

Introduction:

Congratulations on your upcoming marriage! We celebrate with you both as you explore the possibility of sanctifying your marriage within a Christian context. It is our hope that this policy will give you a better sense of our beliefs and understandings of Christian marriage within both the United Church of Canada and Orchard Valley United Church. It also outlines for you the process of getting married in our community of faith, from your point of initial contact with us, to the big day itself and beyond!

This policy applies equally to all members, adherents, and non-members of Orchard Valley United Church.

Our Core Beliefs:

At Orchard Valley United Church:

- We see each and every person as a unique, loved creature of God.
- We see God as faithful, loving, compassionate and just.
- We are called to embody and model this in our own relationships with each other.

At Orchard Valley United Church:

- We believe that God intends loving relationships to be faithful, responsible, just, healing and sustaining for all.
- We believe that such relationships require preparation and nurturing.
- We believe that relationships grounded in inclusivity, openness, respect, trust, and equity, will be caring and loving.

At Orchard Valley United Church:

- We believe that marriage is an act of worship and is a lifelong covenant between two people and before God.
- We believe that when one person turns to another and promises to love them, there is an opportunity to feel and participate in the Divine mystery and presence. Wherever there are those gathered in the name of true love, God is there also.
- We believe that marriage is a union in which two people can find their richest fulfillment of life, body, mind and spirit.

At Orchard Valley United Church:

- We celebrate marriage as both a civil ceremony and a religious rite.
- We celebrate marriage in the context of a Christian community of faith.
- We celebrate marriage that is broad, diverse, and affirming.
- We celebrate marriage of those who have previously been divorced, annulled or widowed.
- We celebrate marriage of those who have children, no children, or have children from a previous relationship(s).
- We celebrate marriage of those who regularly attend worship and those who do not.

- We celebrate marriage of couples of all sexual orientations, gender identities and cultures.
- We celebrate the marriages of inter-faith and multi-faith couples.

Important History and Background:

In 1962, the United Church of Canada confirmed that divorce was not a barrier to marriage, but also confirmed the need for couples to be prepared prior to marriage.

In 1984, the General Council affirmed the church's acceptance of all human beings as persons made in the image of God, regardless of their sexual orientation. Additionally, it noted that all human relationships should be "faithful, responsible, just, loving, health-giving, healing, and sustaining of community and self."

In 1988, the General Council affirmed:

1. that marriage is a gift of God through which Christians make a covenant with each other and with God;
2. that in marriage we offer each other the promise of lifelong companionship, the rich expression of human affections and sexuality, and nurture for the children;
3. that marriage as an institution can under gird each relationship and provide stability for society;
4. the value of marriage and that the church must work both to redeem and care for the institution and to support those entering into a covenant relationship with each other.

In 2000, the meeting of the General Council committed itself to work towards the civil recognition of same-sex partnerships, and in 2003 moved to focus on recognition of same-sex marriages. When same-sex marriage became legal, it was possible for individual clergy and congregations to begin celebrating same-sex marriages. As all services of worship are under the joint authority of the local governing body and the clergy, a congregation must decide.

On March 10, 2019, Orchard Valley United Church voted unanimously to intentionally enter an affirming process and seek membership within Affirm United/S'Affirmer, a group within the United Church of Canada that works for the full inclusion of all peoples and helps congregations become truly welcoming, safe, sacred spaces. As part of this process, we have further articulated and clarified our marriage policy so that it honours, affirms and celebrates the marriage of all couples.

Marriage Preparation

You do not have to be a member of the church to be married at Orchard Valley United Church. We do ask, however, that you approach the ceremony with reverence, respecting the convictions of both the church and yourself. We invite you to attend any of our worship services which, prior to COVID-19 provincial restrictions, are held on Sunday mornings at 9:30 and 11:00 a.m. Respecting the current COVID-19 restrictions, you are invited to register for our 10:00 a.m. Sunday worship service by contacting our church office during the work week prior to any Sunday. Attending one of our services will give you the opportunity to experience the

worship life of our congregation, and to understand better your marriage as an act of Christian worship.

We encourage you, when possible to continue worshipping with us, so that you may come to a greater awareness of the ways God is present in your lives and that of our community.

