



Information for Couples Seeking Marriage at St. Paul's Episcopal Church

A. Introduction

The Christian community at *St. Paul's Episcopal Church* understands that relationships are complex and that making a lifelong commitment to a relationship through a marriage is a significant, exciting, and wonder-filled event in people's lives. We also believe that a Christian community that agrees to bless such a relationship needs to be intentional about supporting the couple as they prepare for the marriage and as they live out their lives.

We understand that committed, lifelong relationships, are to be outward and visible signs of an inward, spiritual, and God-given love. In this context, *St. Paul's Episcopal Church* seeks to support all couples in their commitment to one another and to help make the love of God more visible for the whole community.

B. Guidelines

The following guidelines have been adopted by the lay and ordained leaders of *St. Paul's Episcopal Church*:

1. As required by the Canons of The Episcopal Church at least one member of the couple must be **baptized**.
2. It is desirable that at least one member of the couple be an active member of this, or some other, Christian community. This membership includes giving serious, prayerful consideration to supporting the congregation through time, talent, and/or treasure.
3. Approximately **six months'** notice should be given to allow for planning and pastoral preparation.
4. If the couple has no connection with *St. Paul's Episcopal Church* but wishes to have their marriage at *St. Paul's Episcopal Church* or to use the services of *St. Paul's Episcopal Church's* priest, they should be able to show that at least one of the couple has active membership in another Episcopal or Christian congregation.
5. In all cases, it is important that all concerned comply with the laws of the state, the Canons of the Episcopal Church, and the canons and policies of the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan as well as the directives of the diocesan bishop, including compliance with diocesan policies for cases in which the relationship is **not the first marriage** for one or both people.

C. Policies

"Is alcohol permitted prior to or during the service?"

No. If any persons appear intoxicated during the wedding service, they will be asked to leave the premises prior to the service resuming. **If either the bride or groom are intoxicated, the wedding will not occur.**

“What if one of the persons has been divorced?”

If there has been a divorce of one or both parties intending to be married, a petition to the Bishop of the Diocese of Eastern Michigan must be made for permission to marry. (This is only required when the former spouse is still living.) This upholds the Church’s teaching both that marriage is for life and also the pastoral responsibility to ensure that divorced persons fully comprehend the reasons for the failure of the first marriage. More than half of second marriages end in divorce, often because of unresolved issues present in the previous marriage. This process requires interviews with officiating clergy.

The Church requires the wedding date be at least **one year** from the date of the final divorce decree. In any of these situations, a minimum of eight months is customary from the point when a couple contacts the priest and when the couple would like the wedding to take place. Thus, when there is a divorce an initial meeting with the clergy must precede the regular steps in reserving the Church for the service.

“What if one of the persons has been divorced more than once?”

If a person seeking marriage has more than one previous marriage that has ended in divorce and the previous spouses are still living, the situation is more complicated. If the divorced person believes that there are grounds to seek a judgment of nullity by the bishop, the priest can assist the individual in exploring that matter further. When there are no grounds for annulment, however, the process we understand to best honor the Church’s teaching about the sacramental and lifelong character of marriage is for couples in such a situation to be married by a **civil authority**. After a period of at least a year, the couple is invited to meet with a priest to explore a service bestowing **the Church’s blessing on the marriage** (see pages 433-34 in *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1979).

“What do the pre-marriage classes involve?”

The Pre-Marriage Classes are **required** and cover important topics for those entering into a Christian marriage. Course talks include: Sacrament of Marriage, Spiritual Intimacy, Conflict Resolution, Finances, Understanding Your Spouse, Sexual Intimacy, and Marriage and In-Law Expectations.

“What is the nature of the marriage service/liturgy?”

Weddings at *St. Paul’s Episcopal Church* take place according to *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), the sole standard of worship in the Episcopal Church. Only the “Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage” as contained in *The Book of Common Prayer* may be used as a liturgical form for the service (either in Rite I [King James language] or Rite II [contemporary language]) and the final decision relating to all elements of the service rests with the priest. Each couple is asked to decide about the following aspects of the wedding liturgy:

- the readings and/or lessons they desire (see Scripture Lesson Sheet for options with the complete texts)
- What music will be used (hymns, processional and recessional music, etc.). Any questions about music should be directed only to the staff musician who will oversee the music for the wedding.
- Whether the Holy Eucharist will be celebrated as part of the wedding liturgy.

The parish clergy strongly encourage the celebration of Holy Communion as part of the wedding service. When Holy Communion is celebrated, the wedding party and the congregation are invited to join the bride and groom in receiving Holy Communion. While it is the policy of the Church

of the Incarnation that all baptized Christians are welcome to join in receiving Holy Communion whenever the Holy Eucharist is celebrated, including at weddings, there are sometimes circumstances in which it may seem best not to celebrate the Eucharist as part of a wedding service. Decisions about this should be made 2 months prior in consultation with the priest who will officiate.

