

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

WEDDING GUIDELINES

- ✘ As specified in the Canons, the decision as to whether or not the Celebration of a Marriage or the Blessing of a Civil Marriage will occur at this parish shall be left up entirely to the discretion of the Rector.

PREPARATION & PLANNING

- ✘ Except for extraordinary circumstances, the couple shall make their intention to marry (or to have their marriage blessed) at St. Stephen's known to the Rector at least six months prior to the desired wedding date. In no event, shall the marriage occur in less than 30 days of giving notice.
- ✘ Generally, only active members of this parish, who have contributed financially to the parish in the past twelve months, shall be permitted to hold their wedding ceremonies here; however, the Rector may always make exceptions to this rule. In any event, according to the Canons of the Episcopal Church, at least one of the parties must be a baptized Christian.
- ✘ Pre-marital meetings with the officiating priest, or a qualified person of the priest's choosing, are required, pursuant to the Canons of the Episcopal Church.
- ✘ The couple should wait to print wedding invitations or programs, or to otherwise formally announce the wedding date, until the pre-marital counseling has been completed. Please note that the officiating priest must approve the program before it is printed.
- ✘ If either party has been previously married, evidence of the dissolution of the previous marriage(s) and provisions made for the continuing care for any children must be demonstrated to the officiating priest.
- ✘ Additionally, the permission of the diocesan Bishop must be secured, through the officiating priest, before the marriage of a divorced person can proceed.
- ✘ The couple should make the officiating priest aware, in the initial consultation, of any pre-nuptial agreements that might exist.
- ✘ Space is available, by prior arrangement, for dressing and preparation of the couple and other participants in the ceremony.
- ✘ The couple, or their representatives, must make arrangements with the officiating priest to have access to the church throughout the day, leading up to the ceremony.
- ✘ While a wedding coordinator or planner may be used for other aspects of the weekend, they are unnecessary for the wedding ceremony itself, as the officiating priest will be the sole person directing the rehearsal and wedding ceremony. It is the duty of the couple to

ensure that any wedding planners used understand that their assistance stops at the church doors.

- ✘ Pursuant to Church Canon, all couples getting married at this parish must sign the following Declaration of Intent:
“We, _____ and _____, understand the teaching of the Church that God's purpose for our marriage is for our mutual joy, for the help and comfort we will give to each other in prosperity and adversity, and, when it is God's will, for the gift and heritage of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of God. We also understand that our marriage is to be unconditional, mutual, exclusive, faithful, and lifelong; and we engage to make the utmost effort to accept these gifts and fulfill these duties, with the help of God and the support of our community.”
- ✘ Couples are to secure their wedding license through the town Clerk's office and to bring the license, ready for the officiating priest's signature, at the time of the wedding rehearsal. The priest will sign the license only after the ceremony has taken place and will be responsible for submitting it back to the county clerk's office.
- ✘ In addition to the license, the couple and their witnesses are required to sign the parish marriage register.
- ✘ Signing of the license and parish register take place outside of the ceremony itself.
- ✘ Weddings taking place on a Saturday must begin no later than 4:00 pm to allow sufficient time afterward for cleaning and preparation for the Saturday evening worship service.
- ✘ According to venerable Church Tradition, no marriages shall be solemnized in this parish during the Seasons of Advent and Lent or in Holy Week. Additionally, no weddings shall take place on Sundays, except as part of one of the corporate worship services.

THE CEREMONY

- ✘ Planning for the liturgical details of the Ceremony is done directly between the couple and the officiating priest as part of the premarital meetings and only after all other premarital meetings or premarital counseling has been completed.
- ✘ For heterosexual couples, the rite for the Celebration of a Marriage used in this parish is found in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, on pages 422-431, and the rite for the Blessing of a Civil Marriage is found on pages 433-434.
- ✘ For same-gender couples, one of the rites authorized by the General Convention in 2015 must be used.
- ✘ In special circumstances, prayers and other parts of the ceremony may be specially crafted, in collaboration with the officiating priest, but the words of the vows themselves must always be one of the forms specifically provided in the *Book of Common Prayer* or authorized by the General Convention.
- ✘ The couple may decide whether Holy Communion will take place within the liturgy, although Holy Communion is always recommended to those who are active members of the parish.

- ✘ The liturgy with Holy Communion usually lasts between 40 minutes and one hour, and a liturgy without Holy Communion lasts around 30 to 40 minutes.
- ✘ The Episcopal liturgy makes no allowance for the use of the so-called “unity candle” and as a result it is not used in weddings performed at this parish. If a symbol of unity is desired by the couple, we suggest Holy Communion, the ultimate symbol of love and unity.
- ✘ As indicated by the Prayer Book, when Holy Communion is a part of the wedding, the couple themselves should bring up the offerings of bread and wine to the altar, as symbols of their offering of themselves and their new life together before God. Should the couple decide not to bring up the offerings, the bread and wine will be left on the credence behind the altar and oblation-bearers will not be needed.
- ✘ In the Episcopal Church, we invite and welcome all baptized Christians from any tradition to receive Holy Communion. A notice to that effect should be included in the bulletin for weddings involving Holy Communion.
- ✘ No member of the wedding party may arrive under the influence of alcohol or illegal substances, nor consume such substances prior to the ceremony. Such influences are an impediment to marriage and could invalidate the proceedings. The officiating priest will not begin the ceremony while such influences are present.
- ✘ Our parish can comfortably accommodate 150-180 in the pews in the nave.
- ✘ In our experience, it is unwise to have children under the age of five participate in weddings, even if only as a ring bearer or flower girl.
- ✘ A receiving line following the wedding unnecessarily lengthens the ceremony and is more appropriately held at the reception hall.

