



Guidelines for Marriage at St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Guidelines for the Service of Christian Marriage In St. Paul's Church

Christian marriage is a service of worship. The Prayer Book titles the service **The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage**. The word *celebration* expresses the joy that characterizes the event and its public and corporate nature. The word *blessing* is a reminder of the solemn, religious context of this holy covenant. In the wedding service, the two people promise in God's name to be faithful to each other for life. The congregation commits to support the couple and prays that God will strengthen and guide them in their life together. The priest proclaims God's blessing upon them. The sacred nature of the service and the solemnity of the promises made by the couple influences the decisions to be made about the wedding.

Christian marriage is a covenant that is made out of the Christian commitment of the two people within the context of the life of the congregation and the whole Church. Thus, the service of Christian marriage **assumes that the Bride or Groom are active members of the congregation**. That is why Christian marriage is inappropriate for couples when at least one is not an active communicant. Persons seeking God's blessing through the Church for their marriage are **expected to be regular in worship, especially during the months prior to their wedding**. Of course, couples requesting Christian marriage at St. Paul's are expected to continue in regular worship following their wedding. The solemn vows of Christian marriage are expressed within the context of the living community of the Church.

Many people find that civil marriage is a more suitable expression of their vows. The Church fully recognizes civil marriage, and in many countries it is the norm. A civil marriage may be blessed by the Church later whenever it seems appropriate. *Only when a couple intends to take on the exceptional obligations and responsibilities expected by the Church should their marriage be a Christian one.*

The marriage ceremony will be performed according to the authorized liturgy of the Episcopal Church. The liturgy reflects the communal aspect of the Church's life and the reality that marriage reflects the union between Christ and the Church.

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First Steps

1. Read this entire booklet carefully. It will answer most of your questions.
2. Visit with Parish Administrator Suzi Freeman to set up your premarital preparation sessions with the priest and organist. She can also help you with potential dates that are available on the church calendar. Contact Suzi at 479-442-7373 or sfreeman@arkansasusa.com

Remember: Anyone asking for Christian Marriage at St. Paul's is expected to be an active worshiping member and to continue that relationship as a family.

The Requirements

Every priest of the Episcopal Church must conform to the laws of the state and the canons of the Episcopal Church regarding the solemnization of Holy Matrimony. The bare *canonical* requirements are: (1) that persons desirous of being married in this church must signify their intention to the minister at least 30 days prior to the date of the service; (2) that there be at least two witnesses to the ceremony; (3) that the date and place of the marriage, the names of the parties, the age of the parties, their residences, and their Church status are recorded in the proper register; (4) that the witnesses and minister shall sign the record; and (5) that the parties sign a declaration of intention.

In the case of marriage following divorce, the following additional requirements apply: (1) the minister has appropriate evidence that any previous marriage has been annulled or dissolved (copies of all divorce decrees constitute evidence of the termination of any previous marriages); (2) the divorce decree or annulment has been in effect for one full year prior to the date of the re-marriage; (3) the minister consults with the parties as to continuing concern for the former spouse and children of the prior marriage; and (4) the minister has the consent of the Diocesan Bishop (this takes at least 30 days).

Because the request for the Bishop's permission occurs after the pre-marital counseling period, the typical preparation time for marriage of a divorced person begins several months prior to the wedding date.

The Bishop expects a priest to meet with all couples for a series of pre-marital conferences. This is usually done in three or four sessions, not including the initial visit. The priest may decline to officiate the service at the priest's discretion.

Setting the Date of the Service

Technically, the minister is not supposed to give consent to performing the service until after the canons have been fulfilled. Therefore, before any date is set or other marriage plans made, contact should be made with the minister. The date is subject to the schedule of the priest and the church. Because of the penitential nature of the season of Lent, it is not appropriate to perform weddings from Ash Wednesday until Easter. As you choose the hour of the service, keep in mind, St. Paul's windows are beautiful during the daylight.

The Minister

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage is a service of worship, and therefore is under the complete direction of the priest. Wedding consultants are not necessary. The priest will conduct any rehearsal. All members of the wedding party are expected to attend the rehearsal.

The Eucharist

Because the Eucharist is the Sacrament of unity, it provides an exquisite context for the wedding service. You are encouraged to celebrate the Holy Eucharist in connection with your marriage. What better first act for a new family can be imagined than to receive the sacrament of holy union. The Prayer Book instructs that "opportunity is always given to every communicant to receive the consecrated Bread and Wine..." (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 407)

The Oblations

It is customary for the Bride and Groom or for family members to bring the bread and wine forward for the communion.