We, at Orchard Valley United Church, commit to supporting you in your marriage, and part of that commitment involves intentional discussion about your relationship, and your hopes and dreams for married life. Therefore, each couple is required to meet with the minister at least twice in preparation for the wedding ceremony.

Couples will be encouraged to engage in some intentional conversation and reflection on their understandings of marriage, using a United Church of Canada video resource entitled, “More than Friends”. This resource acknowledges that you, the couple, are the experts on your own relationship. It also acknowledges that healthy, loving, mature relationships require strong and clear communication, and a deep understanding of one another. This resource aims to help you strengthen and develop meaningful habits that will deepen your relationship, reflect on your understanding of spirituality within married life, and compel you to think honestly about the two biggest “thorny” issues in marriage – finances and sexuality. For more information on this resource, visit www.morethanfriends.live

Marriage Ceremony

All marriages conducted through Orchard Valley United Church must follow the governing laws of Nova Scotia and Canada, and the policies of the United Church of Canada. A marriage ceremony performed by a Christian Minister is both a civil contract and a religious ceremony. The minister of Orchard Valley United Church is a registered religious official, certified to solemnize marriages within the province of Nova Scotia. They are responsible for seeing that all legal requirements are met and that the policy and belief of the United Church of Canada is upheld. Couples who feel uncomfortable with this should consider a civil ceremony. Civil ceremonies are officiated by a judge, justice of the peace or authorized municipal clerk.

Our minister is available to perform weddings both within the church building and at off-site locations. Regardless of location of the ceremony, all Orchard Valley weddings will be conducted by our minister, except when they are away or otherwise unavailable.

Other ministers may share in the service, or in extraordinary circumstances, conduct the marriage ceremony themselves, but this must first be approved by both the Worship Committee and the minister of Orchard Valley United Church.

All wedding requests are approved by the Worship Committee and Council of Orchard Valley United Church, at the recommendation and discretion of the minister. All wedding ceremonies will be officiated by the minister of Orchard Valley United Church.

Marriage Application and License

All couples, upon initial meeting with the minister, will be asked to complete a marriage application form. Upon receipt of this form, the wedding and rehearsal dates will be scheduled through the church office. It is the couple’s responsibility to apply for a marriage license. They

may be obtained from Access Nova Scotia in Kentville. Please deliver it to the church or minister no later than 2 weeks before the date of the ceremony.

Elements of a Marriage Ceremony

There are many different styles of marriage ceremony and they can be as simple or as unique as you desire. All aspects of the ceremony need to be discussed with and agreed to by the minister, and must comply with this marriage policy. In all Christian marriages, God is praised as the source of love and the initiator of covenant, Gospel values of love, justice, and compassion made known to us in Jesus, are expressed. Scripture is read and proclaimed in some form; witnesses in the legal sense are acknowledged, as well as the presence and support of family, guests, and congregation, and promises are made between the couple and before God. Each wedding ceremony is a reflection of the couple being married. We will work hard with you to make sure that your big day is a faithful and meaningful reflection of who you are.

Music

Music is an important element in the wedding of many couples. At Orchard Valley United Church, you can enlist the services of our Music Director for all your music needs which include playing during the ceremony, the possibility of having a choir, congregational singing, or something else that is appropriate and meaningful to you and keeping in mind that the music will be in harmony within a religious facility. In coordination with the Music Director, we have the capacity to play pre-recorded music through our sound system, and can accommodate most special music requests (soloists, duets, performances by outside musicians).

Decorations and Flowers

Decorations and/or flowers are the responsibility of the couple to arrange. Please be aware that we do not permit the use of rice or confetti at any time in the sanctuary or anywhere else on church property. You, or a family member, are encouraged to bring decorations and flowers to the church on the date of the rehearsal. If you would prefer to do this at another time, you may contact the minister or the church office to make suitable arrangements. All seasonal decorations and furniture within the sanctuary will remain in place, and all wedding decorations must be easily removable. It is not the responsibility of Orchard Valley United Church to remove decorations and flowers. Please ensure someone is designated to do this following the ceremony and/or reception.

