



Preparation for Marriage
At St. Paul-Reformation

Introduction

Marriage is a joyful time in a couple's life when two are joined to one within the Christian community of the church. In Lutheran theology, marriage is one of the three estates established by God, and the life of home and family are a sphere in which God is working to bring about the kingdom.

As you prepare for marriage, this guide is intended to help you think about the spiritual nature of your love, practical matters related to the liturgy itself, and general advice to get you off to a good start as a couple. The church is here to support you in this journey, and it is our prayer for you that God will continue to bless and grow the love that God has already begun in you.

Theological Foundations

Throughout the Holy Scriptures, Marriage is established by God as a sacred bond that creates community. Each of us longs to love and be loved, and the union of two people in a lifelong bond is one that has roots in the relationship between God and God's people.

In the Old Testament, the relationship between Israel and God is frequently depicted as the relationship of a married couple. Through fidelity and mutual honoring, God and Israel are bonded together in a way that mirrors (and establishes) the relationship between two people who enter into marriage.

In the Old Testament, marriage was very often not based upon love, but rather a contractual obligation between two parties (families) that established stability in society and the transfer of property. This, of course, is a very practical concern. Within the church, this definition is expanded greatly: what once was a contractual obligation is now established by love, itself the gift of God who creates love between two people.

Marriage is Communal

Within the church, marriage is a communal endeavor. It is a public liturgy of the church and the couple commits to a "public, life-long, monogamous relationship." In other secular forums, marriage is understood as a private event, but not so in the church. The couple has responsibilities to the church, and the church has responsibilities to the couple for the entirety of their relationship.

Marriage is Monogamous

In many parts of society, new definitions of relationships and fidelity are emerging. In the church, marriage is understood to be monogamous and between two people only. The sacred bonds of relationship are between two people who agree – *by their marriage in the church* – that faithfulness to one person is the defining mark of their relationship. If one has other views on fidelity and relationship...all well and good, but then the church is not the appropriate place to be married.

Marriage is Lifelong

The church understands marriage as being a commitment for life. When strife and conflict come (which they will), the couple should seek assistance and help to navigate difficulties. This is part of the church's commitment to you: to help you and your family as you continue in relationship.

Divorce – *sometimes sadly necessary* – is only a last option when all others have failed, but previous divorce is not a barrier to remarriage in the church. Honest conversation about contributing factors to a divorce must be addressed during premarital counseling with the goal of strengthening and supporting the new relationship going forward.

Practicalities

Membership First

At SPR, we only perform weddings for members. This is because (as above) marriage is a communal endeavor: one cannot enter into a communal celebration without being a *part* of the community. To this end, if a couples are not members of SPR, either one or both is required to join the parish first. Membership assumes 1.) regular attendance at the Holy Eucharist; 2.) Financial contributions to the parish; 3.) Participation in the ongoing ministries of the parish. A path toward membership should be discussed with the pastor. Similarly, because community is a part of the sacramental nature of the church, we do not rent the building or sanctuary for weddings to non-members.

Date and Time

It is advisable that couples contact the parish office six months in advance of their wedding. Several things that we will discuss:

- A desired date and time;
- A plan for premarital counseling (required);

Requirements for Preparation

At St. Paul-Reformation, several practical things are required for marriages to take place:

- The couple must be or become members of St. Paul-Reformation (see membership requirements, *above*). If only one member of the couple is baptized, the non-baptized person does not need to become a member unless they choose to convert to Christianity.
- At least two sessions of premarital counseling with the Pastor. In some instances, the Pastor may require additional professional counseling with a therapist or counselor.
- Use of the Prepare/Enrich Inventory in preparation for premarital counseling. This is not a test, but it gives us awareness of strengths and growing areas for a couple to work on.
- Participation in the “Hold Me Tight” Couples Retreat with the MN Couple Therapy Center (www.mncoupletherapy.com).

The Liturgy

The church's liturgy is the primary place of celebration for marriages; it is established by the church's liturgical tradition and – *because it is public praise of the church* – is governed by the norms and structures of that liturgy. At St. Paul-Reformation:

- Wedding liturgies are eucharistic unless some particular pastoral concern dictates otherwise;
- Weddings can be very large or very small; there must be at least two witnesses.
- Secular music is not permitted;
- Non-scriptural readings are not permitted;
- Weddings are performed using the liturgy in the prayer book of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*;
- Wedding liturgies are not performed during Advent (the four weeks preceding Christmas), or Lent (the six weeks preceding Easter), as these are penitential seasons;
- Weddings take place within the context of the church's liturgical year;
- Wedding liturgies may take place any day of the week;
- Non-liturgical elements (Unity Candle, etc.) are best left for the reception and are not permitted in the liturgy.
- Weddings make use of the clergy and staff at St. Paul-Reformation (see above);
- Weddings are open to same-sex couples;

Planning the Liturgy

SPR's Pastor and Cantor will assist you in your selection of prayers, vows, scripture readings, music, etc. A well-planned wedding is marked by prayerfulness and sincerity of your faith expression, and – again – is a public liturgy of the church. Non-sacred readings, music, or gestures are more appropriate for the reception. Only scripture readings may be used for your wedding liturgy, and secular music is not permitted.

Eucharistic

Normally, all weddings at St. Paul-Reformation take place within the context of the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist is open to all who are baptized, even if they are not Lutheran. There are some circumstances in which the eucharist would not take place with the approval of the Pastor.

Visiting Clergy

Some couples have clergy in their families or who are close to them whom they would like to participate in the wedding. Great! Let's talk about it and find an appropriate way to celebrate their connection to you!

Clergy and Staff

The following staff members are required for each wedding:

- The Pastor/ Presider
- Cantor (musician)
- Wedding Coordinator
- Liturgical cantor to sing the parts of the liturgy;
- Custodian
- *Livestream Technician (optional)*

Readings Appropriate for the Rite of Marriage

Psalm 67	<i>May God be merciful to us and bless us</i>
Psalm 100	<i>We are God's people</i>
Psalm 127	<i>Unless the Lord builds the house</i>
Psalm 145	<i>The Lord is gracious and merciful</i>
Genesis 1:26-28	<i>Woman and man created in God's image</i>
Genesis 2:18-22	<i>Companionship rather than loneliness</i>
Song of Solomon 2:10-13	<i>The voice of the beloved</i>
Matthew 7:24-27	<i>Build on the rock</i>
Mark 10:6-9	<i>They are no longer two but one</i>
Ephesians 5:1-2	<i>Live in love as Christ loved us</i>
Colossians 3:12-17	<i>Clothed in gifts of God</i>
1 John 4:7-16	<i>Let us love one another, for love is of God</i>

Order of Readings

- First Reading (from the Old Testament)
- Psalm (sung)
- Second Reading (from the New Testament)
- Gospel (chosen by the preacher)