The Congregation

Weddings are important occasions in the lives of the Bride and Groom and their friends and families. It is expected that the Invitation List will include many who are not members of the congregation. However, since the service of holy Matrimony is a worship service, and since there are no "private services" in the Episcopal Church, it is understood that the local congregation is also invited and that an announcement to that effect may be published.

The Music

Only sacred music is allowed at a marriage service. The resident organist has the first right of refusal on all weddings performed in St. Paul's Church. You should contact the resident organist at least 30 days prior to the service. Any other arrangements need to be cleared with the priest and the resident organist.

You are encouraged to use hymns for your wedding, especially if the congregation will be large enough to sing well. The *Hymnal 1982* is widely regarded as a masterpiece of sacred music. It is appropriate to invite the Parish Choir to sing.

Quality instrumentalists can add a festive tone to the celebration of a marriage. Such instrumentalists are under the direction of the minister and the resident organist.

Solo vocal music is unnecessary, but allowed as long as the music chosen is hymns or anthems which are appropriate to the liturgies authorized by the Episcopal Church. The words are to be from Holy Scripture, from The Book of Common Prayer, or from texts congruent with them. Popular music should be saved for the reception.

In our liturgical tradition the Lord's Prayer is a corporate act of prayer (see Prayer Book, page 428). Additionally it may be sung as an anthem. Most professional church musicians discourage the use of Wagner's *Bridal Chorus* ("Here Comes the Bride") and Mendelssohn's *Wedding March*.*

On all music decisions, the minister is the final authority.

*** Why would anybody object to the "traditional" wedding marches we've grown up hearing in every movie?** Part of the problem is that their use is a Hollywood invention. When movie makers were looking for music for weddings, they intentionally chose music that had no history of use in religious ceremony so that the movie wedding scenes would not be identifiable with any particular church or religious group. They "discovered" these two pieces and used them because they had no religious connections. The marches come from two operas. In the Wagner opera, the new bride betrays her husband's trust and is abandoned by him. The Mendelssohn march was written for the marriage of a young woman to a satyr -- half man and half horse!

Liturgical Policies at St. Paul's

One of the reasons people love to worship at St. Paul's and to be married here is our wonderful tradition of beautiful and inspiring liturgy. The use of symbol, sacrament, color, and art is particularly important in liturgical traditions like the Episcopal Church. Everything we do in worship has purpose and communicates meaning.

The Sacrament of Marriage is first of all a service of worship. It's focus is God – God's divine blessing given to the solemn vows made by the couple. The service is also a celebration; it's mood is joyful. Our goal is service of God-oriented worship in joyful celebration of solemn vows. The symbols and ritual acts of marriage are the ways we communicate the meaning of the worship service.

Here is the way we structure the worship service of the Sacrament of Marriage at St. Paul's:

Before the Service

It is our tradition that the congregation keeps silence before worship in order to prepare through prayer. Appropriate sacred or classical music may be played. A hymn or other sacred music may be sung or played by the musicians. The ushers may help worshipers to their seats. If the family of the bride and groom are not to be in the Procession, they may be ushered to their seats prior to the beginning of the service.

The Entrance Procession

Since Marriage is an act of worship, our entrance procession looks similar to our processions on Sunday. As the congregation sings a hymn or as instrumental music is played, the ministers of the service enter down the aisle from the back of the church. The use of a processional hymn of praise is particularly encouraged to highlight the worship aspect of the service and to reinforce the connections with our Sunday practice. Here is the order of procession, [optional parts are placed in brackets].

[Thurifer with incense]
Crucifer with Cross
[Torches]
[Gospel Book]
[Choir]
[Other musicians]
[Parents/Family of Groom]
[Parents/Family of Bride]
[Lay Reader(s) / Chalice Bearer (s)]
[Bridesmaids & Groomsmen]
Maid/Matron of Honor & Best Man
[Ring Bearer Flower Girl]
Priest
Bride & Groom
or if the Father escorts the Bride
Priest & Groom
Father and Bride

The Procession enters in a smooth and dignified manner as one act of procession. Usually we give the Bride and Groom (or the Father and Bride) as much as half the aisle for their entrance at the end of the Procession using the same music as the Procession.

(See *Frequently Asked Questions* for more information about the procession.)

The Flowers and Altar Hangings

One of the joys of being in a liturgical church is that it is already beautifully appointed for worship. There is no need to import flower baskets, ferns, and candelabra to make it look festive. Only Altar Flowers are used for the service. The bride and bridesmaids may have bouquets and the gentlemen may wear boutonnières. Only fresh flowers and real greenery are used. Flowers may be used for pew markers and window decorations. (Pew markers should not be attached by tape or other sticky substances.) No other flowers are necessary.

