

Weddings at Bethany Presbyterian Church

As part of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Bethany bases its wedding policy on a denominational governance document called the Book of Order (2023-2025), which offers this theological insight and guidance on the covenant of marriage:

“Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives. The sacrificial love that unites the couple sustains them as faithful and responsible members of the church and the wider community. In civil law, marriage is a contract that recognizes the rights and obligations of the married couple in society. In the Reformed tradition, marriage is also a covenant in which God has an active part, and which the community of faith publicly witnesses and acknowledges.

“In a service of marriage, the couple marry each other by exchanging mutual promises. The minister of the Word and Sacrament witnesses the couple’s promises and pronounces God’s blessing upon their union. The community of faith pledges to support the couple in upholding their promises; prayers may be offered for the couple, for the communities that support them, and for all who seek to live in faithfulness.”

Our understanding and practice of marriage, and weddings, like everything else we do as a church and as followers of Jesus Christ, must flow from our love for God and each other and reflect the grace and goodness of God. This wedding policy is not intended to be a rule book, a catalog of all scripture pertaining to marriage, or a measuring rod to judge existing or future marriages in our church. We are mindful that in our congregation there are some who have been married multiple decades and some only a few months. We are mindful that some of us have been married more than once, some are married to same-sex partners, some are widowed, and many are single. We are mindful that marriages can involve pain as well as joy, and that many have experienced profound loss and grief, some past and some present.

At Bethany Presbyterian we acknowledge that the Bible can lead faithful believers to different interpretations, yet we affirm that Scripture tells us:

- **A married couple’s partnership reflects the image of God in intimate community** (Genesis 1 & 2)
- **A married couple’s sexual fidelity to one another reflects their fidelity to God** (Exodus 20: 14, 17)
- **Boundaries for healthy sexual and covenantal relationships protect God’s people from harmful and exploitative practices, distinguish God’s people among the nations, and witness to God’s character and protective love** (Leviticus 18)

- **Marriage roots us in our identity as beloved as we honor and delight in one another as God delights in us (Isaiah 62:1-5)**
- **Marriage is a God-given place in which to experience joy, sexual satisfaction, and transcendent love (Proverbs 5:18-19; 1 Corinthians 7:1-9)**
- **Marriage is a lifetime commitment (Matthew 5:31; Luke 16:18), though not an eternal state (Matthew 22:29-30)**
- **The joining of two people in marriage is a mutual covenant for life that should be entered into mindfully, with due reverence knowing that each marriage is sanctified by God's presence. Jesus recognizes faithfulness in the choice to marry or remain single. (Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12)**
- **Jesus used weddings as an occasion to reveal his glory (John 2:1-11) and reflect his kingdom (Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:7-14)**
- **Marriage is a good creation and gift of God that should not be withheld, but rather received with thanksgiving and sanctified by God's word and prayer (1 Timothy 4:1-5)**
- **Marriage is an opportunity for mutual sanctification and discipleship, entailing a lifestyle of sacrificial love and mutual honor, respect, and submission, caring for each other's physical and emotional needs (Ephesians 5)**
- **Marriage creates a basis for home and family (Book of Ruth; Genesis 2:24)**
- **Marriage is for practicing oneness and faithfulness and raising godly children (Malachi 2:13-17)**
- **Marriage is a haven in which we may be truly, deeply known and accepted while supporting and encouraging one another to follow God's word (1 Peter 3:1-7)**

In the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2, God observed and accommodated our innate human need for human companionship. It is not good for human beings to be alone. God created us to be partners in relationship with God and each other. While it has taken different forms in different times and cultures, marriage remains one of the richest and most significant examples of the kind of partnership for which we were created.

Reading the Bible from beginning to end, we see that it is natural and blessed to desire intimacy of a different quality than that offered within our families of origin, and that if a person desires to be in a sexual relationship, it is in the best interest of the people involved, including children and the rest of society, that it be a committed and accountable relationship.

Bethany hosts weddings for currently unmarried members of our faith community and their children and grandchildren, irrespective of prior marital status, gender identity, or sexual orientation. A couple already wed in a civil ceremony may also request a worship service celebrating their marriage.

The first step for any couple interested in getting married at Bethany Presbyterian Church would be to meet with one of our pastors. We authorize our pastors to determine if a couple can be married at Bethany. A pastor will meet with and counsel the couple, praying and turning to scripture with them. In the PC(USA) denomination, pastors counsel couples and may agree (but cannot be compelled) to marry any couple that may legally wed and that they believe understands the nature and values of the marriage covenant.