

WEDDING GUIDE FOR PROTESTANT SERVICES CONDUCTED ON WEST POINT



Welcome. In receiving this Wedding Guide, you have indicated your desire to celebrate your marriage vows in the presence of God amid the beautiful setting of the United States Military Academy at West Point historic places of worship. As you prepare for your wedding, read this guide carefully and accept the stated policies. The Chapels serve under military order and have specific requirements and limitations that are mandatory for every wedding party. These are in place to ensure that God is glorified and that all participants enjoy a memorable experience.

WHO MAY BE MARRIED IN THE CADET AND OLD CADET CHAPEL

In accordance with USMA Regulation 165-1, all persons wishing to use one of the Military Chapels at West point must meet the following priority and eligibility requirements:

- 1) Active duty military personnel and their dependents currently assigned to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point or U.S. Army Garrison West Point.
- 2) Graduate (past and present) of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point or another U.S. Military Service Academy.
- 3) Active congregation members, as defined by the respective pastor/priest of the Cadet Chapel or Old Cadet Chapel.

Any exceptions to the above must be approved by the Superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and restrictions may be put in place to ensure the priority of support goes to recent graduates.

If you are eligible to be married in the Cadet Chapel or Old Cadet Chapel please read the rest of this document, fill out the required forms listed and email them to the Garrison Chaplain's office. The required forms may also be located on our webpage at: [West Point Religious Services Office](#).

Weddings held at the Cadet Chapel and Old Cadet Chapels are conducted as Protestant services of worship only. If either the bride or the groom is Catholic, they must contact the West Point Catholic Chaplain's office at (845) 938-8760 to speak to a West Point priest prior to making any wedding arrangements.

Catholic ceremonies are performed at Most Holy Trinity Catholic Chapel at West Point. Call the Most Holy Trinity Catholic Chapel Office at 845-938-8760 for information.

PREPARATION FOR THE MARRIAGE SERVICE

Place - Reservations for a wedding at the Cadet Chapel and Old Cadet Chapels can only be arranged through the Garrison Chaplain's Office, located in the Post Chapel Annex, building 692, West Point, New York 10996, (845) 938-2003.

Clergy – It is highly encouraged that you find a chaplain or civilian clergy to officiate your wedding. Having a West Point chaplain officiate your wedding is possible, but takes a great deal of coordination due to the mission of the West Point chaplains. Upon request, the Garrison Chaplain's office can provide a list of available chaplains from West Point with their denominational requirements for weddings at (845) 938-2003.

If you would like to request a West Point Chaplain, please fill out the form on page three of the [West Point Protestant Wedding: Request and Agreements](#) and email it to the Garrison Chaplain's office. There is an "Email this form" button on the required forms to make this process easier.

Couples getting married and guest ministers officiating at the Cadet or the Old Cadet Chapel must fill out and sign the [West Point Protestant Wedding: Guest Minister Policy](#). This document must be returned to the Garrison Chaplain's Office no later than 60 days prior to the rehearsal. Upon receipt, the Garrison Chaplain's Office will appoint a sponsor to the wedding and notify the party via e-mail.

Visiting clergy will be sponsored by an assigned chaplain from the Garrison Chaplain's Office, which may or may not be the same denomination of the wedding party. The Garrison Chaplain's Office grants permission to guest ministers with the understanding that the wedding couple and the guest minister abide by the policies published in the Wedding Guide for Services Conducted in The Cadet Chapel and Old Cadet Chapel. Additionally, couples and ministers must also adhere to the following procedures:

No Weddings involving a guest minister can be scheduled after 2:00 p.m.

Guest ministers must certify in writing that they have conducted premarital counseling with the couple. Since the service is being held in a military Chapel, installation policy requires pre-marital counseling of all couples being married at West Point. The counseling should be completed at least one month prior to the wedding. If not local to the area, couples may make arrangements for pre-marital counseling with a chaplain or clergy from another post or community. Couples must provide a letter from their counselor to the Garrison Chaplain's office certifying that the required counseling has been completed 30 days prior to your wedding date. There is no special required program.

