

ST. MARY'S CHURCH, STONE HARBOR, NEW JERSEY

INFORMATION CONCERNING WEDDINGS

I. General Information

There is no better way for a marriage to begin than with a wedding ceremony in the Church when the new relationship is celebrated and blessed by the Christian community.

St. Mary's Church, Stone Harbor, is a particularly beautiful setting in which a wedding can take place. Many persons who have little connection with the Episcopal Church or are not worshipping at St. Mary's are drawn to the beauty of the Church's liturgy and the loveliness of the Church Sanctuary. They come, seeking the ministry of the Church as they enter into the covenant of marriage. We rejoice whenever people seek to relate their lives and their marriage to God and seek God's blessing. These guidelines have been prepared to assist you in understanding the policies of the parish and the rules of the Episcopal Church with respect to marriage. We hope that you will find most of your questions answered. The priest will be happy to clarify any of this when you meet.

The Episcopal Church seeks to assist every couple who is preparing for marriage by offering extensive pre-marital counseling. The Church requires that every couple who is contemplating being married in the Episcopal Church meet with the priest for a series of conferences. These sessions, usually four or more, deal with the nature of Christian marriage and with areas of life in which people often experience problems subsequent to their marriage. The counseling is highly individualized and focused, with the length and content being determined by the couple's personal maturity, their relationship with one another, their understanding of Christian marriage, and their relationship to the Christian community, which is the household of God, the Church. It is a process which should not be hurried. It is best conducted in an atmosphere free from the hectic and frantic atmosphere which so often marks the weeks immediately preceding the wedding. Six months of lead time is advised. Exception to this can be made at the discretion of the priest.

Quick marriages are neither possible nor advisable. Whether or not to officiate at a marriage is a decision which a priest cannot make until the persons are known to the priest and has met with the couple. No priest is obligated to perform a marriage. The Church is concerned that every marriage gets off to the best possible start, and that problems which could lead to a dysfunctional marriage be dealt with prior to the wedding. We want marriages to succeed! Under no circumstances should a reception hall be rented for a specific date or time, nor a caterer engaged, nor invitations ordered, before the priest has committed to officiate and a definite date and time agreed upon. Please read these guidelines together with your intended spouse and formulate any questions which you may have. An appointment should then be made for an initial meeting with the priest at which you both can be present. (This sometimes is not possible due to distance, i.e., one person living in another part of the country or going to school until just prior to the wedding, in which case special arrangements will have to be made.)

II. When There Has Been a Divorce

If one or both of you have previously been married and a former spouse is still living, special requirements prevail. The priest who is to officiate must exercise judgment as to the readiness of the couple to enter what for one or both is a second marriage. A relationship to the Church and the opportunity for ongoing pastoral care from this or some other Christian pastor is a necessary ingredient in all marriages, but is particularly important where a previous marriage has ended in divorce.

The Episcopal Church believes that marriage is intended to be a lifelong union. At the same time, however, the Church wishes to reach out to those who have been through the pain and trauma of the dissolution of a marriage with a vision of the forgiveness, healing and love which we believe are marks of the Gospel and of the new life in Jesus Christ. Christianity is a religion of grace, not of law. We rejoice whenever any of God’s children seek blessing and to sanctify their relationship through establishing a Christian marriage. The procedure that the Canon Law of the Episcopal Church has established requires that the priest determine whether or not it is appropriate for the Church to proceed, and then to submit his judgment to the Bishop of the Diocese in which the marriage is to take place. The Bishop must give his consent for the priest to officiate. A definitive response is usually received in a matter of weeks and the Bishop must render judgment within thirty days of when he receives the application for his consent. Please be assured that the Church acts with pastoral concern for the persons involved, as well as with an awareness of the witness she must make to the world concerning the importance of marriage. There is no fee involved in this canonical procedure. Please bring a copy of your final divorce papers with you.

III. The Declaration of Intention

All persons planning a marriage in the Episcopal Church are required to sign the following Declaration:

We,

and

desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union as it is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.

We believe that the union of two people, in heart, body, and mind, is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort 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.

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 hereto.

