

PRINCIPLES, POLICIES, AND GUIDELINES FOR

THE CELEBRATION AND BLESSING OF A MARRIAGE

AND

THE CONDUCT OF WEDDINGS

St. John's Episcopal Church  
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*The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people.*

*The union of husband and wife 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. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.*

- The Book of Common Prayer, p. 423

## Welcome to St. John's

We're happy to be a part of your exploration of the nature and character of Christian marriage. As you come to us in that journey of discovery, please do not think of us as simply a "provider" of a service, such as the provider of a pretty place in which to have your wedding ceremony. We are a community of people who worship according to the discipline of The Episcopal Church and The Book of Common Prayer. That life of worship defines us and informs our teaching about and approach to the sacrament of Christian marriage. This small booklet is intended to help you understand that about us, and to provide some context for our wedding policies and guidelines, which may seem initially to be quite arbitrary. Be assured that we take your inquiry about being married at St. John's seriously. We simply ask that you take us seriously as well. Now let's talk about wedding and marriage.

The words *wedding* and *marriage* are used interchangeably, even though they have different meanings.

A *wedding* is a ceremony. It can elicit many feelings. It can be an occasion of joy or a cause of stress. It can be an opportunity for family reunion and celebration, occasions too rare in our transient society. It can be a time of reconciliation and new beginning, where before there was estrangement and alienation. Sometimes a wedding can be the occasion for hurt and misunderstanding. You may already have experienced some of these dimensions in your own preparation. People approach a wedding with many expectations and hopes, often unexpressed and sometimes unrealistic. Much is said about the amount of money spent on wedding ceremonies, and sometimes that amount is deserving of such comment! What is equally true in addition to all of the above is that a wedding and its attendant preparations can take on a life of its own. This life and the energy that feeds it may have little or no relationship to the life of the couple after a wedding ceremony. We call that life *marriage*.

Don't misunderstand. A wedding ceremony is neither unimportant nor trivial. In the Episcopal Church we pride ourselves on the beauty and integrity of our worship, and that includes your wedding ceremony. But we are primarily interested in your marriage.

Marriage is a sacramental state of life in which two persons commit to one another in a solemn covenant before God, their family, friends, and representatives of the Christian community, to live together in a certain way. That way of life is characterized by the presence of fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful and honest communication, and holy love enabling each partner to see in themselves and each other the image of God. That way of life is equally characterized by the absence of promiscuity, exploitation, and abusiveness.

The wedding is that ceremony in which the couple enters into this solemn covenant, and asks God's grace to sustain them in it, until they are parted by death. They ask God's blessing, given through the office of the officiating priest, on their intention and their efforts. Those present affirm the couple's desire to live this life, and offer prayers and pledge their support to that end.

The covenant of marriage finds its meaning in God's covenant with God's people, and in the self-offering of Christ on our behalf as the ultimate human expression of that covenant. The Church understands and approaches the wedding ceremony as a service of Christian worship in which the gift of God to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is recalled and appropriated for the benefit of the couple exchanging vows. Christian worship is a corporate act, and includes elements of joy and praise, thanksgiving and intercession, intimacy and humility, offering and blessing.

The Book of Common Prayer titles the wedding service "*The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage.*" Note that there are two parts to that title: celebration, and blessing. We aren't against having a good time, especially at your wedding. We remember that Jesus, as a wedding guest, saved a wedding reception from disaster because the amount of wine needed has been underestimated! So we are happy to be a part of your wedding celebration.

But we look beyond your wedding to your marriage, and what your marriage can say to us all about the creative and life-giving grace of God. This

booklet tries to address the most frequently asked questions regarding wedding ceremonies at St. John's, and to describe the norm for wedding ritual in the parish. Bear in mind that all details of music and other ceremony are agreed to after appropriate consultation with the officiating priest and the Director of Music, so we urge you to involve these persons early in your preparation. And then turn your attention beyond your wedding ceremony, and look to the larger vision of what sacramental marriage can be for you.

## WHO MAY BE MARRIED IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH?

At least one of you must be baptized, because Christian marriage grows out of Christian baptism. Baptismal life is life lived within a community of believers. It is expected, therefore, that any baptized person desiring the Church's blessing on their marriage will be involved in the life of the local worshipping community.

At St. John's we expect that persons who are not active in the life of the parish when they first inquire about marriage will become active over the course of their marriage preparation. It is also expected that they will have the intention of continuing involvement in the life of a worshipping community after marriage. Adult children of the parish established in other communities, and university students whose home is elsewhere, may satisfy this expectation by presenting evidence that they are involved in the life of a local congregation in the community of their residence.

