



Guidelines and Requirements for Marriage
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
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By both tradition and practice the Episcopal Church regards the solemnization of marriage as a sacred, life-long covenant between two persons in the presence of God and witnessed by the community of faith. The support of a faith community, as well as family and friends, is essential to the health of any marriage. Therefore, the following are required of persons seeking marriage at St. Paul's Episcopal Church:

Baptism

Baptism makes a person a member of the Christian church. The canons (laws) of the church require that at least one member of the couple be a baptized Christian.

Permission for Re-Marriage

If one or both of the persons marrying are divorced, the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts must give permission for an Episcopal Clergy person to officiate. This is a straightforward process that we will gladly discuss with you.

Counseling with the Clergy

In order for a marriage ceremony to be truly personal, the clergy solemnizing the marriage must get to know the people involved. In order to give a married couple all the support they need to weather the "for better, for worse" of life together, counseling is required by the national canons of the Episcopal Church. Couples are asked to meet three or four times with the clergy person to share their journey toward marriage and their hopes for the future and to explore the spiritual dimensions of marriage. Couples may be asked to fill out a questionnaire about their relationship to help them focus on areas of discussion such as finances and families of origin. At these meetings, detailed plans for the ceremony itself will also be made. (If the couple resides far from Stockbridge, permission may be granted for pre-marital counseling by another party.)

Many couples put much effort and planning into the one day of the marriage ceremony, but it is equally important to put effort and planning into the many days of married life to follow. We believe it is well worth investing in establishing a firm foundation for a long and joyful life together.

Getting Married at St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Welcome to St. Paul's Church!

We're so glad you want to celebrate your wedding here. Couples often have many questions about their wedding. This document will help you plan your service.

Scheduling

Weddings are not celebrated during the holy seasons of Lent (usually mid-February through mid-April) or Advent (usually Thanksgiving through Christmas) unless in case of pastoral emergency. Weddings are also not celebrated during Holy Week or the week after Easter. Any other time is a wonderful time for your wedding. Please contact the church office to reserve the exact day and time. Usually you will want to do this at least six months to a year in advance. Please note it may not be possible to schedule a wedding less than three months in advance.

The Service

All weddings at St. Paul's Church will be according to the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* or authorized supplements. Please feel free to borrow a copy if you'd like to look over the wedding service. Although there is some flexibility in the prayers and readings chosen, you may not write your own vows. The Episcopal vows are the traditional "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer..." (However, they do not contain any clause about obeying!)

Your wedding may include a celebration of the Holy Eucharist, since all our ability to share love with one another comes from Jesus first sharing his love with us, which we commemorate in the Eucharist. Because all people of faith, regardless of denomination, are welcome to receive the Eucharist at St. Paul's Church, your guests from other faith traditions will be welcomed and included. If most or many of your guests are from a non-Christian tradition (for example, if one of you is Jewish or Muslim), you may prefer not having the Eucharist as part of your wedding.

There are two or three readings as part of the wedding service. You may want to ask friends or family to do these readings. If your wedding includes the Eucharist, one reading must be from the Gospels. A list of suggested readings will be provided to you by the priest. You may also ask a friend or family member to lead the prayers during the service. If you prefer, the clergy person can do this.

Program

The church office can create a program/bulletin for your wedding service. We strongly suggest a bulletin that includes all the words of the service so that non-Episcopal guests can follow along and know when to join in the prayers. If you would like the church office to produce the bulletin, please let us know at least six weeks in advance and give all the information you would like included in the bulletin including:

Your completed "Wedding Planning Worksheet" (This document will be provided at the first meeting with the clergy person.)

The names of the people in your wedding party

The names of the readers and others participating in the service

The music you have chosen for the service, including titles and composers

Any other details you would like included in the bulletin

The charge for this service is \$100. You may provide your own paper if you wish. Paper must be provided six (6) weeks in advance.

Flowers

It is expected that if you wish to have fresh flowers at your wedding, you will provide them. Flowers are usually placed in two vases that sit on either side of the cross, behind the altar or on flower stands on either side of the altar. We call these the “altar flowers,” although they do not actually sit on the altar. If you choose to have flowers in addition to the altar flowers, you may. However, flowers may not be placed on the altar table and may not obstruct the congregation’s view of the top of the altar, the cross behind the altar, or the wedding party. They must also not obstruct the clergy or wedding party when moving around the altar area.

