

# Planning Your Ceremony

## Our Expectations

All matters concerning the wedding and related activities will conform to practice in keeping with the tradition of Salem Covenant Church. When arranging for flowers, decorations and signs for the wedding, care must be taken to avoid damage to church property and to insure the safety of the guests.

We do not allow the consumption of alcoholic beverages or smoking in the church building or on the property. The bride and groom must convey this information to members of their wedding party.

Furniture in the chancel area of the sanctuary, including the prayer rail, baptismal font, communion table and lectern, may not be removed without permission of the pastoral staff. We know that "clearing the stage" would make the movement of people much easier and simpler. But the chancel is not a stage and the sanctuary is not an auditorium. It is a place of worshipping our holy God. We invite you to think of yourselves being wrapped around these wonderful reminders of faith and hope as you celebrate your marriage vows in the Salem sanctuary.

Decoration plans should be made in consultation with the Wedding Coordinator. If the church is decorated for a holiday, those decorations must remain largely intact. Minor alterations may be made with the knowledge of the Wedding Coordinator and must be replaced afterwards. Flowers can be attached to furnishings, candelabra, etc. only with pipe cleaners or wire covered with floral tape and ribbon. No tape or other materials may be used without prior approval of the custodial staff or designated church staff. Some adhesives are difficult to remove. Church owned candelabra, including candles, will be provided upon request. Only dripless, enclosed candles will be permitted in areas other than the chancel. Real flower petals may be scattered for the processional only if a runner is used.

For the safety of all guests, the use of rice, bird seed or confetti is not permitted either inside or outside the church. Bubble blowing is allowed outside the building only.

## The Ceremony

Music should be selected in consultation with the officiating pastor and musicians. If organ music is desired, it is your responsibility to contact Salem's organist. If another organist is desired, the person must be approved by the church organist.

One of the members of the pastoral staff will officiate at the ceremony. It is your responsibility to contact the pastor to his/her availability for your rehearsal and wedding. If another clergy person is asked to officiate, this request will be approved by a member of the pastoral staff.

The pastor performing the ceremony will be in charge of the rehearsal. The wedding license should be given to the pastor at this time.

In the interest of maintaining a worshipful service, all details concerning photography and videotaping in the sanctuary must be approved by the officiating pastor or Wedding Coordinator prior to the service. Salem requests no flash photography be used during the ceremony.

If a white runner is desired for the center aisle, please make arrangements with your florist, as the church does not own one. *The center aisle is 90' long and 4 1/2' wide.*

A technician will be available at rehearsal and the wedding ceremony to assist with the use of the sound system and lighting during the ceremony and the audio-taping of the service.

Dressing rooms will be provided for the women and men of the party. A gift room will also be provided.

## Blessing the Bond

At Salem Covenant Church, the Order for the Service of Marriage is a specifically Christian act of worship as distinguished from a civil ceremony or the rite of a non-Christian religion. We desire to celebrate the promise-making binding of two people in covenant partnership by a service that is "reverent, festive, and beautiful". This is what we mean by "blessing the bond".

As a Christian act of worship, those elements present in any service of congregational worship should also be

present in a wedding service, including the singing of hymns, reading of the Scriptures, a meditation given by the pastor, the Lord's Prayer, and other prayers.

Because "blessing the bond" is not simply a pastoral act but the act of all who assemble, we encourage congregational participation throughout the service. The presence of God may be realized more fully through the singing of hymns. Within the ceremony we seek to uphold certain musical standards of excellence and reverence, distinguishing between music and texts that are secular in character and those that give expression to the Christian understanding of love, marriage and fidelity. If, for example, the bride or groom has a favorite song which is not appropriate to Christian worship, that song may be used at a family gathering, a rehearsal dinner party or at the reception.

In keeping with the Protestant tradition, the sacrament of Holy Communion is appropriate only as a communal sharing for the entire congregation of believers and not as a private sacrament received by the couple or wedding party alone.

### **In Conclusion**

If the above process seems somewhat involved and complex, it is only because the bonding of two people in covenant and the blessing of the bond constitute one of the most significant events in a couple's life. It is reassuring, however, that above and beyond the promises two people make, "as long as we both shall live," there is the promise which the God of our forebears makes: "I will be there for you."

In light of the couple's own promise-making, it is appropriate to add a reminder of the special commitment by the church community. The church is committed to joyfully receive the talents this couple brings to the church out of the mystery of their journey. More than anything else, we wish to stand not only as supporters of promises and the blesser of bonds, but as the receiver of this couple's special contribution to the church. In such mutual exchange, the promises at the beginning of the journey will more likely be kept and the bonding we bless will grow stronger.