The sponsoring West Point Chaplain will direct all wedding rehearsals. Guest ministers will attend the wedding rehearsals and may participate as necessary. Wedding rehearsals are normally scheduled between 5 and 7 p.m. the evening prior to the service and may not be changed without approval of the Garrison Chaplain's Office.

Weddings will start on time. The Cadet Chapel and Old Cadet Chapels are public buildings and very popular sites to visit for tourists and guests of the Academy. Since we "fence" the chapels from local tour groups during services and ceremonies, there is only one hour allocated for weddings at the Cadet Chapel or Old Cadet Chapel. If no wedding is scheduled to follow, the wedding party and guests must clear the Chapel no later than one hour after the scheduled start time of their wedding. If another wedding is scheduled to follow, the wedding party and guests must clear the Chapel no later than 20 minutes before the hour to allow the next wedding to seat guests before the hour.

Marriage License - The State of New York requires all weddings being held within its borders to have a valid New York State marriage license prior to the service. The license may be obtained from any Town or City Clerk within New York State. Both bride and groom must be present when applying for a marriage license. A marriage license is valid for sixty days. If an applicant for license to marry is under twenty-one years of age, proof of age must be submitted to the Town or City Clerk, such as certificate of birth, baptismal record, automobile driver's license, etc. Applicants must have the consent of parents or guardian in writing together with proof of age if the bride is under eighteen years of age. The clerk shall furnish the certificate of consent which must be signed by parents or guardian and notarized before obtaining the license.

The nearest Town Clerk's office to West Point is located at 254 Main Street in Highland Falls, N.Y. They are open for business Monday through Friday, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Their phone number is (845) 446-3398. Both the bride and groom must be present to obtain the license but it is not necessary that witnesses accompany them to the office. The license must be obtained at least 24 hours prior to the wedding. New York State does not require a blood test.

Dates and Service Times - Specific wedding dates and service times cannot be guaranteed as the schedule is arranged on a first-come, first-served basis. Weddings are scheduled to begin on the hour during available Saturdays. There are no weddings allowed during special event weekends (e.g., football home games, Organ Recital weekends, Plebe-Parent weekend, etc.). There are no Sunday weddings allowed due to the regular worship service schedule. The only alteration to this schedule will occur during the week following graduation. For specifics of the post-graduation schedule, contact the Garrison Chaplain's Office at (845) 938-2003.

When requesting a specific wedding date, your date is only tentatively reserved until the chaplain's office has received your completed wedding packet. You can expect to receive a confirmation email indicating that your wedding packet has been approved and your wedding date has been reserved by the garrison chaplain. Scheduling of hall, caterers, etc. prior to receiving a confirmation email is discouraged and done at your own risk.

WEDDING TIME SCHEDULE

In response to the large volume of weddings conducted at West Point Chapels throughout the year, the following wedding time schedule has been established. All wedding parties must consent to abide by this published schedule in order to ensure a smooth transition between multiple services and as a gesture of goodwill to fellow wedding guests.

Friday Night Rehearsals - If there are four weddings scheduled on Saturday, rehearsals will be conducted in 30 minute increments, beginning at 5 p.m. and concluding at 7 p.m. If there are only one or two weddings on Saturday, then the rehearsals will begin at 6 p.m. and conclude no later than 7 p.m. All members of the wedding party must be on time for their rehearsal.

Saturday, "Quarter to the Hour" - The wedding party arrives and guests are admitted to the Chapel. Due to limited space, participants cannot prepare themselves at the Chapel before the service. There is only a small Bride's Room available at the Cadet Chapel for ladies to wait prior to the wedding and none afterwards. There are no rooms available for men before or after the service. Please come as fully dressed and prepared as possible. If included in the service, those who serve as saber bearers will report to the Chapel Sexton at the Chapel steps no later than 30 minutes before the wedding. The Sexton will instruct them on the placement and basic movements required for the saber arch at the end of the service.

