

Planning Your Wedding

On behalf of the congregation of Ipswich City Uniting Church, we'd like to congratulate you on your decision to commit your lives to one another through the gift of marriage. We are thrilled that you have chosen our church as the place in which to be married. We would like to work with you to make your wedding a true expression of your love, and share in the joy of your family and community.

Working with couples and families to celebrate marriage is one of the great joys of a Christian community. Marriage is, for many people, the most significant relationship of human life, and when we celebrate marriage we express some of life's deepest and most powerful meanings. A marriage service uses words and symbols to represent those powerful meanings. It seeks to express the love, trust and hope of a couple as they make a commitment to a shared future. It is also a legal commitment, a formal announcement of marriage to family and community, and, when a minister of the Church is involved, a service of worship.

With all those things happening it's no surprise that preparing for a wedding can also be just a little stressful! With so many expectations and hopes to express, with different 'family cultures' and personalities involved, and with significant costs to cover, weddings need careful planning, and we can't let the point of the wedding – the celebration of a loving, trusting and hopeful relationship – be lost in all the confusion.

There are three types of wedding ceremonies offered in Australia:

- A Court house wedding
- A Civil Celebrant wedding
- A Christian Wedding (*offered by Ipswich City Uniting Church, either in the church building or off-site at another location*)

As you have chosen to have a Christian Wedding ceremony, it is a requirement of the Uniting Church that the Minister ensures couples adequately understand the nature and responsibilities of a Christian Marriage. A Christian Wedding ceremony is an act of worship similar to any other church service, but with the emphasis upon the marriage covenant. The Christian church believes that marriage is a gift of God in creation, and is a means by which a couple become one in heart and mind and body, enriching and encouraging each other in every part of their lives together.

With this in mind, there are a number of important requirements that we request of couples presenting themselves for Christian marriage:

Legal Requirements:

- A '**Notice of Intended Marriage**' form must be completed and witnessed by the minister, **at least one month and a day before the wedding date.**
- **ORIGINAL Birth certificates** of the bride and groom will be needed when completing documentation, and, where relevant, **ORIGINAL copies of death or divorce certificates** also.
- The bride and groom will be asked to sign a **Statutory Declaration** before the marriage service, to say that there is no legal reason for them not to marry. During the service, the couple will sign 3 documents: the church's **Marriage Register**, the legal **Certificate of Marriage** form, and a **Commemorative Marriage Certificate** that will be given to the couple at the end of the ceremony.

The documents must all be signed with current signatures (ie: the bride signs in her 'maiden' name). In this country, a Christian Marriage Ceremony affirms the marriage in the eyes of God, but the marriage does not become official by law until the documents are processed and registered with the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registry Office, after the ceremony. Any change to names must be arranged separately by the couple after the marriage ceremony.

- Two persons over the age of 18 will be required to sign the marriage documents as witnesses to the Marriage Ceremony.



- If there are any other requirements under the Commonwealth Marriage Act, your Minister will explain them to you.

Marriage Preparation:

- It is important that the Minister and the couple become well acquainted before the Marriage Ceremony. This will require several meetings (at least 3), and will cover such matters as completing the necessary legal formalities, a discussion of the meaning of marriage, planning the service, and a wedding rehearsal.
- It is also a requirement that each couple undertake a marriage preparation course, such as the **PREPARE programme**, or something similar, before their Marriage. This programme has been developed to help couples improve communication and to build up the strengths in their relationship. The cost is approximately \$44 per couple, and involves completing an online questionnaire about your relationship. The results are fed back to the minister, and form the basis of the marriage preparation sessions. The minister will guide you through this process.