Pipe cleaners or ribbon are the only acceptable way to attach bows or flowers to the ends of the pews. Tape, tacks, and plastic clips will damage the pews. If your wedding is on a Saturday, you may choose to donate your altar flowers to the church for Sunday’s worship services. If you choose to do this, please let us know and tell us how you would like your offering to be noted in Sunday’s worship bulletin (for example: “Flowers offered in thanksgiving for the wedding of Jim Smith and John Jones”).

After the ceremony, please remove your flowers (except the altar flowers, if you have donated them for Sunday) and all other decorations from the church.

Candles

The candles on the altar will be lit for your wedding ceremony, as well as the Paschal Candle (a special candle that signifies the gift of Christ). No other candles are permitted – including “unity candles,” which are permitted in some traditions, but are not part of our tradition.

Music

Music at St. Paul’s Church is provided by and/or under the supervision of our music director and organist. Other organists are not permitted without the permission of the music director or unless the music director is not available. You will need to make an appointment with the musician if you plan to have music at your wedding. Music must be appropriate for a church context and reflect a Christian understanding of marriage. Our musician can help you arrange for soloists and instrumentalists if you wish.

Guest Clergy

If there is a special clergyperson in your life that you would like to include, guest clergy are welcome to take part in the ceremony. Options for a guest minister might include: preaching the homily, leading the prayers, or pronouncing the final wedding blessing. Episcopal and Lutheran guest clergy are welcome to celebrate or co-celebrate the Eucharist. The St. Paul’s Church clergyperson must lead the couple in their wedding vows and pronounce them married in order to be able to sign the wedding license.

Prohibited Items

For reasons of safety, no aisle runners may be used. Also, for reasons of safety, the throwing of rice, birdseed, or any other objects is not permitted.

Kneelers and Cushions

St. Paul's Church will provide a special wedding kneeler for use during the service. Other cushions (for example, for a ring bearer to carry the rings on) must be provided by you if you desire to have them.

Photography

Your photographers and videographer are welcome, if they respect the sacred nature of the wedding ceremony. The photographer and/or videographer must meet briefly with the clergy before the wedding. Often this can be done just prior to the ceremony. Please make sure an appointment is set for a specific time for your photographer to touch base with the clergyperson.

License

You are responsible for obtaining your wedding license from the appropriate authorities. You must bring your license to the wedding rehearsal. After signing it, the clergyperson will mail it in to the Town Hall from which it was obtained. In Massachusetts, you may apply for a marriage license at any Town Hall. It does not have to be from the Town of Stockbridge. In Massachusetts there is a three-day waiting period once you apply for a marriage license. The license is valid for 60 days once you have it. For more information, go to

<https://www.mass.gov/guides/getting-married-in-massachusetts-before-the-wedding>

Rehearsal

The wedding rehearsal is an important event in preparing for your wedding. It is a time for your clergyperson to get to know the members of your family and wedding party and for everyone to practice what they are going to do so that the ceremony itself goes smoothly. The rehearsal is usually scheduled for the evening before the wedding, but it can be scheduled at another time, if more convenient. Please leave at least an hour for the rehearsal. Please also remind your wedding party to be on time. The rehearsal will begin when the last person arrives, so late arrivals may delay any rehearsal dinner festivities you have planned.

Costs

There is no charge to St. Paul's Church members for the sacraments of the church. However, there are certain church costs to keep in mind, and we do ask that you make donations that will allow these costs to be met (all checks should be payable to St. Paul's Episcopal Church, unless otherwise noted):

- The **rental charge for use of the church**, including rehearsal, is **\$750 for non-members**. A voluntary donation is requested from members.
- The **cost of cleaning the church** after your wedding is **\$75** for both members and non-members.
- The cost of the **organist** is **\$200 to both members and non-members**. To have the organist at your **rehearsal** is an additional **\$100**. Soloists or

instrumentalists arranged for by the organist will require additional fees and are to be paid directly by you.

- If you have the church office create your wedding **bulletin**, the cost is **\$100 for both members and non-members**.
- It is customary to give the **clergy person** an honorarium for his or her time in preparing for your wedding. The honorarium is at your discretion, but in the case of **non-members**, we suggest **\$300**. If the clergy person also conducts **pre-marital counseling**, there may be an additional suggested honorarium of **\$200**. For members, this check should be made payable to the Rector's Discretionary Fund. Non-members make checks payable directly to the officiating clergy person.

Please bring payments to the rehearsal or remit them in advance so you don't have to remember them on your wedding day.

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