fee. Arranging audiovisual needs is the requester's responsibility. Anyone planning to use audiovisual equipment must be trained to use the equipment or have a trained operator use it from the church's list of approved audiovisual technicians.

## Rehearsal

The minister sets the time and date for the wedding rehearsal and conducts the rehearsal. Everyone involved in the wedding, including parents, should attend. Promptness in arriving for

the 45-minute rehearsal is important. Church personnel will secure the building and leave one hour after the wedding rehearsal is scheduled to begin.

### **Flowers, Decorations, and Candles**

You are welcome to use a florist of your choice for decorating the sanctuary. Floral arrangements may be adhered to the pews or other parts of sanctuary using safe release tape or floral wire, taking care not to scratch or damage surfaces. They must be in watertight containers. Flowers that you do not wish to take with you may be donated to the church for its ministry with its homebound members.

Only candles with a minimum of four inches of glass above the flame, such as hurricane glass, are allowed. Pew candelabras are available for an additional fee. If you are interested in using the pew candelabras in your ceremony, you are responsible for supplying 12, 8" taper candles in the color of your choice.

Additional decorations must be approved by the church representative. Children's worship materials will remain in the sanctuary but may be covered; other miscellaneous items from worship will be removed prior to the ceremony.

### **Printed Programs**

If you wish to create a printed program for your wedding service, the minister will work on the content of it with you. You are responsible for having the printed program produced and making sure it is delivered to the church prior to the rehearsal.

### **Seating Capacity**

The church can comfortably seat 500 people in the sanctuary. Depending on the size of the wedding, a minimum of two or four ushers are recommended.

### **Wedding License**

The wedding license is due in the church office one week prior to the wedding service. Please note for the wedding license that the church is located in Baltimore City.

### **Day of the Wedding Ceremony**

On the day of the wedding ceremony, the church will be opened two hours prior to the scheduled starting time. The wedding party should be dressed before they arrive; they are welcome to gather in the parlor of the church house or bride's room off the sanctuary until the appointed time. The wedding ceremony itself must start on time. If the wedding party is 30 minutes late, the ceremony is cancelled. The building will be locked 45 minutes following the conclusion of the service. Any forgotten items will be kept in the church house and can be picked up during the week.

## Parking

You may request the church to apply for parking restrictions on the day of your wedding. Under normal circumstances, the city of Baltimore will restrict parking immediately in front of the church to allow the couple to depart the church unobstructed by other vehicles. Should you desire it, the church will give you instructions for securing permission from the Mt. Royal School (three blocks away) to park in the school's lot. Please understand that the church has no parking facilities of its own and cannot guarantee any parking.

## Photographer

The photographer may take photographs during the processional and may take non-flash photographs from the balcony or the front door of the church immediately prior to the recessional. For the benefit of all, from the time the minister begins to speak through the benediction, photography of any kind is prohibited. The service may also be videotaped as long as natural light is used and the camera is placed on a tripod and not moved during the service. Please have the photographer speak with the pastor prior to the ceremony. Please be sure to include enough time for your photographs and receiving line, if necessary.

## Rice

Since the church doors empty out onto a city sidewalk, no rose petals, rice, or birdseed may be thrown. Instead, blown bubbles are welcome outside on the church steps.

## Security

Please be mindful of keeping exterior doors closed, particularly during the colder months. Exterior doors must remain locked unless someone is stationed next to them and are not to be propped open with the exception of a procession through them.

Although thefts and other crimes are rare, they have occurred in or near our facilities. Monitor unlocked doors. The church is not responsible for any losses or damages to personal belongings. Thefts of church equipment or vandalism during your event are the responsibility of the person or organization holding the event.

## Heating and Air Conditioning

The heating or air conditioning is set to come on and off as necessary. You may adjust the temperature if you return it to the original setting at your event's conclusion.

## Firearms, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs

Firearms are not permitted in any part of the church facilities. Alcohol is not permitted in the sanctuary. Smoking, vaping, or other drug use (other than medically prescribed) is prohibited in and around the church facilities. Please make sure your guests are aware of this policy.

## Wedding Reception

The assembly room is available for your wedding reception for additional fees. The space can comfortably accommodate approximately 50 people seated and 75 people standing.

### Use and Care

Receptions are limited to the assembly room and kitchen in the fellowship building. Restrooms nearest the courtyard entrance are the only ones to be used. Familiarize yourself with the location of fire extinguishers.

Generally, the assembly room and kitchen should look the same before and after the reception. If something breaks, notify a church staff member so it can be fixed quickly.

Children are not allowed to run and play in the building or be left unattended. Parents are responsible for seeing that their children are properly supervised and adhere to these guidelines.

### Furniture and Equipment

Work with the church representative to arrange the tables, chairs, and equipment needs for your reception. All furniture and equipment supplied by the church must stay on church premises. Musical instruments and equipment may only be moved by approved personnel. The church does not provide extension cords except in the case of AV equipment requests. Do not affix anything to the walls or ceilings without staff approval.

### Food and Drinks

You are responsible for securing a caterer, linens, and clean-up. The church's linens and other supplies are not appropriate for weddings. All silver and plates must be supplied by the caterer or rented from a vendor.

All food and drinks must remain in the assembly room and kitchen of the fellowship building. Alcohol may be served and consumed, subject to staff approval.

### Kitchen Use

The kitchen is equipped with various kitchen appliances and utensils. You may use the stove, oven, or refrigerator during the reception. Please do not use the clothes washer and dryer.

Spills and crumbs must be cleaned up. Tablecloths must be shaken out over the trash. All trash and recycling must be placed in bins in the kitchen. Extra bags are at the bottom of each bin. When a bin is full, remove the filled bag from the bin and place the tied bag in one of the trash cans located in the courtyard.

All items brought into the facilities—including food, decorations, and any other items—must be removed immediately following the event. Note, Please do not leave leftover food in the refrigerator. Failure to adhere to these guidelines may result in deductions from your damages deposit.

## Contact Information

Andrew Connors, Pastor  
Michael Stefanek, Minister of  
Music  
Sharon Holley, Wedding Coordinator  
Camille Sherriffe, Admin. Assistant

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