

The Blessing of a Christian Marriage in the Episcopal Church

What is Christian Marriage?

Christian marriage is a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God. In the Episcopal Church it is required that one, at least, of the parties must be a baptized Christian; that the ceremony be attested by at least two witnesses; and that the marriage conform to the laws of the State and the canons of this Church.

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 422

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help given one another in prosperity and adversity; and when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 423

The Wedding Ceremony held in Church

A wedding in a church is not merely a festive and lovely occasion. It is a service of worship in which two people participate in a sacrament and make their covenant before God, publicly and in the presence of a priest or bishop. The bride and groom receive the power and blessing of God and the grace to keep their vows with fidelity and steadfast love all the days of their lives. All of this occurs with the understanding that a marriage is *blessed* by the church and is *conformed* to the Church's teaching. It is assumed that husband and wife will continue to live out their marriage vows within the community of God's faithful people.

Marriage Ceremonies at St. Paul's Episcopal Church

St. Paul's Episcopal Church is available for wedding ceremonies when at least one of the persons to be married is a regularly attending, contributing, and participating parishioner of the Parish, when one of the persons to be married is an immediate family member of a currently active and contributing parish family, when one of the persons was baptized and grew up attending St. Paul's, or when a couple is open to committing themselves to regular attendance at St. Paul's Church throughout the time that they are preparing for their marriage and beyond. In the event that no prior relationship to the Parish exists, and none is intended, the Rector may consider the request for a wedding at St. Paul's Church which is solely at his discretion.

In addition, all of the following conditions apply:

1. One of the two persons to be married must be a baptized Christian.
2. The form of the wedding service is according to *The Book of Common Prayer*. While the rector will collaborate with the couple and make every effort to work toward a service that is meaningful to them, the Rector has final authority in all questions concerning the ceremony and the music.

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3. The Rector of St. Paul's Church, or one of the three Bishops of the Diocese of Massachusetts, officiates at all weddings celebrated at this parish church. *Other, regularly ordained clergy may assist at the invitation of the bride and groom, after prior consultation with the Rector.*
4. The ceremony must be attested to by two witnesses and conform to the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the canons of the Episcopal Church.
5. The bride and groom must enter into a pastoral relationship with the Rector no less than six months prior to the wedding date, and must meet with the Rector for several pre-marriage counseling sessions to prepare for the lifelong covenant of marriage. An assessment and skill building tool called "Prepare-Enrich" (www.prepare-enrich.com) is utilized as a basis for the pre-marital counseling. Alternate arrangements may be made when one of the Bishops is to officiate at the service or when the couple lives a considerable distance from the church.
6. When one, or both, persons are divorced, the Bishop's permission must be obtained in order for a priest to officiate at the marriage. This requires completion of written application materials by both the bride and the groom. Also, if either, or both, of the persons have been divorced more than once, additional mandatory guidelines must be followed before the Bishop's permission can be obtained, including, but not limited to, six sessions with an authorized family counselor/therapist. The Rector will provide information concerning these guidelines, upon request.
7. Please speak with the Rector should you desire information about arranging for the Blessing of a Same-Sex Union.

The final authority rests with the Rector who may decline to solemnize any marriage for which he deems a wedding at St. Paul's Church to be inappropriate.

Fees

1. **Contribution to the church:** there is no charge for a pledging member of the parish. It is suggested that a gift of \$500 be given by anyone who is not a pledging member. It is understood that those adults who are not regularly attending, contributing, and participating parishioners at the time that they begin their conversations with the Rector, will make every effort to attend worship and participate in the life of the parish of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in the months preceding their marriage at the church.
2. **The Rector** receives \$500 unless he is not conducting the premarital counseling sessions in which case he receives \$300.
3. **The Minister of Music** receives \$250. (If rehearsal with soloist is required - \$275.) There is an additional charge when the organist is asked to arrange for soloists or other special music.
4. **The Sexton** (custodian) receives \$75. This fee is waived if the services of the sexton are not needed as determined by the Rector.
5. **The Office Administrator** (optional) receives \$75 if a service leaflet is requested.
6. **The cost for the "Prepare-Enrich" assessment tool** is the responsibility of the couple. The current cost is \$35.
7. Wedding receptions may be held in the Parish Hall. The fee for the use is \$350. If a reception is held on church premises, there is an additional fee of \$100 for the Sexton. It is understood that the persons using the hall will be responsible for any food or kitchen clean up necessary. All functions must end by 11 p.m. Champagne or wine may be served with the permission of the clergy.