The Altar Flowers should follow the scale and proportion of arrangements used on Sundays and other Major Feasts. The only vases we use are those supplied by St. Paul's parish. Please make arrangements with the office for your florist to pick up the vase liners. Flowers for the altar may be up to 23" from the bottom of the vase. If a wedding takes place on a Saturday, it is customary that the flowers be used in church on the following Sunday. We generally take the Sunday Altar Flowers to the sick or shut-in after church each week. We recommend that the dominant color of arrangements be white. The Altar Hangings may be either the seasonal hangings, tapestry, or white.

The Candles

The Church's Altar candles, torches, and window candles may be used during the marriage service. During advent, the advent candles are lit, and during the Easter season, the Paschal Candle is used at all services. If you wish to use a "unity candle," please save that for the reception. We do not use pew candles.

The Pictures

A wedding is a service of worship. No photographs may be taken during the service. (The processions in and out of the church are considered part of the service.) This is a firm requirement and is expected to be communicated to the photographer and to friends and family. The photographer may take pictures in the Guild Hall prior to the procession, but should not take photographs from the Narthex.

Posed photographs may be taken either before or after the service. We may pose any parts of the wedding service. If pictures are taken in the church before the service, they must be completed before the congregation arrives. Remember, posing pictures after the service delays the wedding party's arrival at the reception.

There may be one stationary video camera on a tripod placed in the church behind the last pew. There may be an additional video camera on a tripod placed next to the east end of the organ console. It may be supervised, but the photographer should be dressed in keeping with the wedding party. (i.e. coat & tie; nice dress) Artificial light for photography is inappropriate for a wedding.

The Acolytes

Ordinarily, the acolytes will be those of the congregation. If you wish to request particular parish acolytes, please clear those choices with the priest and acolyte warden. You are asked to extend the invitations to the acolytes who would take part in the service.

The Rehearsal

Wedding rehearsals are usually held in the early evening of the day before the wedding. **All** members of the wedding party are expected to attend, to be on time, and to remember that the rehearsal is conducted with reverence. For some small weddings, it is preferable to have a brief rehearsal on the day of the wedding sometime prior to the arrival of the congregation, or at some other suitable time.

The Reception

If the reception is to be held in the Parish Hall or Garth (courtyard), arrangements should be made in advance to reserve the building and to ensure that the event occurs smoothly. You are responsible for cleaning up and returning everything to its pre-reception condition. Receptions can not be held in any of the carpeted areas of the building or the upstairs. Child care must be provided. All rented equipment, etc, must be removed from the kitchen and Parish Hall immediately after the reception. The use of alcoholic beverages must follow the attached policy. Please read it carefully. If champagne is served, take caution when opening to prevent damage to people, walls, ceiling, and floors. The cleaning service will come in afterwards to prepare the church for the following Sunday. The reception needs to end in time for the hall to be empty by 10:30 p.m. so we can set up for Sunday.

Miscellaneous

Please do not use rice. If you use birdseed, please use it outside only. Please remove hangers, cleaning bags, and other things from the dressing areas. There is no food or drink allowed in the Sacristy. Please do not bring or drink alcohol during the rehearsal or during the time prior to the wedding. We have a very strict policy. Alcohol may only be used at receptions.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why don't the men enter from one direction and the women process down the aisle as I've seen in other weddings?

Many of the ritual actions of weddings are an inheritance from days when marriages were contractual events arranged by families, often with important property issues as the primary driving force. In those days it made sense for the two parties to enter from different directions in order begin the contractual process safely "at arms length." For protection, sometimes the Best Man and a representative from the bride's family were armed just in case things got out of hand.

Form follows function. We no longer enter marriage as potentially adversarial parties agreeing to enter a contract. In our culture, a mature, committed couple is coming joyfully to the church to celebrate their relationship of love. The bridal party enters together as friends intending to show their support for these two persons in their marriage. It makes sense for them to enter the church together as a sign of their mutual support and loving relationship.

Why isn't there a break in the procession when the Bride enters? In other weddings I've seen the doors close and the music change for the entrance of the Bride?

Some of that practice has its origins in the days of arranged marriages. In some traditions, the Groom was not to see the Bride prior to the safe culmination of the contract. The families often feared that if the Groom did not find the Bride attractive enough, he might refuse the wedding and spoil the property arrangements. There was also great concern to protect the virginity of the Bride, which was an important property value promised to the Groom. If he had reason to suspect the virginity of the Bride, it was legal grounds to annul the contract. The safest way to get the Bride to the point where the couple was legally married was to keep her heavily veiled and distanced from the Groom until he had made his public and binding vows. Then he could safely lift the veil to see the Bride who had been chosen for him.