*A direct benefit of sharing in the worship life of St. John's is that you will experience our worship and liturgical style. There is a wide range of worship style and liturgical practice across the breadth of the Episcopal Church. That range is even wider if one includes non-Episcopal churches. Much confusion and misunderstanding about what is and is not done liturgically at St. John's can be avoided if a couple is familiar with our local custom and range of practice and accepts it, despite what they may have experienced in other churches.*

We do not exclude previously married and now-divorced persons from receiving the Church's blessing and support on their new attempt at marriage. Indeed many weddings at St. John's are second marriages for one or both partners. Specific canonical provisions (I.19.3) apply to divorced members of the Episcopal Church who wish to remarry while their former spouse is still living, and to members of the Episcopal Church who wish to marry a divorced person whose former spouse is still living. These provisions are pastoral rather than punitive, requiring an additional level of inquiry and conversation having to do with the circumstances of the previous marriage, and are undertaken with the officiating priest. The nature of these requirements will be explained fully if they apply to you.

## PREMARITAL INSTRUCTION

The Episcopal Church requires that the couple be instructed as to the *"nature, meaning, and purpose of Holy Matrimony"* by the officiating priest. Occasionally another person known to be competent and responsible by the officiating priest can do this.

As practiced at St. John's, premarital instruction is a shared exploration into the Prayer Book understanding of Christian marriage. The dynamic of your relationship is explored in order to identify mechanisms which might enhance or inhibit both the growth and strengthening of your marriage and your growth as a person within marriage. Consideration of families and family backgrounds, differences in culture and religion and of role expectation for yourself and your spouse are all part of this exploration. Unique considerations, such as the dynamics of blended families or the lukewarm support of adult children of previous marriages, is considered as appropriate. The Prayer Book liturgy, and the hope and vision for marriage that it proclaims, are included as well. You may well have identified your own list of topics you would like to explore. Occasionally a professional "testing instrument" is indicated or desired, usually administered and interpreted under the supervision of a licensed professional. The couple assumes any cost involved for this testing.

Normally premarital instruction is accomplished in a series of from three to five sessions of approximately one hour's duration. An initial introductory session and a final walk-through of the wedding ceremony itself (not the same as the rehearsal) are also required. Given the reality of people's schedules a minimum of six months is required between the initial session and the wedding itself. This time span cannot be compressed.

If it is not possible for premarital instruction to take place in Lafayette because you live far away, we can help make referrals to Episcopal clergy close to you, but final responsibility for those arrangements is yours. That priest is free to work with you according to his or her custom, and then will be asked to certify in writing to St. John's that the instruction has been completed and the Prayer Book requirement met. If premarital instruction is undertaken in this way, you are still expected to have an initial meeting, and a walk through session, with the officiating priest at St. John's. You will also be expected to have consulted (even if by long-distance) with our Director of Music for the music for your ceremony.

One of the more important benefits of this time spent together is the relationship and understanding that can develop between the couple and the officiating priest. Beyond that this regular communication provides a means by which the parish staff can stay informed of your wedding plans and address in a timely way the questions about details of the ceremony that inevitably arise. Our experience is that the extraordinary liturgical requests that sometimes are made of us cannot fairly be considered when they are placed at the last minute. Planning in advance can help to avoid this.

*So important do we hold the content and benefits of this premarital instruction process as outlined above that if you cannot arrange for it we will be unable to commit to celebrating and blessing your marriage at St. John's.*

## THE DAY AND TIME OF YOUR CEREMONY

Most weddings are held on a Saturday, although weddings on other days can be arranged. We will not schedule a wedding during the season of Advent (the four weeks before Christmas) or the season of Lent (the seven weeks before Easter). For any other date, consult with the officiating priest to make a final determination about space and staff availability. We recommend that you have a selection of possible dates, since staff and/or space may not be available on the one day you have chosen.

We will not schedule two weddings in one day, so you can be assured that once a day is agreed to, it is yours.

For practical reasons, we will not schedule a wedding to begin before 10:00 a.m. in the morning, or after 4:30 p.m. in the evening. The earlier limit recognizes that parish volunteers must prepare the church before the ceremony, and these preparations cannot always be made earlier in the week. The later limit recognizes that Sunday is a full workday for the staff for which they must rest and prepare.

The rehearsal is normally scheduled for the late afternoon or early evening of the Friday before the ceremony, although other times can be negotiated. Normally rehearsals begin between 5:00 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Only persons who have an active part in the ceremony itself need to attend the rehearsal. You should allow a full hour for the rehearsal once it begins, so please urge your party to be on time. Please be aware that the Director of Music does not normally attend the rehearsal.