IV. The Wedding Ceremony

Most weddings will follow the service as found in the Book of Common Prayer (1979), beginning on page 423, and entitled “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage.” If you do not have a Prayer Book, please ask the priest to borrow one so that you can look over the service, which is one of the most beautiful in Christendom. The Church also provides a form for the “Blessing of A Civil Marriage” which is found on page 433, and which is for use when a couple desires to receive the blessing of the Church upon an existing marriage which was not solemnized in the Church. For those who wish to celebrate their marriage in a less structured way and with some words of their own composition, “An Order for Marriage” is provided on page 435. Whichever service is appropriate, please note the instructions in the Prayer Book are quite specific and must be adhered to strictly.

Baptized Christians often wish their first act as a married couple to be the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and participation in the Holy Communion. A Nuptial Eucharist, at which all present are invited to receive, will usually last approximately forty-five minutes, not including hymns or solos. The exact length of the service will depend on the size of the wedding party, the number of communicants and the amount of music chosen. Even with extensive music, the service will be under one hour. Sometimes the Eucharist is felt to be inappropriate or is not desired, in which case the service is shortened by about fifteen minutes. The decision to have the Eucharist or omit it should not be made just to “save time.” This is your first opportunity to serve your guests a meal as a married couple! The entire Service which seems so long when you are planning it seems, after the fact, to have taken just a few minutes! Enjoy it, and expect your guests to enjoy it also!

The details of the liturgy will be worked out with the priest during the pre-marital conferences. As part of the process, you will go over the Service thoroughly so that its meaning is clear. Members of the wedding party and the families of the couple are encouraged to read two of the scripture passages and to lead the Prayers of the People. You should select three lessons, one from each of the groups of lessons listed on page 426 of the Prayer Book. You are encouraged to produce a wedding program/bulletin so that your guests will be aware of the order of the service.

It is the policy of the Vestry of St. Mary’s Church that no outside organist may play for a wedding unless the regular church organist requests to be relieved of the responsibility, or receives his regular fee in spite of the fact that another organist plays. This is a standard practice urged by the American Guild of Organists. All outside organists must be approved by the priest, as must all soloists, vocal or instrumental. The priest and the church organist will help you select appropriate music and obtain soloists. Words of music sung or played for weddings must be from Holy Scripture, the Book of Common Prayer, or the Hymnal of the Episcopal Church, or must be consistent with the faith and beliefs of the Christian community, part of classical, traditional hymnody. Secular romantic music is seldom appropriate, and should be used at the reception rather than as part of the service. Because the wedding service is a holy event and a worship experience, the use of cameras and flashbulbs is restricted. Pictures may be taken during the entrance procession and as the couple are leaving the church, but not during the service itself. The one exception is that

natural light pictures may be taken by a professional photographer or one designated by the wedding couple. A roaming photographer intent on creating an expensive album can be a distraction and offensive to your guests. Don't let your wedding become a circus! We have had excellent results from videotaping, but again – one designated camera person strategically located and working with the priest! We urge you to record the service itself through the video soundtrack or as a tape recording. Following the service, an opportunity may be provided for pictures to be taken by your professional or any other guests so that you will have ample pictures for an album. We do ask, however, that you limit picture taking in the church to a half-hour.

A rehearsal will be scheduled, usually during the week preceding the wedding. At least one hour is needed for a good rehearsal. If the wedding party is late, or members are missing, or we are dealing with very young flower girls or ring bearers, additional time may be required. The couple to be married, the wedding party, and your readers should be present at the rehearsal. Please bring your wedding license, programs, wedding candle (if you choose to use one) and all fees outlined in page 6 to the rehearsal.

V. Flowers and Decorations

No decorations may be fastened to the walls or the furniture. Pew-end sprays and decorations may be used, but not stapled, tacked or taped to the pews. Two vases of flowers behind the altar are always appropriate. The arrangements can be any color (white is traditional). It is a good idea to ask your florist to visit the church, or to show your florist a photograph if a visit is not possible. It is the responsibility of the couple to arrange for the delivery of flowers at a convenient time. Flower arrangements can be brought in vases or baskets provided by your florist. The Church vases may also be used with a liner provided by the florist. The amount of flowers or number of arrangements is your personal choice.

The Altar Guild will be helpful with appropriate suggestions, if requested. With the exception of altar flowers, all decorations should be removed from the Church immediately following the Service. You must appoint a family member or friend whose job it will be to assure that decorations are removed following your Service. The altar flowers are utilized for Sunday Worship Services and for the sick and shut-in of the parish. They are noted in the parish bulletin as a thank-offering for your marriage.