Please note that in all cases, checks for wedding fees detailed here are to be made payable separately, as appropriate, according to the guidelines provided. St. Paul's Episcopal Church cannot accept a single payment to be divided and distributed to the various recipients. Information for payees will be provided by the church office.

Marriage License

Marriage is governed by the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. No marriage may take place without a proper license. Application for the license may be made between 4 and 30 days before the marriage. The license may be secured in the city or town in which the bride and groom reside or in the city or town where the marriage is to take place. If both parties live outside the state, a license is obtained in the city or town where the marriage is to take place.

The state requires that a blood test shall be made of both the bride and groom, the test being made not more than 30 days before the filing of the notice of intention to wed. Three days must intervene between the filing of the notice and the securing of the license. We suggest that this information be verified with the civil authority.

Dates and Times for Weddings and Rehearsals

At St. Paul's Episcopal Church weddings are celebrated at any time except on Sundays; during the weekdays of Lent; in Holy Week; Christmas Day, or at other times when parish services and events are scheduled. Weddings are not held before 9:30 a.m. Only one wedding will be scheduled for any single day.

The rehearsal is typically held between 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. the evening immediately before the wedding day. A rehearsal usually lasts one and one-half hours. All members of the wedding party must attend, and must make every effort to be on time. A rehearsal is conducted by the officiating priest (or where appropriate, by the officiating Bishop).

Flowers, Decorations, etc.

St. Paul's Flower Guild does not provide floral arrangement services and flowers are the responsibility of the couple within the following guidelines. Two floral arrangements may be placed on either side of the high altar or a single arrangement in the center. No floral arrangements or other ornaments or objects may be placed on or near the altar, whether or not there is to be a Holy Eucharist celebrated at the wedding. St. Paul's Church provides vase liners which may be filled by a florist; other containers of appropriate size may be used, if preferred, in consultation with the Rector. Care must be taken to allow for ease of movement around the altar by the officiant, participants, etc.

No flowers or decorations of any kind, including so-called "Cana" or "Unity" candles, may be placed on, or around, the altar, the altar rails, or at the front of the church.

Floral arrangements and other decorations, including "Cana" or "Unity" candles, may be used in the entry area of the church. They are to be lit before the service, along with any other candles used. The Prayer Book service for the Blessing of a Christian Marriage does not provide for any ritual lighting of these, or any other candles, by the bride and groom. Aside from the aforementioned floral arrangements, simple flowers and/or greenery, and ribbons may be used to decorate the pews along the aisles.

A "runner" for the center aisle of the nave (provided by a florist) must be in place before wedding guests arrive. The runner may not be rolled out immediately prior to the wedding procession into the church.

No rice, confetti, bird-seed, or similar items sometimes "tossed" at the bride and groom as they leave the church are permitted, inside or outside of the building.

All floral decorations must be delivered and in place no later than one hour prior to the starting time of the ceremony.

Photography

While it is understood that a record of the couple's wedding is a highly desirable and cherished memento, the Blessing of a Christian Marriage is, first and foremost, a sacramental rite of the church. As previously noted, a wedding in a church is not merely a festive and lovely occasion. It is a worship service in which two people participate in making a covenant before God, publicly and in the presence of the officiating clergy.

Still photography, or videotaping, or audio-visual recording is permitted during the ceremony, by professionals, only under the condition that they remain unobtrusive. It should be understood by family members and friends that taking of pictures or video-taping is inappropriate within the context of the ceremony.

Please speak with the Rector so that suitable and sufficient time for wedding photography may be arranged before and/or after the service, to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Music

The Minister of Music of St. Paul's will consult directly with the couple and will make available a selection of music appropriate to the Blessing of a Christian Marriage. An initial meeting is arranged by the couple directly with the organist, whose contact information can be obtained from the Rector.

Under no circumstances is 'popular' or secular music to be used during the ceremony in the church. Choral and/or instrumental selections, other than organ music, must conform to this guideline, as well. Contemporary or non-sacred music is best reserved for the rehearsal dinner and/or the wedding reception.

It is understood that so long as the Minister of Music is available, this person will be employed for the wedding rehearsal and ceremony. In the event that the Minister of Music is unavailable, another organist may arrange with the Rector to provide the music.

According to the canons of the Episcopal Church, the Rector has final authority in all questions concerning the wedding ceremony and the music.

How to Proceed

If after reading these guidelines you believe that a wedding ceremony at St. Paul's Episcopal Church is appropriate for you, please contact the Rector to arrange for an initial meeting.