

YOUR WEDDING AT FIRST PARISH CHURCH UNITED OF WESTFORD MASSACHUSETTS

Congratulations! The members of First Parish rejoice with you as you anticipate your wedding day. A wedding is a joyful and sacred event, and so First Parish welcomes your interest in being married in the sanctuary of the Meetinghouse. A wedding is a deeply personal event shared between two people, and it should be planned carefully to reflect your feelings. We are here to help you make your wedding – and, more importantly, your marriage – a true blessing in your life.

These pages have been prepared to assist you in the details of your planning, and to inform you of policies at First Parish. It is understood that choosing to have your wedding here indicates agreement of all the items addressed below.

Worship. Having chosen to celebrate your marriage in a church, your wedding will be a worship service, and will reflect God's presence in your wedding and in your marriage. If you do not worship at First Parish regularly, we invite you to do so. Worshipping together will make both your wedding ceremony and your marriage truer expressions of your faith. Worshipping with us will also help you to know your celebrant and this community.

Setting the Date and Time. As soon as you have a date in mind, check with the administrative assistant in the church office to be sure the church's calendar is clear. Please note that no date can be firm until you have your first appointment with the pastor and pay your deposit.

Pre-Marital Conferences. The most important preparation for marriage takes place in your hearts and minds. To help this happen, the pastor normally meets with you at least three times before the wedding. During these sessions you will discuss your relationship, share your views on marriage, plan for the ceremony itself, and develop a relationship with the pastor that will be a resource in the future. It is recommended that these sessions cover a period of three to six months. Thus you are invited to contact the church office or the pastor as soon as you have decided to get married, even if a date has not been set.

The Wedding Service. Normally the pastor of First Parish officiates at all services held in our Meetinghouse. We are glad to welcome other clergy (ministers, priests, rabbis) to participate in your service. Please inform the pastor of these desires at the first meeting. If you would like to have a sole celebrant other than our pastor, please discuss that with the pastor; it is at her discretion.

The pastor will work closely with you on the content of your wedding to make sure the service reflects your relationship as well as the standards of the law and

this parish. Some couples choose to write some or all of their service, in consultation with the pastor.

Organist. Please contact our organist, Nancy Eberiel (978.692.8961), as soon as your date has been set. Our organist has “first refusal” for all services at First Parish. She will gladly consult with you regarding music selections, and can be helpful in finding soloists or special instrumentalists. Please note that Nancy typically does **not** come to rehearsals, due to scheduling conflicts.

Sexton. A wedding sexton is assigned by the church office, and attends the rehearsal as well as the ceremony. He or she is responsible for opening and closing buildings, turning on lights and heat, monitoring parking, facilitating the ceremony, supporting the pastor, and doing whatever else needs to be done!

Decorating the Sanctuary.

Candles. We can provide two standing candelabra; you provide candles. The couple also provides unity candles and holder if desired.

Flowers. We recommend two arrangements at the front of the church, or floral swags on candelabras if they are used. You might include bows on pews; there are 12 on each side. All adornments must be tied, not taped or tacked, to church furnishings.

Photography / Videography. The Meetinghouse is a place of worship, and your wedding is a service of worship. Thus, while the pastor will try to accommodate your wishes, guidelines must be followed in regard to photography and videography. **Most notable is that the photographer / videographer is not permitted to stand in the aisle during the processional; you are responsible for communicating this to your photographer.** Your photographer / videographer should speak to the pastor in advance concerning other guidelines. Flash photography is fine, unless you desire otherwise.

Rehearsal. A rehearsal is recommended for all weddings and is normally scheduled a day or two before the ceremony. The date and time of the rehearsal will be set in your first meeting with the pastor. All participants in your wedding (parents, readers, musicians, etc.) should be present for the rehearsal, which lasts approximately one hour.

Reception. The Fellowship Hall, adjacent to the Meetinghouse, is a wonderful space for receptions. Please contact the church office for further information.

Invitations. For printed invitations we recommend this address: First Parish Church United, 48 Main Street, Westford, Massachusetts.

Programs. Wedding programs are not only mementos but also a way to thank the congregation, provide directions to the reception site, and describe the participants in your wedding. We recommend that you review the program with the pastor.

Other Details.

Capacity. 200 sit in the sanctuary comfortably.

Accessibility. The Meetinghouse is accessible by a ramp and a chair lift. Please inform the pastor or church office if the lift is needed.

Rice. Please do not include the throwing of rice or paper/plastic confetti in your wedding. Please use birdseed or bubbles, and both should be used outside the church only.

Fees. The following charges apply to weddings at First Parish.

<u>Fee</u>	<u>Parish members</u>	<u>Others</u>
Meetinghouse	None	\$350 (includes \$100 deposit)
Clergy	None	\$350
Organist	\$225	\$225
Sexton	\$100	\$200
Fellowship Hall	Contact church office for information	

A \$100 deposit (toward the Meetinghouse fee) is required to reserve the date and time of your wedding. ***All other fees are due one month before the wedding, or payment must be made by money order.*** Checks for the use of the Meetinghouse should be made payable to "FPCU". Other checks should be made payable to the individuals personally. Please do not combine the fees into one check.

Pastor: Cindy Worthington-Berry
Organist: Nancy Eberiel
Sexton: Contact church office for your sexton's name

If your plans undergo any change, please let us know immediately. Once again, we thank you for including First Parish in your wedding plans. Please feel free to call the church office with any further questions. Office hours are Monday 9 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., Monday and 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Tuesday through Friday or you may leave a message on the answering machine at 978.692.8350.

Marriage License

Couples planning to marry in Massachusetts have to meet certain legal requirements beforehand. These are subject to change, and can vary from community to community. Use what follows as guidelines, but it is wise to call the office of the town or city to make sure you have everything necessary when you apply for your license.

- **Skip the blood test!** Massachusetts no longer requires a blood test.
- **Apply for the license.** Both members of the couple must appear together at the office of the clerk in any city or town in Massachusetts (does not have to be the Massachusetts town in which you will be married). Bring your birth certificates with you. If either person is divorced, it is wise to bring a copy of the divorce decree. It may also be necessary to bring proof of Massachusetts residence (a utility bill, for example). The clerk's fee is different in various communities.
- **Wait.** After application has been made, there is a three business-day waiting period. The license may be picked up by anyone. The license is valid for 60 days from the date of the application. If you fail to have a three-day waiting period, you may apply for an exception through the court.
- **Bring your license to the rehearsal.** Without the license in hand, the wedding ceremony cannot be performed.
- **Request copies of the official wedding license.** The license becomes a legal marriage document after it is signed by the celebrant and is returned to the city or town clerk. You must contact that clerk for official copies of the marriage certificate, each available for a small fee. It is recommended that you purchase several copies, since many places you will be changing your name or marriage status require an original copy of the certificate. Most town clerks let you "order" copies of the marriage certificate when you pick up your license.