Saturday, “On the Hour” - All weddings must begin at the appointed time on the hour **No Exceptions**. It is imperative that you ensure that all wedding participants and guests are aware that they **Must** be on time. There will be no delaying of the wedding ceremonies for any reason.

Saturday, “Forty past the Hour” – After the service, all members of the bridal party must be clear of the Bride’s Room and Chapel in order to allow the Sextons the opportunity to prepare the Chapel for the next wedding if there is one scheduled immediately following. If there is no wedding immediately following, all wedding guests must be clear of the Chapel on the hour.

As seen in the schedule, services are limited to these wedding times. This means that pre-wedding photo sessions are not allowed. Post-wedding photo opportunities are limited strictly to the number of minutes remaining in your allotted wedding time. These constraints prohibit receiving lines being conducted within the Chapel grounds.

CEREMONY

Processional - The bridal party begins the processional Saturday “**On the Hour**” in this order: grandparents of the groom, grandparents of the bride, parents of the groom, parents of the bride (if included in the service, the single tapers of the unity candle placed on the altar will be lighted during this time,) bridesmaids, flower girl/ring bearer, maid/matron of honor and bride. The chaplain, groom and groomsmen enter from the Chancel area as the bridesmaids begin their processional.

Presentation - The bride joins the groom. The chaplain introduces the ceremony.

Affirmation of the Families - The father of the bride may give away the bride or special questions of blessing are asked to family members.

Scripture Reading - These will be appropriate passages read by the chaplain or friend/family member.

Questions - Bride and groom affirm before witnesses that they desire to be married.

Wedding Vows - The vows are recited and accepted.

Exchange of rings - Bride and groom exchange wedding bands.

Lighting of the Unity Candle (if included) - The couple will move toward the altar to light the unity candle.

Announcement of Marriage - The chaplain will conclude the service by pronouncing the couple married and present the bride and groom.

Recessional - The bridal party will exit the Chapel area in this order: Bride and groom, best man and maid/matron of honor, flower girl and ring bearer, bridesmaids and groomsmen, parents of the bride, parents of the groom, grandparents. The bride and groom will return to the waiting area located at the back of the Chapel. The congregation is dismissed and the saber arch, if included, is formed. See the section marked “Military Honors” for execution of the saber arch.

The above is just an example of the wedding order, however, exceptions to this order are strongly discouraged due to the time constraints of the schedule. Any requests for exceptions must be coordinated with the officiating/sponsoring chaplain in advance.

MUSIC

The Cadet Chapel normally provides an organist for all weddings. All wedding music is approved by the Cadet Chapel Organist, Mr. Craig Williams, in advance, as he normally does not attend the rehearsal the night before. Please contact Mr. Williams no later than one month prior to your wedding in order to discuss music options. He can be reached at (845) 938-7352 or by email at craig.williams@usma.edu Music appropriate to the setting that respects the nature of the worship service and honors the couple will be played. No recorded music will be used for services in the Cadet Chapel. Couples requesting the Cadet Chapel for their wedding should understand that the Cadet Chapel houses one of the premier pipe organs in the world and the audio system is not designed to support recorded music. Only Chapel personnel will operate the sound system..

Special requests - If you have a request for special music, please make it known to Mr. Williams. In making the request, we must point out that we are bound to honor copyright terms and limitations, as well as the decorum of the service therefore, not all special requests can be honored.

Soloists and Musicians - If you have someone that you wish to have perform during the service please coordinate this Mr. Craig Williams. Excellent opportunities for special music occur during the seating of the parents/grandparents and again during the lighting of the Unity Candle. Please note that only West Point musicians may play the organ for weddings in the Chapels, and we are not able to provide or recommend soloists or musicians.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Participants must make all arrangements for photographic coverage of their wedding. The official photographer should be inconspicuous throughout the wedding service.

