

WEDDING MANUAL

Christian Marriage at St. Matthew's

The celebration and blessing of a marriage is a sacred occasion. A wedding is one of life's great moments, a time for good wishes, feasting and joy. It was at a wedding in Cana in Galilee that Jesus chose to perform his first miracle. Christian marriage is to be entered into reverently and with the understanding that both discipline and dedication are required.

Marriage is intended by God to be a creative relationship – God's blessing enables husband and wife to love and support each other in good times and bad. It is based upon a solemn, public and life-long covenant between a man and a woman, made and celebrated in the presence of God and before a priest and witnesses. It is therefore vital for persons planning to be married within the Church to understand that Christian marriage implies intentional relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, and that this relationship should be central to the marriage.

The following guidelines explain the wedding policy here at St. Matthew's. It is intended to help you in your planning. The experience of the Church has shown that certain guidelines are helpful to lessen confusion, to insure that wedding arrangements go smoothly and to answer questions that arise in planning.

General Information

1. The Celebration and Blessing of a marriage in St. Matthew's Episcopal Church is intended **primarily for members, children or grandchildren of members of the parish.**
2. One of the parish priests will normally officiate at all weddings. Other clergy, who have a special relationship with either the bride or groom, may be invited to assist in the service. The Rector should be consulted before communicating with other clergy in regard to the wedding.
3. At the time the couple decides to be married, they should contact the Rector prior to setting a wedding date. Please make no public announcement of your marriage plan until calendar arrangements with the Rector have been finalized. Courtesy would suggest this; scheduling of people and facilities requires that this procedure be followed.
4. Ordinarily, weddings are not scheduled during Lent, major Feast Days or national holidays.
5. The Wedding Guild is responsible for assisting the priest in all of the mechanical arrangements for a wedding. One or two members will be present at the wedding rehearsal and at the wedding. If an outside wedding consultant is retained, it is the responsibility of the wedding party to be certain that the Wedding Consultant understands the necessity of confirming any plans that involve the church with your Wedding Guild member.

6. The bride and groom must obtain a valid marriage license and make it available to the officiating clergy the day before the wedding. The wedding will not take place without a valid license.

Canonical Requirements

At least one member of the couple must be a baptized Christian.

- At least two witnesses must be present .
- All laws of the state must be honored.
- The couple must attest that they freely and knowingly consent to the marriage and that they hold marriage to be a “lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the liturgical forms authorized by the Church.”
- Barring emergency circumstances, the priest acting as officiant requires at least 30 days notice of the wedding.
- If either party to the proposed marriage has ever been married to a person still living, the clergy person will not proceed with the wedding without the Bishop’s written consent. If one or both parties have been divorced, the parties will need to meet with the clergy for special counseling with regard to the prior marriage. Ordinarily, the Bishop requires that the divorce decree should have been final for at least twelve months.

The Service

Holy Matrimony is one of the seven sacraments of the church. **Weddings are a worship service of the Church.** As with all worship services in the Episcopal Church, the Rector is charged by canon law with the final responsibility for determining the appropriateness of all details and arrangements for the service.

Only the “**Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage**” as contained in the **1979 Book of Common Prayer, pp. 422-436**, may be used as a liturgical form for the service. It is helpful for the couple to read through the service early in the period of wedding preparation.

Planning a wedding is done by the bride and groom together with the clergy and the Music Ministers of the church. In preparing for the service the couple is asked to choose the readings they desire, as well as the readers. They may also wish to have one or more acolytes. If children are to be in the ceremony, as a general rule, they should not be under the age of five.

Pre-marital Counseling

At the initial meeting of the proposed bride and groom, a plan for counseling will be agreed upon. Usually, a minimum of three counseling sessions are required. On occasion, the priest may arrange for someone else to conduct the counseling if the bride and groom are living in another city. **Pre-marital counseling is not optional.**

The Canons also require the parties to sign the following **Declaration of Intention**:
“We, (Name) and (Name), desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the liturgical forms authorized by this Church.

We believe it is for the purpose of mutual fellowship, encouragement and understanding,

for the procreation (if it may be) of children and their physical and spiritual nurture, and for the safeguarding and benefit of society.

And we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help thereto.”

Floral Arrangements and Other Decorations

The Episcopal Church values simplicity in the presentation flowers at a wedding. Because of its importance, the cross and altar are the focal points for the service. Accordingly, flower arrangements should enhance, not overwhelm, these features.

Silk or artificial flowers are never used.

Wedding flowers and decorating plans must be approved by the church Wedding Guild Consultant. If you wish, the St. Matthew's Flower Guild will furnish three arrangements for your wedding for a fee of \$150. These include an altar arrangement, and two smaller arrangements to be placed in the main foyer area. When possible, the Flower Guild members purchase flowers to match your color scheme. Wedding flowers become the property of the church and will be left in the church for use on Sunday morning. An appropriate thanksgiving or memorial statement may be included in the Sunday bulletin

If you prefer to use an outside florist, we will put you in touch with the St. Matthew's Flower Guild who will go over the guidelines with them.

Family rows may be marked with ribbons or fresh flowers which you furnish. These should be attached to the chairs with pipe cleaners, not taped or stapled.

Throwing rose petals, birdseed, confetti or rice in or around the church is not permitted. Flower Girls are not permitted to drop objects on the aisle.