The liturgical procession at St. Paul's is intended to communicate a different understanding. We enter together joyfully in an act of worship and thanksgiving. The main focus is on God, not on the property contract or even on the Bride. Overly theatrical entrances can take away from the worship aspect of the wedding celebration. Much as the Bishop enters solemnly at the end of the procession, so does the Bride and Groom (or Bride and Father) as the final part of the beautiful and dignified entrance rite. It is one procession flowing together rather than two divided. The Sacrament of Marriage is a Sacrament of Unity, and everything we do in worship intends to convey this essential meaning.

Why does the congregation stand throughout the wedding? In other churches the congregation sits.

In our tradition, the congregation participates as active witnesses to the vows and covenants of the couple. Instead of being a passive audience, the congregation stands to indicate its active participation in the marriage. In our tradition we sit to listen to the scriptures, and we stand or kneel as active worshipers in the vows and prayers of the service.

Parish Policy on Alcohol Use

The use of alcohol at a Reception in the Parish Hall.

The Episcopal Church has never endorsed the prohibition of the moderate, adult enjoyment of beverages containing alcohol. Scripture offers Jesus' example of the presence of wine at a wedding party in his first miracle at Cana of Galilee and at the Last Supper when he instituted the Holy Eucharist. Hebrew tradition honors wine as a gift from God when used moderately in accordance with the purposes of the Creator.

The following guidelines will direct the enjoyment of alcoholic beverages at Church functions within the life of St. Paul's Parish.

1. Alcohol is to be served only after receiving permission from the Rector or Vestry.
2. All applicable Federal, State and local laws are to be obeyed, including those governing the serving of alcohol to minors.
3. Alcohol is not to be consumed by adults at events primarily designed for children or youth.
4. Alcoholic beverages and food containing alcohol must be clearly labeled as such and supervised by a mature person who is given the sole responsibility of serving the alcohol. Unsupervised access (i.e. Champagne fountains) to alcohol is not allowed.
5. Whenever alcohol is served, non-alcoholic alternatives must always be offered with equal attractiveness and accessibility.
6. The service of alcoholic beverages should not be publicized as an attraction of the event (i.e. "Shrimp & Beer, Wine & Cheese").
7. Chemical usage other than alcohol is forbidden.
8. Only moderate consumption of alcohol is allowed. The sponsors or organizers of the event assume responsibility for the safe travel of anyone who might become intoxicated.
9. Food appropriate to the occasion should be offered to prevent anyone drinking on an empty stomach.
10. Except for Church functions in private homes, only champagne, beer or wine may be served.
11. Alcoholic beverages cannot be sold without a license.
12. The use of alcohol is prohibited by groups not sponsored by St. Paul's.
13. All alcoholic beverages will be removed from the church immediately following the event.

As amended by the Vestry August 10, 2004

Fees

There are no charges for the priest's services but an honorarium is traditional. If you desire music, there is an honorarium for the resident organist of \$150. Please give that directly to the organist. The church asks for \$300.00 to help us cover our costs for care and upkeep of the facility if you have a wedding only with no reception at the church. If you have a reception at St. Paul's we ask for an additional \$350.00. (Church + Parish Hall = \$650) You may give that to the Parish Office. If you would like acolytes, we can make suggestions for servers. Customarily there is an honorarium (\$20.00 suggested) given directly to each youth acolyte; you might make a discretionary fund contribution to honor an adult acolyte. Please pay fees before or after the rehearsal.

Contacts: Suzi Freeman, St. Paul's administrator — 442-7373
Charlie Rigsby, organist — 442-7373

LETTER OF AGREEMENT
BETWEEN
ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
AND
ALL WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHERS

There will be no wedding photography without a signed letter of agreement

STILL PHOTOGRAPHERS

***There will be NO flash pictures once the music for the wedding has begun. This includes the music that is played prior to the Wedding Service.

***The only pictures that can be taken during the music and the wedding service are those where the photographer is stationary, the camera has a silent shutter and no flash is used. There are two locations for the photographer:

- a. in the rear of the church behind the back pew
- b. behind the choir pews next to the organ

CAMCORDERS, MOVIE AND OR TELEVISION CAMERAS

***May be used without lights.

***Must be on tripods. Two locations are the same as above.

I have read the above agreement and hereby indicate my willingness to abide by the principles set forth by St. Paul's. I also understand that if I do not abide by these principles that I will not be allowed to take pictures at future weddings at St. Paul's

Signature of the photographer _____

Please print name _____

Return to St. Paul's seven (7) days prior to the wedding.

Names of the bride and groom _____

Date of the Wedding _____