Either the Bride or Groom and the photographer must sign, the [West Point Protestant Wedding: Photographer Policy](#) certifying that they have read, understand and will abide by the guidelines here for services conducted in The Cadet Chapel and Old Cadet Chapel.

Flash pictures may be taken as the bride and father process down the aisle at the start of the service, and following the service as the bride and groom recess down the aisle. There will be no flash pictures during the actual worship service; this includes official photographers and wedding guests.

The photographer will not ask them to stop to pose for pictures.

At no time during the service will any photographer approach closer to the Chancel area than on a line corresponding to the last row of guests or beyond the galleries on each side of the choir area. You will be shown this upon rehearsal.

The traditional arch of sabers picture is taken outside the Chapel and serves as an excellent photographer's model. Have your photographer be prepared for this shot as time constraints will prohibit this shot from being reposed. In inclement weather, the arch will be held in the choir area of the Chapel and the photographer will be allowed to come closer and use flash photography.

Due to time constraints, there will be no posed pictures allowed prior to the service. Post-service photos will only be possible if there are minutes remaining in your wedding time (up to the hour if there is not another wedding scheduled for that hour). When a wedding is scheduled to follow yours, no wedding service or pictures will be allowed to go beyond the "Forty past the hour" mark. Please see "Wedding Time Schedule" in the West Point Protestant Wedding Guide.

Video cameras may be used with natural light. The videographer, should be inconspicuous throughout the wedding service.

DECORATIONS

Flowers - Seasonal flowers (lilies and poinsettias) will be in place at Easter and Christmas, respectively, in the Cadet Chapel only. Flowers, seasonal or otherwise, are not provided for in the Old Cadet Chapel. Couples are encouraged to limit decorations they bring to either of the Chapels due to the restricted time to decorate prior to and recover the items after the service. The Chapels' own architecture and decorum provide ample beauty for any service.

Unity Candle (if included) - The Chapel will provide a Unity Candle and two tapers to be placed on the altar if the couple chooses to include that portion in their service. However, if the couple wishes to keep the unity candle, then they must provide their own candle set complete with stand.

Aisle Runner - Due to heating grates in the floor of the Cadet Chapel and carpeting in the Old Cadet Chapel, aisle runners are not permitted for safety reasons.

Rice, birdseed, confetti, rose petals, candles - No items may be thrown by the congregation in honor of the couple inside or upon exiting the Chapel. Please do not distribute these items, and ensure that your ushers notify your guests that they are not allowed to throw anything inside or outside the Chapel. Candles are not permitted to line the aisle in the Cadet and Old Cadet Chapels as they pose a serious risk for starting a fire.

MILITARY HONORS

Essentially, a military wedding is no different from any other wedding except the service member and saber bearers wear military dress uniforms (uniform is optional if bride is the service member). At the conclusion of the wedding ceremony, the bride and groom — and only they — walk between the saber arch as they exit the Chapel. Groomsmen, of course, may be civilians, but only military members may serve as saber bearers. Saber bearers must be in military dress uniform, and therefore boutonnieres are not authorized to be worn on the uniform. You can have members of another military branch perform the saber arch, but they must be in their appropriate dress uniform. Saber arches will not be permitted unless the groom (if he is a military member) and all saber bearers are in the appropriate military uniform. If the bride is in the military marrying a civilian and she wishes to wear the traditional wedding gown, then a saber arch will be permitted with the approval of the chaplain.

