

POLICY FOR SPECIAL SERVICES OF WORSHIP

Westminster Presbyterian Church
1250 W. Exchange, Akron, Ohio

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” ~ Galatians 3:28

Whereas,

Westminster Presbyterian Church already welcomes all people to come, encounter, grow, and serve (per vision statement), and;

Westminster has committed to being an adaptive and inclusive congregation (per values statement) and;

Westminster has a long-standing mission and practice of allowing the use of our building for a wide variety of services and programs, as long as they are consistent with our vision/values, and;

The Presbyterian Book of Order has ample support for establishing occasions of worship for member nurturance or in support of life transitions, which could include services of worship for:

1. same-sex adults who wish to make a commitment of mutual support/faithfulness;¹
2. adults for whom becoming legally married would be a hardship;
3. recommitment or renewal of vows;
4. life transitions such as retirements, career shifts, or graduations.

Therefore,

We, as the Session of Westminster Presbyterian Church, authorize the use of our building for “Celebrations of Commitment” or “Services of Blessing” when such services:

1. celebrate faithful relationships,
2. have the support of the pastor(s),
3. are designed and conducted with sensitivity to the values of the congregation, and
4. acknowledge the sacred nature of commitments made in this religious context.

Session gives responsibility for meeting these requirements to our pastors (in consultation with the Worship Task Force) as is true for other services of worship. We take this action in our belief that, as part of its ministry, the church is called to support covenants that celebrate love, affirm commitment, or encourage fidelity.

GUIDELINES FOR SPECIAL SERVICES OF WORSHIP:

A. Naming the Ceremony

1. Such services shall be named a “Celebration of Commitment” or a “Service of Blessing.”

¹ Ministers and sessions are permitted to provide pastoral care in the form of worship services that "celebrate a loving, caring, and committed relationship" such as civil unions for same sex couples, but they must also advise such couples that such a service does not constitute a marriage and may not be held out as such. To read more about this advisory opinion regarding ceremonies blessing same-sex relationships in the Presbyterian Church (USA) visit: <http://oga.pcusa.org/section/departments/constitutional-services/advisory-opinions/>

2. Couples shall use either the name "Celebration of Commitment or "Service of Blessing" when describing the worship service in their invitations, public announcements, and all other printed or electronically distributed material related to the service of worship.

B. Religious Affiliation of Participants

1. It is required that participants have a relationship with Westminster Presbyterian Church in order to have a "Celebration of Commitment" or "Service of Blessing" at the church.
2. While the actual ceremony will occur in a Christian setting, an interfaith service may be planned, if appropriate.

C. The Service As Worship

1. "Celebrations of Commitment" and "Services of Blessing" are services of worship and should have the dignity and integrity of worship. Therefore, "the press" and other media shall not be invited to cover the occasion.
2. The atmosphere surrounding the service should be sensitive to the religious nature and significance of the occasion.

D. Scheduling

1. The date and time of the service shall be set in consultation with the pastor(s) performing the service.
2. It is expected that clergy on the staff of Westminster Presbyterian Church shall perform all "Celebrations of Commitment" and "Services of Blessing."
3. While the participation of other clergy is welcome, their participation must be cleared with the pastoral staff prior to an invitation being extended.
4. Because "Celebrations of Commitment" and "Services of Blessing" are services of worship performed by the church, our facilities are not to be rented for such services to non-members.

X _____

X _____

All participants must sign to indicate they have read and understood this policy.

The following statement from the *Confession of 1967* informs this policy: "God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In his reconciling love, he overcomes the barriers between brothers and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary. The church is called to bring all men to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. Therefore, the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it. Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize their fellowmen, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they profess." (9.44)