

YOUR WEDDING AT THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
United Church of Christ
Bristol, CT

We, at the First Congregational Church United Church of Christ, believe in the sanctity of marriage and understand that in your commitment to each other, you are also asking God to be a part of your lives together.

We believe that the church of Jesus Christ should be open to all who desire to know God and believe in Jesus Christ. We affirm the dignity and worth of every person. With God's grace, we strive to include all persons in our community without regard to race, ethnic or socio-economic background, sexual orientation, gender, marital status, physical or mental challenges, or age. We cherish the richness that this diversity brings to us, individually and as a congregation. Our acceptance of each other embodies our commitment to unity with God and each other in Christ. We welcome all to share in the life, leadership, fellowship, worship, sacraments, responsibilities and blessings of full participation in our congregation.

We also believe that weddings, like baptisms, confirmations, and funerals, are a part of our life as a Christian community. Based upon our understanding of scripture and our mission as a welcoming, inclusive, open and affirming church, we are committed to the ministry of all wedding ceremonies for all people.

We extend to you our welcome as you begin to make plans for one of the most meaningful events of your lives. We are proud of our church and want to make its facilities and ministries available to you, whether you are a life-long member or new to our community. We also pledge to nurture and support you in your marriage and as individuals. We consider you to be part of our church family, and we hope that you will feel welcome in our community while you prepare for your wedding as well as in the years to come.

YOUR WEDDING CEREMONY

Careful advance planning will enhance the solemnity and joyfulness of your wedding. As you start to plan your wedding ceremony, please return your completed worksheet to the church office. Then contact the church office administrator at 860-589-4700 to arrange a premarital conversation with our pastor.

This conversation will enable our pastor to learn more about you and your thoughts concerning your marriage. Your wedding date will then be placed on the church calendar. In the months before your wedding, you should plan to meet at least two more times with our pastor to discuss your wedding ceremony and your coming marriage. We hope that these premarital conversations will give you a chance to better explore your relationship with each other and the place of God in your marriage.

WEDDING MUSIC

Music is an integral part of the wedding ceremony. It sets the mood and tempo for the service. It also serves to bring participants and the congregation together in the spirit of worship. In light of this, the music for your ceremony is expected to be appropriate for the occasion. Selections should add to the dignity of the service and highlight the love that comes from God and is shared between God's children. Generally speaking, music shared during the service should be sacred in nature.

Our music director will assist you in selecting music that is appropriate for the service as well as special for you. It is expected that our music director or his approved substitute will play for the wedding ceremony. Another organist may participate in the wedding ceremony with the approval of the music director.

Vocal or instrumental soloists can add greatly to the service. Here again, care should be taken to select appropriate music. You may want to consider including the singing of congregational hymns in your service. Selection of the ceremony's music should be arranged several weeks ahead of the wedding between the music director and couple (and soloist) to allow adequate rehearsal time. Our music director will also be glad to assist you in finding a soloist or additional musicians. Soloists and musicians decide their own honorariums. A couple may, of course, choose not to have music at their service.

THE MARRIAGE LICENSE

The state of Connecticut has established laws regarding marriage. A proper license is required before proceeding with the marriage celebration. A blood test is no longer required for your license. You may apply for a marriage license in the town where your ceremony will take place or the Connecticut town where you live. You will need to complete a marriage application, and both parties will need to be present with photo identification. Please see the Bristol city website for further information (www.ci.bristol.ct.us). Since the license is valid for only 65 days, we recommend that you apply for the license at about one month prior to the wedding.

Please bring the marriage license to the pastor at your last premarital conversation meeting. The Pastor will sign and return the license to the City Clerk. A certified copy may be procured from that office about a week after the ceremony.

Please bring honoraria and fees for the pastor, organist, and wedding coordinator *to this last meeting as well*. Honoraria and fees should be placed in separate envelopes and marked with the appropriate names.

GUEST MINISTERS

If the couple wishes to have a pastor from another church or a clergy from another faith share in the wedding service, it is a matter of professional courtesy to have that invitation come from our pastor. This invitation will be to co-officiate with our pastor.

INTERFAITH CEREMONIES

If you and your fiancée are of different faiths, we hope that the First Congregational Church is a place where you may feel comfortable having a wedding ceremony that is blessed by God but also acknowledges your different faith backgrounds.

NON-MEMBER

As we welcome all people with Christ's love, we welcome the weddings of non-members. We hope you will come to feel a part of this welcoming, inclusive Christian community. As a matter of supporting our ministry in the world, we appreciate a gift of \$500 to support the ministry and mission of our church. Please prayerfully consider the amount of your gift because your generosity enables us to further our mission of welcome, nurture and transformation of the world with Christ's love.

OFF-SITE/ RECEPTION LOCATION WEDDINGS

Our pastors are experienced and available to perform weddings at your reception site or another setting beyond the church. If pastors need to travel a great distance or stay overnight for your wedding and rehearsal, it would be expected that the wedding couple would provide additional compensation for transportation and/or accommodations.

THE WEDDING REHEARSAL

Your wedding rehearsal is a time to go through the order of service with the entire wedding party. The entire bridal party should be present, including soloists and readers. The pastor will answer any questions and clarify all last minute details. The rehearsal is under the direction of the officiating pastor. Our wedding coordinator will also be present to assist the wedding party.