Photography and Multimedia

Photographs are a wonderful way of celebrating and capturing the joy of your wedding day. Friends, family and other guests are certainly invited to take pictures before and after the ceremony, however, are asked not to use the flash during the ceremony itself. If you are hiring a professional photographer or videographer, please inform them that they are welcome to take pictures and video in the sanctuary and the church grounds before and after the ceremony, however no flash photography is permitted during the ceremony itself out of respect and reverence for the worship service. Please remind your photographer/videographer that any use and placement of tripods and equipment must be discussed with and agreed to

with the presiding minister and all photography during the wedding ceremony must be discreet.

We do have the capacity for projection, the use of video, and ability to live-stream your ceremony within our sanctuary, if you are interested. However, this must be discussed beforehand with the minister to ensure that support staff, if required, are available.

Bulletins

It is the couple's responsibility to purchase and print bulletins if they are desired. After finalizing the order of service, the minister will provide you with a copy of this information for you to distribute to the guests and the wedding party.

Involvement of Family and Friends

Your friends and family play a big role in helping you celebrate your marriage. We, at Orchard Valley, encourage family members and friends to be involved in the ceremony in whatever way you would like. We recognize that there are many different family configurations and are happy to work with you, the couple, to include children in the ceremony, if you wish. Honouring and remembering those who have passed away or are unable to be present with us may also be something for you to consider.

If you have a friend or family member who is a minister, you may wish for them to be involved in the service. Any requests like this must be discussed with the minister of Orchard Valley United Church and, ultimately, approved by our Worship Committee and Council.

As required by law, every marriage must be witnessed by two persons over the age of 18. These are most often close friends or family members of the couple, such as the best man and the maid of honour. Please make sure to let the minister know who you have chosen for this role.

Unity Candles, Sand Ceremonies, Unity Tree, and other Rituals

Some couples like to include rituals within their wedding ceremony that reflect the coming together of their families and lives. These might include the lighting of a unity candle, the blending of coloured sand, planting of a unity tree, or something similar. Please feel free to ask the minister about these rituals and they will provide resources to help you find something that is meaningful to you both. Occasionally, couples also like to include a service of Holy Communion within the wedding ceremony. This is a sacrament of the church that acknowledges the transformative and living presence of God within our lives. In the United Church of Canada, we celebrate an open table, which places no barriers upon the receiving of communion. Anyone who feels called to partake is invited to consume the bread and wine (juice). If you are interested in including communion as part of your ceremony, please let the minister know.

Wedding Rehearsal

Once a date for the wedding has been agreed upon, the rehearsal date will be scheduled. Typically, this happens a day or two before the ceremony. All members of the wedding party are required to attend, and you may invite any other guests you wish. The wedding rehearsal is

an opportunity to do a dry-run of the ceremony to make sure that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities and to help relieve some of the last-minute jitters that appear at times like this. We want you to be relaxed and able to fully enjoy your wedding. We hold the rehearsal so that you can let go of your stress and rest assured that everything will go according to plan.

Alcohol, Tobacco and Cannabis

Please be advised that Orchard Valley United Church does not permit the consumption of alcohol, tobacco or cannabis on the property. We understand that you may be nervous during the rehearsal or before the wedding ceremony, but please wait until the wedding reception. According to Canadian law, a couple must be completely sober during their marriage ceremony. If the minister has any suspicions that anyone in the wedding party is not, they will postpone the marriage.

Marriage Certificates – Post-Ceremony

There are three pieces of paper that need to be completed during the wedding ceremony – the marriage license, the Orchard Valley United Church marriage register, and the Record of Solemnization of Marriage. Following the ceremony, the minister will mail the completed marriage license to the provincial government to be registered. The marriage register is kept at Orchard Valley United as a secondary record of the marriage, and the Record of Solemnization will be given to the couple as their personal record of the marriage. Please designate someone, typically a close friend or parent, who can hold on to this important paperwork for you so that you can celebrate your day.

The Record of Solemnization is accepted by the province as legal proof of marriage. You will need this for tax purposes and to assist in other updates of information, such as any name changes. After the ceremony, you may contact Access Nova Scotia if you wish to apply for a formal, permanent marriage certificate, which will then be mailed to you within 4-6 weeks.

For more information, visit: <https://novascotia.ca/access-services-online/>