Order of Service:

- The Minister will discuss the order of service with you. The service has some specific elements that are legally required, as well as other areas that you may wish to modify. Our aim is to work with you in creating a marriage service that is unique and personal, and one that will both bless and enrich your special day.
- Couples may wish to invite a friend or relative to read from the Bible during the service, to offer prayers of blessing, or provide musical accompaniment. These contributions are warmly welcomed, but we ask that we are kept well informed of your plans so that we can best formulate your wedding service in a way that is able to accommodate all your ideas.
- **Music:**
 - Any **music selections** will need to be checked by the minister. While we offer a reasonable amount of choice within the service, the music needs to be appropriate to suit the dignity and sacredness of the service. We are certainly open to including popular and contemporary music choices, but within reasonable limits.
 - Christian Marriage ceremonies don't have to include **hymns or corporate singing**. This is best included only when most guests will feel comfortable singing along.
 - There is the option of playing **CD's**, using other **live musicians**, or asking one of our organists to play the **pipe organ**. If there is a desire for live music to be performed, please keep in mind the size and layout of the sanctuary, and where people will be standing etc. The minister will inform you of the obligations regarding copyright matters in this regard.
 - With regard to the **organist**, you are free to suggest particular pieces of music to be played, or alternatively, our organists have a wide repertoire of music that you can select from. (There is an additional cost that we pay directly to the organist for their time, at both the wedding service, and at the rehearsal if necessary.)
- There is an option for the Order of Service to be printed in a **booklet** for each guest, or it can be put together into a **Powerpoint presentation**. Generally these are the responsibility of the couple to provide, in consultation with the minister.

Practical Arrangements in the Church:

- **Flowers** – these will be the responsibility of the couple to arrange. We do have some artificial arrangements that can be used as needed.



- **Decorations** - Any plans to decorate the church other than with pew attachment will need to be discussed with the minister well before the wedding day. Decorations may be attached to the pews with ribbon or elastic. Due to heritage considerations and workplace health and safety requirements, under no circumstances are rice, confetti or bubbles allowed in or around the church building. If flower petals are used, it is the responsibility of the couple to arrange for these to be collected at the end of the service.
- **Photography** – Professional photographers are permitted to take photographs in the Church under certain, clearly understood conditions and with **prior arrangement with the Minister**. The minister will provide **3 specific photo opportunities** during the service, for the photographer as well as family and friends to take photos (bridal party entrance; the 'kiss'; the signing of the marriage certificate). The photographer will not be allowed beyond the front pews during the service, as it is distracting. Floodlights and flashlights are not permitted for the same reason. During the signing of the register, we recommend that a musical item be played. This allows the official photographer, and family and friends, the freedom to take their photos without disturbing the 'flow' of the service.
- **Videography** – similarly a professional videographer must not move around during the service, especially beyond the front pews. They must also hold a current AMCOS or APRA licence and appropriate copyright must be acknowledged.
- **Children in the Bridal Party** - Our advice is that flower girls and page boys should be chosen carefully. Weddings are a very big occasion and can often overwhelm young children. Ideally they should be of school age and able to stand for the duration of the service (usually half an hour) without close parental support. We do have a children's area at the back of the church with toys and a place to read and colour, if necessary.
- **Groom and Attendants** - The groom and attendants should meet with the minister at least 10 minutes before the ceremony is due to begin. This can be quite a nerve-racking time and we advise that you allow yourselves time to adjust to the occasion with support around you (this is also an ideal time to ask the 'best-man' if they have remembered the ring etc!).
- **Bride and Attendants** - the bride and attendants should make every effort to arrive at the Church at the advertised time. **Do not allow photographers to delay proceedings**. It normally takes approximately 10 minutes from the arrival of the Bride to the beginning of the ceremony. Please make sure that you have arranged to be able to make phone contact with someone who will be waiting at the church, to inform the minister (and guests) of any unforeseen reasons that may cause the service not to start on time.

Costs and Fees:

We recognise that weddings are expensive occasions at the best of times and our aim is certainly not to make a profit out of your special day. We do, however, ask for a contribution towards the ongoing work of the church. If there are special requests for the service that are outside of the normal operating parameters of the congregation, an additional fee will be negotiated to help assist with the expense. Currently the costs are as follows:

- **Set costs:**
 - Wedding at Ipswich City Uniting Church \$300
 - Wedding offsite at another location \$150
 - Hire of audio technician (to run microphones/sound system) \$60
- **If required:**
 - Organist for ceremony \$80
 - Organist for rehearsal \$80
 - Data projectionist for ceremony \$60
 - Audio technician for rehearsal \$60
 - Hire of hall for light refreshments after the ceremony \$50 + \$50 bond
 - Catering for light refreshments in the hall \$7/head