Saber Bearers - Saber bearers not serving as groomsmen will take seats in the congregation, normally toward the back. The saber arch is outside the entrance to the Chapel, except in the event of inclement weather. The Chapel is able to provide up to twelve officer sabers. However, for the size and space available, it is recommended you use six sabers. Also, it is up to the wedding party to provide their own saber bearers. The groom normally asks some of his military peers to perform the arch at his wedding ceremony. Saber bearers do not need to attend the rehearsal. They should be at the Chapel thirty minutes prior to the wedding to rehearse the saber arch. The Chapel Staff will conduct this rehearsal. *It is inappropriate for saber bearers not to be in uniform.*

Saber Arch - Upon completion of the ceremony, the bride and groom recess down the aisle, followed by their wedding party and guests. Before exiting the Chapel, the wedding couple steps aside and remains inside the Chapel, allowing the wedding party and congregation to exit the Chapel. The saber bearers will then form two lines to exit the Chapel and take their position on the steps outside the door. The person positioned as the first person in the left line is generally the person who gives commands. Commands are simply "**Carry Sabers**" [sabers on the right shoulder,] "**Forward March**" [saber bearers position themselves on the stairs, starting at the top, every other step or every two steps, depending on the number of saber bearers,] "**Halt, Center Face**" [turn and face the center]. The bridal party then walks through [sabers are still in "**Carry Sabers**."] When the bride and groom approach, they stop before reaching the first set of sabers. The best man, whether he is a service member or not, introduces the newly married couple. The person positioned on the TOP LEFT will give the commands: "**Present Sabers**" [bring saber to the chin], "**Arch Sabers**" [fully extend the right arm, rotating the wrist, or by rotating the arm in a counter-clockwise direction turning the cutting edge of the saber up, away from the people, thus forming a true arch]. The only people to walk under the arch are the bride and groom. When the bride and groom reach the two saber-bearers on the end, they close sabers by bringing the sabers down to cross at waist level and request a 'kiss' for passage. When they lift the sabers, the bride and groom proceed. (There will be **NO** "Welcome to the Army" as the bride passes through.) The orders are then given for: "**Present Sabers**" [to the chin], "**Order Sabers**" [saber the blade down at right toe], "**Carry Sabers**" [at the shoulder], "**Left and Right Face**" [facing command], "**Forward March**" [movement command].

RECEPTIONS

Receptions are not held at the Chapels, nor can the Chaplain's Office recommend or arrange for receptions following the service. Information may be obtained concerning on-post reception services by calling the West Point Club at (845) 446-5504, the Hotel Thayer at (845) 446-4731, or the Alumni Center (AOG) at (845) 446-1603. Receptions may also be scheduled off post in other facilities. A reservation of a local facility for a wedding reception does not guarantee the reservation of a Chapel, nor warrant consideration for an exception to policy. Arrangements for your rehearsal dinner and reception should only be made after you have received a reservation confirmation letter from the Chaplain's Office.

RESPECT TO THE CHAPELS

Please remember that marriage ceremonies held in the Cadet and Old Cadet Chapels are services of worship held within a military setting. As a place of worship, all guests are asked to show due reverence while attending the service. As a military facility, all guests are encouraged to display proper respect. To support this, remember that the chaplain conducting or sponsoring the service retains overall responsibility for the conduct of the service. We ask that you and all the wedding party support them, and their representatives, as they seek personally and professionally to honor the Lord and serve you. There are no alcoholic beverages allowed on the premises of either Cadet Chapel or Old Cadet Chapel. Members of the wedding party or their guests who bring alcoholic beverages into either Chapel will be asked to leave.

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CHAPEL STAFF

All weddings will be directed by the chaplain and the Chapel Sextons. There is no need for a wedding coordinator. If you bring a wedding coordinator, they must follow the directions of the chaplain and the Chapel staff at the rehearsal and the ceremony. All members of the wedding parties are expected to follow the instructions given by these personnel. The Sextons are very experienced with Cadet Chapel weddings and are there to help ensure that each wedding is conducted in the proper manner with the least amount of stress and confusion.

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION AND QUESTIONS

If you have any questions please send an email to Garrison Chaplains Office at: Maria.Trevizo-Ramirez@usma.edu at (845) 938-2003.

Our mailing address is: Garrison Chaplains Office, 692 Biddle Loop, West Point, NY 10996