BULLETINS

- ✘ Sample wedding bulletins are available for perusal from the parish office.
- ✘ The Parish Office will work with the couple to adapt existing bulletin templates with the particular information.
- ✘ The wedding bulletin must be approved in its final form by the officiating priest before being printed.
- ✘ The couple is responsible for the printing arrangements, with the printer of their choice, and the costs of the wedding bulletins.

CLERGY

- ✘ Any wedding performed in this parish must involve the Rector or a priest affiliated with St. Stephen's Church. Exceptions may be made by the Rector, at the Rector's discretion and with the Bishop's permission, when other Episcopal clergy are under consideration.
- ✘ Other clergy may be invited to assist, at the discretion of the officiating priest and with the permission of the Rector.

FLOWERS & DECORATIONS

- ✘ All flowers and decorations shall be the sole responsibility of the couple, by arrangement with a florist of their choice. It is the duty of the couple to ensure that the florist understands the wedding policies of this parish.
- ✘ Floral arrangements are limited to two flower stands that flank the altar or a single arrangement in front of the Altar.
- ✘ Any flowers used at the wedding to decorate the Altar area shall remain in place throughout the Sunday morning worship services that follow.
- ✘ The pews and church doors may also be decorated, usually by arrangement with the couple's florist, but any decorations on these items must be removed by the couple or their representatives immediately following the ceremony.
- ✘ No rice, confetti, bird seed, or flower petals may be thrown in the church or on the church grounds; however, the blowing of bubbles after the ceremony may be permitted outside the church's front doors, with advance notice given to the officiating priest.
- ✘ Aisle runners are not permitted at weddings in this parish. They often bunch or tear, and also become a hazard to others, who might trip on them and fall.
- ✘ Decorating may be done, by arrangement with the Parish Administrator, during normal office hours: Monday – Friday, 9am to 12 noon.

MUSIC

- ✘ If the couple desire music as a part of their wedding ceremony, they must meet with the parish organist, prior to the wedding ceremony and in no less than 30 days before, to establish the music for the wedding ceremony.
- ✘ Couples should note that if they desire music at their wedding, the parish organist must be involved. In special circumstances, another organist may be used, but only with express permission of and by arrangement with the parish organist and the Rector.

- ✘ All musical selections must be approved by the organist and the officiating priest well in advance of the wedding date. The organist will directly confer with the priest in these occasions about special music requests.
- ✘ Because the celebration of a marriage occurs within the context of worship in the Episcopal Church, weddings at this parish shall not employ secular music (opera, show tunes, pop music, *et cetera*). While Wagner's "Bridal Chorus" and Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" are exquisite musical pieces, they are selections from secular music and thus not suitable for use in a liturgical wedding. The parish organist has a wide repertoire of musical pieces and will be happy to help couples find more appropriate alternatives.
- ✘ Additional vocalists and instrumentalists may be used, subject to approval by and arrangement with the parish organist and the Rector.
- ✘ Pre-recorded music is not used at this parish, as the live offering of music is more suitable to the worship of God.

PHOTOGRAPY & VIDEOGRAPHY

- ✘ The photographer and guests shall be informed by the couple that while photos may be taken during the ceremony, no flashes are permitted after the bride's entrance into the church. A notice to that effect should be printed in the wedding bulletin.
- ✘ Staged photographs may take place before or after the ceremony, by prior arrangement with the officiating priest.
- ✘ If the couple desires a staged photograph with the clergy, please arrange with the photographers to do these photos first, so that the clergy may divest from their vestments.
- ✘ Videotaping of the ceremony is permitted only from the rear of the church or from the choir loft.
- ✘ In no way should the photographer or videographer obstruct, interfere, or disrupt the liturgy of the Church.
- ✘ In the past some photographers and videographers have shown a lack of regard for the Church's norms, and as such these professionals should not be used. Please consult with the Rector about your choice of professionals before signing any contracts or agreements.
- ✘ It is the duty of the couple to ensure that the photographer is made aware of the church's policies regarding photography.
- ✘ Additionally, any photographers and videographers need to consult with the Rector in the week before the wedding date in order to review the Church's norms and expectations.
- ✘ Blatant disregard of parish policy by the photographer or videographer may result in expulsion of the photographer/videographer (and/or others) from the wedding ceremony and the exclusion of these professionals from any future weddings at St. Stephen's.

RECEPTIONS

- ✘ Given the small facilities at the parish, receptions must be held elsewhere. The officiating priest can offer suggestions for reception halls during the pre-marital planning time.
- ✘ If the couple involves an active parishioner and the celebration is a small one (not more than 50 people present), the Rector may make an exception and permit a reception to be held in Fay Hall. Additional fees for building use and for subsequent cleaning will be required in such event.
- ✘ When Fay Hall is used for small receptions, the couple or their representatives shall be responsible for all decorating and the removal of such decorations following the event.
- ✘ No receptions held in Fay Hall may include the serving of alcoholic beverages of any kind.
- ✘ The parish china, table cloths, and serving materials are available to active parishioners who host small receptions in the Fay Hall; however, the couple or their representatives are responsible for the cleaning of the items and their prompt return to the church.