A runner is not recommended. The aisle is short with steps, and heels tend to catch in the plastic normally used these days. However, if you wish a runner, it must be ordered from your florist and must be made of fabric and not plastic, otherwise shoes will slip.

If your wedding is to be after dusk, a candlelight wedding may be requested. The cost of the candles will be \$25.

You are not limited to the church florist, although he knows the building and has access to it at all times, thus simplifying your task. The priest will gladly provide you with the name of our florist and contact information.

Our Altar Guild also participates in the preparation for and cleaning up after your marriage. There is a \$100 fee for the Altar Guild.

VI. New Jersey License

It is the responsibility of the couple to be married to obtain a valid marriage license from the State of New Jersey and to present it to the priest prior to or at the wedding rehearsal. The priest will direct you to the proper civil authority and give you details about the legal requirements. The license is good for thirty days from its date of issue. In the case of residents of New Jersey, the license is obtained from the township of residence. Do not wait until the last minute to obtain your license! You will need a witness over eighteen years of age who knows you both!

VII. Other Information

Rice, bird seed, and/or confetti may not be thrown inside or outside the church. (Bird seed encourages weeds in our lawn, and the birds seem to ignore it.) We encourage you to have small bottles of bubble soap (available at any party store) for everyone to blow bubbles over you as you exit!

The Rector of St. Mary's Church will normally officiate at all weddings at St. Mary's Church. At her request and upon her invitation, other ministers may assist or officiate. Invitations to other ministers to participate must come from the Rector, not from the engaged couple. Ecumenical weddings may be arranged. We do not rent the building, but we can make it available to another congregation for the wedding of a member of that congregation.

If the presence of the Rector and her spouse is desired at the rehearsal dinner and/or the reception, please extend an invitation, since it is not assumed (even though often welcome).

VIII. Fees and Honoraria

We wish that it were possible to provide all that is necessary for your wedding service without any charges. The Church is not in the "the marriage business," and has no desire to make money from weddings; however, there are costs. There is a fee for the organist, and there is a building use fee for those who are not regularly contributing members of our parish family. In cases of financial hardship, certain fees may be waived. The organist is unsalaried with respect to weddings, and his compensation is based on the extra hours and duties which the service demands. When a wedding is informal with only witnesses and immediate family present (and with no music), the organist is not required and there is no fee. The building use fee for non-contributing persons is to assist the parish with the general maintenance of the building and grounds, to cover the cost of cleaning after a wedding, and to cover heating, air conditioning and lighting. It is our way of equitably distributing the

burden of keeping our lovely buildings and grounds maintained for the use of all Christians in our community.

IX. Schedule of Fees and Honorarium (2015)

Basic Costs

Pledging parishioners
and their dependent children: \$0

Non-pledging parishioners and others:

Organist's Fee *	250
Building Use/Sexton	400
Altar Guild	100
Minister's Honorarium **	<u>500</u>
Total	\$1250

* The fee does not include the organist's presence at the wedding rehearsal. Extra time to rehearse with soloists or instrumentalists may involve an additional negotiated fee.

** An honorarium for the priest appropriate to the amount of time spent in counseling and preparation by the officiating minister is considered customary. This is not a fee and the Vestry does not wish to prescribe a specific amount for parishioners; however, the Vestry does suggest that it ought not be less than the organist's fee of \$250. For non-parishioners, the Vestry has established that the honorarium be not less than \$500. The honorarium is normally paid by the groom and should be consistent with the means of those being married or their families.

Other Optional Costs

Candlelight Service: The actual cost of candles \$25.

Soloists or instrumentalists: As negotiated with the person/persons, generally \$150 - \$200.

Acolytes: A nominal "thank you" gift (\$10) is always appropriate.

An offering to the Church in thanksgiving for marriage is always appropriate for Christians and would be gratefully received by the parish from parishioners and non-parishioners alike.

All fees and costs **must** be taken care of *before or at the rehearsal*, **not** the day of the wedding. Fees may be paid in cash or by check. Checks for the church should be made out to St. Mary's and others to the appropriate persons, the names of whom can be obtained from the priest. Where financial hardship exists, some of the costs may be lowered or waived.

St. Mary's Church phone number is (609)368-5922.