A wedding service with Holy Communion typically lasts 50-60 minutes; a service without Holy Communion typically lasts 35-40 minutes.

“Who may officiate?”

No service of Holy Matrimony may be conducted without the parish clergy as the primary officiating priest. Episcopal clergy, clergy of other Christian denominations and non-Christian denominations may participate in the service, when that involvement seems justified, and the officiating priest has been consulted and has agreed to the nature of that person’s involvement. The priest who will officiate at the wedding must give prior approval before the Bride and Groom extend an offer to any other priest or Christian minister to assist in the service. When outside clergy outside are involved, names, titles and addresses should be submitted to the officiating clergy person as soon as possible.

“When may a wedding take place?”

Weddings are not permitted during holiday weekends, the seasons of Advent (before Christmas) and Lent (before Easter), including Holy Week. Weddings are normally held on Saturday. The earliest wedding hour at our church is 11:00 am

“How are flower arrangements handled?”

St. Paul’s can provide flowers free of charge. This is church flowers only. Bouquets, etc. are the

“What candles may be used?”

The church’s normal, brass altar candles will be lighted as they are on Sundays.

“What about photography?”

Marriage is a sacred and solemn event and it is imperative that the two persons being married are prepared for that event and are not in any way distracted from its importance. The following rules must be strictly observed:

1. No church property may be moved by the photographer/videographer.
2. No camera of any kind is allowed in the front of the church.
3. It is expected that cameras and video equipment will be quiet with no distractions during the service.
4. Following the ceremony, video and flash photography may be taken in the Church.
5. It is expected that photographers and videographers will dress in a conservative manner suitable for a church service.
6. Photographers must be unobtrusive and cooperate with these regulations.

It is the responsibility of the Bride and Groom to make clear these rules to the photographer and all persons involved in the wedding.

“What is involved in the rehearsal?”

This is the opportunity, the night before the wedding to walk through the entire service for the benefit of all those involved, particularly the Bride and Groom. The rehearsals are normally scheduled for 5:00 PM on the Friday evening before the wedding. This is an enormously important part of the wedding preparation and provides the opportunity to carefully “rehearse” the actual service and to answer the many last-minute questions that arise. The rehearsal lasts about an hour and involves walking the entire wedding party through the wedding service two or three times. Every effort should be made to have all the participants arrive on time for the rehearsal and remain until dismissed by the priest.

All members of the wedding party, including parents, the flower girl, ring bearer, the readers of the lessons, and any visiting clergy sharing in the service, should attend the wedding rehearsal.

Please note: The rehearsal is for **participants in the service only**. It is a serious event and **alcohol is not permitted**.

Order of Procession: (optionals are in *italics*)

- 1) *Crucifer*
- 3) *The Choir, if present*
- 5) *Priest*
- 6) *Groomsmen 2 X 2 Groom and Best man last two in*
- 7) Brides Attendants
- 8) Maid of Matron of Honor
- 9) Flower Girl(s)
- 10) Ring Bearer
- 11) Bride and Escort

Conduct

Under no **circumstances will alcoholic beverages be allowed on the premises** (includes parking lots). The couple and their families are responsible for explaining that any drinking prior to coming to church **may result in our not being able to go forward with the service**. The simple truth is that even the least bit of alcohol to “calm the nerves” is a mistake and inevitably takes away from the grace and meaning of the service.

Seating

At the actual hour of the wedding, grandparents of the bride and groom, the mother of the groom and then the mother of the bride will all be seated in the appropriate order. Please provide a roster in order for their names to be read.

Ushers

There should be one usher for every 50 guests. Groomsmen may be used for this function. Ushers are expected to expedite the seating of guests to minimize both congestion and noise in the Narthex (area in back of church).

An usher will offer his right arm to the woman in a party. Her escort follows them. Specific ushers need to be assigned to seat family members, and specifically the mothers of the bride and groom, and, if desired, to escort them out of the church after the service. After the seating of the bride’s mother, no one is to be escorted to a seat. Latecomers are directed to use the side aisles to enter quietly and find a place near the back of the church. Ushers may also assist in the Holy Eucharist by indicating when persons may approach the altar for Communion.

Licenses

The State License, issued by the Civil Authority, must be obtained by the couple at least three days prior to the wedding and not more than 30 days prior to the wedding. The couple is required to bring the License to the church. It is recommended that it be brought a few days prior to the service, or to the rehearsal.

The State License will be signed by the Priest immediately **after** the service.

I have read and understand these policies.

Signed:

Bride: _____ Date: _____

Groom: _____ Date: _____