

Wedding Policy

of
St. Peter's by the Sea
Sitka, Alaska

It is the belief of the Episcopal Church that marriage in the Church is by definition Christian and a Sacrament. Because of the sacramental nature of marriage the Church holds a few assumptions in regard to weddings and marriage.

All marriages solemnized at St. Peter's Episcopal Church are done according to the rites of the Book of Common Prayer, with a priest or bishop of the Episcopal Church presiding. Duly ordained clergy from other denominations are very welcome to take part throughout the marriage service. In addition, one of the following conditions must be met.

1. At least one of the two persons must be a baptized Christian;
-AND-
2. At least one of the two persons is a communicant in good standing in a Christian congregation.
-OR-
3. The applicants are seeking a church home.
-AND-
4. If the couple has a church home, agreement should be provided from their pastor(s) that the wedding be conducted at St. Peter's.

Any exceptions to these policies are made at the discretion of the Rector.

GUIDELINES FOR COUPLES DESIRING HOLY MATRIMONY IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

"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; that the marriage conform to the laws of the state and the canons of this Church." Book of Common Prayer, 1979, page 422

PREFACE

Welcome to St. Peter's. Whether you are a parishioner or not, these guidelines will help you to plan your wedding and, we hope, answer the kinds of questions people have at this time.

St. Peter's works within the traditions of the Episcopal Church, the provisions of the Book of Common Prayer, and the current regulations of the Episcopal Church. Those standards give us the structure which provides you with spiritual support and guidance. They are intended to keep the service focused on your marriage to each other in the presence of God and with His blessing. The Rector and people of St. Peter's are happy to share your celebration and to help you in it.

To this end it must be remembered that:

Christian marriage is first of all a Liturgy of the Church, and a service of worship. This means we follow the standards and practice common to all occasions of worship in the Episcopal Church. The rest of this booklet will help you to understand how these standards and practices will affect the decisions you must make.

SETTING THE DATE

Because of potential scheduling conflicts and the requirements of premarital counseling, St. Peter's requires notice of 60 days before a wedding can be scheduled. Normally, we do not schedule weddings during the seasons of Advent or Lent. Moreover, major days in the church calendar (Christmas Day, Easter Day, etc.) and Sundays should be avoided. Requests for exceptions to this will be considered; however, some factors in this requirement are policies of the Bishop's office and beyond the Rector's control. At your first meeting with the Rector, a wedding date will be chosen with regard to appropriate arrangements for pre-marital counseling.

The couple is responsible for contacting a St. Peter's organist to plan the music. (See "The Wedding Music"). The couple must also contact the Chair of the Altar Guild to help make arrangements for flowers, candles, etc.

PRE-MARITAL COUNSELING

The Episcopal Church requires all persons who are seeking marriage in the Church to receive premarital counseling. Normally the Rector requires four sessions for those who are being married for the first time and five to six sessions should either party be divorced. Sessions are usually scheduled on a weekly basis and last about 60 minutes. When neither party has been previously married, they must be completed no later than two weeks prior to the wedding date. Those seeking marriage following divorce must complete their premarital counseling no later than 45 days prior to the wedding. (This is so that the Bishop will have 30 days to consider your request.)

Pre-marital counseling offers spiritual guidance and a candid examination of the couple's relationship. This is not a time for "problem solving!" The Rector is not a therapist and will not offer clinical advice, although he may suggest or require such advice for the couple.

Pre-marital counseling also allows you and the Rector to develop or enhance your relationship with one another. This greatly deepens the personal dynamics of your wedding. This is just as important to the Rector as it is for you, inasmuch as it makes his ministry deeper and more personal. An accelerated or diluted schedule of pre-marital counseling defeats these purposes.

You should also know that most people very much enjoy pre-marital counseling. (It probably isn't what you think!)

REMARRIAGE

Yes – divorced persons may be married by the Church! Both experience and theology tell us that this in itself can be a significant vehicle for God's grace for healing brokenness in human life. However, a priest in the Episcopal Church must first make application to the Diocesan Bishop before celebrating the marriage of persons who have been divorced. This is not to make you jump through any sort of hoops, but rather is an indication of how seriously the Episcopal Church views the sacramental nature of Holy Matrimony. No such application can be made until at least one full year has elapsed between the date of decree of divorce and the proposed date of the new marriage. Moreover, these procedures are to help the couple make sure old issues have been dealt with, appropriate insights gained from the failure of the earlier marriage, and to assure that any children from the former marriage have been properly considered in the formation of a new family.

It is the Rector's responsibility to make a recommendation to the Bishop about remarriage in the church. This will be determined from the premarital counseling sessions as described above. The same standards apply as for first-time marriages.

Please be aware that your priest cannot proceed with your marriage without final approval from the Bishop, so you need to give yourself plenty of time to allow for this process in setting your wedding date. (Normally about 90 days.)

THE MARRIAGE LICENSE

The couple is responsible for obtaining the license and for complying with all other legal requirements affecting them under applicable law. The license must be brought to the officiating priest at the rehearsal, as the wedding cannot take place without it. The parish secretary will return it, duly signed by the officiating priest, to the Clerk of the Court after the wedding for recording by the Clerk.

PLACE OF WEDDING

The Church is available for weddings. It seats 100 comfortably. Occasionally, we have officiated at weddings in other locations. If you have something in mind, please discuss this with the Rector.

THE PRAYER BOOK AND WORSHIP

The Rector and all other parties are subject to the provisions of the Service for Matrimony as it appears in the Book of Common Prayer, pp. 422-432, 861. (The couple should read this material and be familiar with the available options (especially choices of scripture, p. 426 BCP)

We ask you to attend regular services at St. Peter's prior to your marriage, if this is at all possible. This should begin at the commencement of your premarital counseling sessions. This is an intentional way of inviting God into your relationship. It is also another way to help you prepare for your wedding service by becoming familiar with the worship space, the way worship is conducted here, and to become acquainted with the

St. Peter's community that you are inviting into your life, by celebrating your marriage here.

FINAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SERVICE

As in every service of the Church, the priest is charged by Canon Law with the final responsibility for determining the appropriateness of all arrangements and details.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY

St. Peter's recommends that you take photos before the marriage service with the couple arriving at least 90 minutes before the wedding, and the photographer finishing no later than 30 minutes before the service begins. It is preferable that pictures with participating clergy, acolytes etc., be taken immediately following the wedding, before going to the reception. Generally the clergy cannot be available for pictures prior to the service because of the need to be attentive to service details.

To preserve the integrity of a wedding as a service of worship, no photography or bright artificial lights are permitted. So as not to be distracting to participants or guests at the wedding, no photographs may be taken during the liturgy. However, the service may be videotaped provided the video camera is mounted on a stationary tripod (in a place agreed upon by the Rector) and is limited to natural/available light. Videographers must be specially mindful not to distract members of the congregation. It is the responsibility of the couple to inform family and friends of the rules concerning photography/videotaping during the service.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST

The celebration of the Holy Communion is always an appropriate part of a wedding, should this be an option you wish to consider. Keep in mind that in the Episcopal Church, Holy Communion is open to all baptized Christians; everyone who wishes to receive the sacramental bread and wine may do so by coming to the rail. Be assured that those who choose not to receive Communion will not feel singled out or embarrassed in any way. It is also important to remember that the very nature of Communion will not allow for only the bride and groom to receive the sacrament; if Communion is celebrated it must be offered to all in attendance.

THE WEDDING MUSIC

Any wedding can be conducted without music, but if you want music you will need the service of a St. Peter's organist. The couple is responsible for making an appointment with the organist at least two months prior to the wedding date for consultation about music arrangements. An organist will be available to meet with you.

Normally an organist of St. Peter's Church will serve at your wedding, if available on the date that has been chosen. We prefer that the parish organist be offered the opportunity to perform at your wedding. If you have a specific request for another organist, other arrangements are possible, following consultation with the Rector.

Because your wedding is a service of worship in the Episcopal Church, secular music is usually not used.

Other soloists, instrumentalists, or the St. Peter's choir may be included in the wedding service, as you may prefer and by agreement with the parish organist you are working with.

THE WEDDING FLOWERS

The Altar Guild oversees the floral arrangements, candles, and other decorations. Within two weeks of first meeting with the Rector, the couple should make an appointment with the Altar Guild Chair who will advise them regarding the suitability of flowers and other decorations in the church. Generally speaking, two floral arrangements adorn the altar as in all other services of worship. Likewise, candles will be placed only as liturgically appropriate.

We suggest that the chancel flowers remain for the following Sunday services. The flowers will be designated in the Sunday Service bulletin "in thanksgiving for the marriage of _____." All other decorations must be removed immediately following the ceremony.

ACOLYTES

The couple may choose a relative or friend to serve as an Acolyte if the person is an Acolyte in another parish. If preferred, the parish can provide one or more Acolytes from among St. Peter's parish. Acolytes will be vested, according to the custom of the parish.

THE WEDDING REHEARSAL

Wedding rehearsals are normally held on the afternoon before the wedding day. Please emphasize to everyone in your wedding party the importance of being on time, as the rehearsal involves many individuals and arrangements. Except in unusual circumstances, a rehearsal will last 45-60 minutes. Please keep this fact in mind when scheduling a rehearsal dinner. The officiating priest conducts the rehearsal with help from the organist. Wedding consultants are not used.

RECEPTION AT ST. PETER'S

The parish hall is available for wedding receptions. Expenses for special arrangements, set-up and cleanup are the responsibility of the couple. The facilities may be reserved by calling the parish office manager 60 days before the date of the wedding. At the conclusion of the reception, the parish hall must be cleaned and ready for use on the next day.

RICE, BIRD SEED, CONFETTI, ETC.

If somebody wants to throw something at or onto the couple, it should be bird seed only – confetti becomes litter, and rice (besides being dangerous if striking one's eyes) is environmentally unfriendly to birds.

THE FEE SCHEDULE

The ministry of the parish of St. Peter's by-the-Sea is a gift from God through our Lord Jesus Christ and the community of Christ to the larger community. Holy Matrimony is a sacrament. The question of fees is inappropriate in this context. Making the sanctuary and parish hall available to you is an act of love and faith by the members of our congregation. This is beyond price. Saying thank you is the appropriate response.

If you are not able to personally clean up the church building and parish house, we ask that you make arrangements for it to be done by others. We assume that the sanctuary, See House, and grounds will be ready for public worship the evening of the day of your wedding.

It is customary to give the organist who plays at your wedding a thank offering. The same is true of the priest who officiates at your service. The decision to make such a gift and its size is up to you.

WEDDING PREPARATION CHECKLIST

Bride's Name _____

Address _____

Phone (w) _____ (h) _____

Groom's Name _____

Address _____

Phone (w) _____ (h) _____

If not local, list local contact: _____

Dates for premarital counseling:

Scriptures: Old Testament Reading _____

Psalm _____

New Testament Reading _____

Gospel _____

Photographer _____

Communion _____

If so, arrangements for: (Names)

Ushers _____

Acolytes _____

Chalice Bearers _____

Florist _____

Rehearsal dinner (location) _____

Reception (location) _____

St. Peter's Organists:

Carol Williamson 747-3388

Karen Williams 747-3520

Wanda White 747-8613

Altar Guild Chair:

Pauline Fredrickson 747-8453

Parish Office Manager:

Roberta Modrell 747-3977