Candles as used for Sunday services are provided by the church. St. Matthew's has two candelabra that you may use. In addition, you may choose to use the aisle torches at additional cost. Rental fee for the torches is: one pair for \$30, 6 pair for \$150, 12 pair for \$300. The church will provide the candles and fuel for these extras. Simple ribbons may be attached to the torches – no tape, no wires. Please share your decorating ideas with your Wedding Guild Consultant before purchasing supplies.

Tree candle stands are not permitted. The “unity” candle may not be used in the church during the ceremony.

Photography

Because of the dignity of a wedding service, photography during the ceremony will be severely limited. Available light photos may be taken from the balcony, but the camera must have no pronounced shutter sound.

No photos are permitted during the ceremony in the sanctuary. This includes your professional photographer and also your family members. It is the responsibility of the bride and groom to be certain that the professional photographer and their wedding guests do not abuse this policy.

If you wish to be videotaped, a stationary camera with zoom lens may be placed in the balcony.

Photo sessions arranged to take place in the sanctuary before the wedding must conclude at least 30 minutes before the wedding is scheduled to start. Following the service, 30 minutes will be allowed for photographs to be taken in the sanctuary.

Music

A Church wedding is one of the greatest and most joyous moments in a Christian's life, made sacred and holy by being performed before the Altar. Therefore, every effort is made to provide music that expresses both the reverence and the joy of the occasion.

Keep in mind that the selection of music should be of the highest quality and needs to be suitable for the occasion. The music is to fit within the framework of the marriage rite as outlined in the Book of Common Prayer. Music which falls into an obviously "pop" vein is not permitted in the worship service, but is better reserved for the reception. Bear in mind that many choices of music popularly associated with weddings, such as "Here Comes the Bride," may not be considered appropriate for a wedding at St. Matthew's.

The church organ is the instrument most often used in the blessing and celebration of a marriage and the parish organist (Music Minister) is skilled and experienced in the selection of appropriate music for the service. Even if other instruments and/or other musicians are desired in addition to or instead of the parish organist, the parish organist must first be consulted.

If a guest organist is used, the St. Matthew's organist must still be paid the customary fee (\$200). This includes the rehearsal and music before and after the service. If soloists or instrumentalists are desired, an additional fee will be required. This is because our organist is in part financially dependent upon fees received for playing at special services. If the parish organist is not available, an alternate organist will be provided.

The use of a soloist and the selection to be sung must be approved in advance by the Rector in consultation with the parish organist. Congregational hymns may be sung, and in fact, are encouraged in the worship service. Please consult with the Rector or organist when selecting hymns.

The parish organist consultation is held with the bride and groom. The choice of music is subject to the final approval of the parish organist and the Rector.

Before setting the initial appointment with the organist the couple should have:

- Set the wedding date with the Rector and confirmed the Music Minister's availability
- Determined the number of people serving in the wedding party
- Selected their scripture readings
- Made decisions about where in the service they would like music to be played/sung
- Decided which musicians/instruments they would like to use
- Decided if they would like to have congregational singing.

The Service Leaflet

You are welcome to prepare a service leaflet that contains an outline of the marriage service as written in the Book of Common Prayer. If you choose to do this, the Rector must review it for content and correctness before it goes to print. Please allow two weeks for this. You may hand deliver it, fax a copy to the Church Office or email it to the Rector.

The Rehearsal

The wedding rehearsal will be conducted under the direction of the officiating priest assisted by members of the Wedding Guild. Everyone who is to have a role in the ceremony is expected to attend. Please stress to all participants the need to be on time. The rehearsal is limited to one hour and it cannot begin until all are present. The bride should participate in the rehearsal with all of the wedding party.

Bring your Marriage License and several copies of your wedding program with you when you come to the rehearsal.

At the initial appointment with your St. Matthew's Wedding Guild Consultant, she will inquire as to how many family members will be present and who will require reserved seating. Grandparents, parents, step parents, etc. Please try to predetermine which ushers will seat which family members.

We ask that you be committed to having a serious rehearsal with all eyes and ears open. The time to celebrate begins after the rehearsal is over. A serious rehearsal assures you (and the church staff) that there will be no missed signals at your wedding.

The Wedding

All members of the wedding party should arrive at least one hour and fifteen minutes before the scheduled time of the wedding.

Ushers should be in the church at least half an hour before the wedding begins. The front rows on both sides will be reserved for family. Specific seating arrangements will be made at the rehearsal.

Dressing rooms are located in the basement and will be available to the wedding party prior to the service. The bride and groom are responsible for removal of all personal belongings anywhere on church property after the service is over. Please designate one or two persons to perform this task after the ceremony while photos are being taken upstairs. St. Matthew's assumes no responsibility for items left in the dressing rooms.

In addition, the bride and groom should designate one person whose responsibility it is to remove wedding gifts from the Commons area and deliver them elsewhere. St. Matthew's assumes no responsibility for wedding gifts.

Note: Smoking is not allowed in the buildings and alcoholic beverages may not be consumed on church property.

The Reception

The couple is welcome to use the parish hall for their reception, if it is available. A janitorial fee of \$75 is charged for use of the parish hall which only covers cleaning of the floors and bathrooms at the end of the evening. Your caterer will furnish all items for serving. The hall and kitchen area must be restored to proper cleanliness and order immediately after the function is over. Alcohol may not be served in Huffman Hall.

Your Wedding Guild Member will be able to discuss use of the parish hall with you.

Wedding Fees

Fees are due and payable to the Church Office two weeks prior to the wedding. The rehearsal will not take place until all fees have been paid.

Sanctuary Use	\$250
Huffman Hall Use	250
Organist	200
Flower Guild (optional)	150
Acolytes (each)	10