If unity candles, worship bulletins, or decorations will be used in your ceremony, please bring them to your wedding rehearsal.

YOUR WEDDING DAY

Worship Bulletins

It is the responsibility of the bride and groom to provide worship bulletins for their wedding service. Your officiating pastor will be able to help you with the format if you desire to have a worship bulletin.

Arrival

The seating of guests usually begins half an hour before the ceremony. Ushers should arrive approximately an hour (60 minutes) before the ceremony in order to seat guests in a timely manner. The *entire* bridal party should arrive at the church at least one half hour (30 minutes) before the ceremony. This ensures that the ceremony will proceed on time and that any last minute details can be straightened out. This is also a good time to take pictures.

Weddings that begin late place a burden upon the organist and minister officiating at your wedding. The organist plays the entire time that guests are being seated. Please make plans to arrive early so that your service is not delayed.

Pictures

Pictures are a memorable keepsake, but the taking of snapshots may interfere with the solemnity of the service. No flash pictures or videos with lights are permitted during the service. The bride and groom should convey this to their families and guests and be very specific about this with professional photographers.

Professional photos and videos can be taken from the center aisle during the procession of the wedding party, but once the ceremony begins, the photographers must work from the back of the church or the balcony, using available light. A video camera, without the videographer, may be set up in the choir loft.

Close-up shots of the exchange of rings or other parts of the service need to be re-staged after the ceremony. All photo/videographic work must be completed within one hour following the ceremony's recessional. The professional photographer should consult with the pastor before the service begins, but it is the responsibility of the bride and groom to inform their photographer/videographer of these guidelines.

The Reception

Our church's Dining Room and Auditorium are available for wedding receptions. More information is available upon request.

ABOUT OUR CHURCH

Dressing Rooms

If you wish to dress and prepare for your ceremony at the church, please speak with pastor about comfortable locations within the church building.

Decorations

Flowers and candles are considered offerings to the glory of God and are appropriate sanctuary decorations. Flowers should be in place in the Sanctuary one hour before the ceremony. Flowers for the wedding party may be delivered to the church, or you may prefer to have them delivered to your home. Please advise your florist that the church building will be open an hour before the ceremony, but not earlier.

Arrangements should be made for the disposition of the flowers after the service. In the case of Saturday weddings, many couples wish to leave the flowers in the Sanctuary for Sunday worship. If flowers are to remain for the service of worship, they will be so acknowledged in the Sunday morning bulletin. If interested in making these arrangements, please let the pastor know during your meetings.

If you are planning to have other decorations such as pew bows or a unity candle, please ask a friend or family member to collect these items after the ceremony. If no arrangements have been made, it is likely that these items will be disposed of after the ceremony.

If you desire to include a unity candle in your ceremony, we do have available a stand and tapers to light the candles. Please ask our pastor. If you desire other decorations, please consult the pastor. Nails, thumbtacks, and scotch tape may not be used in connection with the decorations.

The center aisle of the Sanctuary (53ft.) and Chapel (43ft.) are carpeted, so a runner is not necessary. It is our recommendation to not use a runner since they are often problematic. However, if a runner is desired, it is the responsibility of the couple.

Facility Accessibility

Our Sanctuary, Chapel, and Auditorium (Reception Hall) are accessible by elevator and ramps. Please speak with your officiating pastor about arrangements for the comfort of your physically challenged guests.

Rice & Confetti

The throwing of rice, confetti, birdseed, etc is not permitted anywhere on church grounds. This includes in the church building, the driveway, parking lot, and lawn. Rice is harmful to the birds. Confetti and birdseed are difficult to clean up and pose a safety hazard to your guests and our congregational members. Please inform your guests of this restriction.

Alcoholic Beverages

Alcoholic beverages are not permitted in the church/ sanctuary or outside grounds of the First Congregational Church. This includes the driveway, parking lot, and your limo while it is on church property. It is your responsibility to inform your bridal party, guests, and limo driver. Alcohol is permitted in the Parish House when arrangements have been made for a wedding reception or shower.

Since your wedding ceremony is a solemn occasion witnessed by God and the Christian community, please do not consume alcoholic beverages before your wedding ceremony.

Smoking

The smoking of cigarettes, cigars, or other substances is not permitted on the church grounds. Again, this includes the church building, the driveway, and the parking lot. Please respect our desire to keep our church property neat and our desire to keep everyone attending your wedding healthy.

Seating

Our sanctuary seats 500 people and our Chapel seats 70.

HONORARIA AND FEES

We consider weddings to be part of our mission as a church. Honoraria and fees compensate staff for the extra time they take preparing for and performing your wedding service.

Minister's Honorarium...	\$400
Organist's Honorarium...	\$250
Wedding Coordinator's Fee...	\$100

When neither member of the couple is a member of the First Congregational Church or when there is not a pledge in support of the ministry of the Church, it is expected that there will be a gift of \$500 in support of the ministry of this church. As a matter of Christian Stewardship, the gift to the Church should be seen in proportion to the total cost of the wedding.

If these honoraria and fees pose a financial hardship for the couple, they should discuss their concerns with the officiating pastor.

This booklet was approved by the Diaconate of
the First Congregational Church United Church of Christ.
May 2009 (updated October 2014)