## THE “FORM” OF YOUR WEDDING CEREMONY

The “form” for all weddings performed at St. John’s will be that contained in The Book of Common Prayer. Couples, if both are baptized, are encouraged to include a celebration of The Holy Eucharist as a part of their wedding. If they choose to do so, every baptized person present during the service will be invited to share in receiving communion.

The rubrics (directions) of the Prayer Book provide certain choices to the couple planning their wedding, and these will be discussed fully with the officiating clergy. The Prayer Book also assumes that lay persons will undertake certain roles in the liturgy. The couple should be prepared to identify persons to read scripture lessons and prayers, and perhaps to assist in the Holy Eucharist itself. This specific planning will be included in the premarital instruction with the officiating priest.

## MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

The Director of Music of St. John’s by contract has the right of first refusal for all wedding ceremonies conducted in the church for which music is requested, which means that another organist cannot play in his or her place without our organist’s consent. If he or she does not, for whatever reason, play for a particular wedding, he or she nonetheless serves as staff consultant on all musical matters for that wedding. In this capacity the parish organist will consult with the couple to ensure that the music performed is consistent with the rubrics of the Prayer Book and the musical norms of the parish. The Director of Music will be compensated a full fee for this consultation.

Any fees for replacement or additional musicians shall be the sole responsibility of the couple, and attended to directly by them.

The fee paid to the Director of Music includes musical consultation and selection of music and congregational hymns for the ceremony, as well as the performance of a program of organ music before, during, and following the ceremony itself. Work with supplemental musicians, the mastering of specifically requested musical selections or the provision of additional musical programs before or following the ceremony, or specifically required attendance at the rehearsal itself, may require an additional fee. This will be negotiated separately with the Director of Music.

The Book of Common Prayer states, *“Hymns referred to in the rubrics of this Book are to be understood as those authorized by this Church. The words of anthems are to be from Holy Scripture, or from this Book, or from texts congruent with them...On occasion and as appropriate, instrumental music may be substituted for a hymn or anthem”* (p. 14). In simple language this means that any words sung at your wedding must be consistent with the Church’s teaching on the nature of Christian Marriage. It means too that only instrumental music that is appropriate to the dignity of the worship of the Episcopal Church will be permitted.

It is in these areas of conformity to Prayer Book rubric and stylistic appropriateness that the Director of Music consults and advises. His or her final judgment on any given piece of music will be upheld, and will be based on consultation with the officiating priest as necessary.

St. John’s has no provision for the playing of audio tapes or recorded music to supplement our worship. Our music is live. We do encourage the singing of one or more hymns by the entire congregation as a way of including them in the ceremony. There are numerous hymns that are appropriate. The choir of St. John’s can be contracted to provide musical leadership at weddings if desired. If this interests you, the Director of Music can provide details about possibilities.

## FLOWERS AND CANDLES

There is no requirement that there be flowers for a wedding. If you choose to use flowers, be aware that we use only fresh flowers inside the sanctuary (behind the altar rail). There should be no bows, ribbons, or plastic accent pieces in these arrangements. Dried or artificial arrangements may be used elsewhere if you wish. The use of flowers should not be excessive, and the parish norm for a festive service is the norm used in determining what is and is not excessive. If decorations are desired on the pew ends we require that they be attached with rubber bands or wire with a protective coating so as not to damage the finish or the wood of the pews. Tape or tacks of any kind are not allowed.

We ask you to have your florist deliver the flowers two hours prior to the ceremony, so that they are here when any pictures are taken. Be certain to advise the Altar Guild consultant which florist you will be using, so that we can contact them if there is any difficulty. If you wish and have no further need for them, fresh altar flowers may be left as a thank offering for use in the Sunday services. If other parishioners have provided flowers for that Sunday, your flowers will be used in the chapel for weekday services, or in the parish hall.

There are two candles on the high altar, and these are used at every service. Should you wish other candles, the Altar Guild consultant can show you the candelabra available. These are placed in the sanctuary, either on the floor, or the retable or window shelves. There is an additional cost if you choose to use these candles.

The altar candles, and the parish candelabra which you may arrange to use if you desire, are the only additional candles used for weddings at St. John's. *"...solemn vows, the joining of hands, and the giving and receiving of rings..."* are the signs of unity in the wedding ceremony. That is sufficient.

## PICTURES AND PHOTOGRAPHERS

Weddings have increasingly become "photo opportunities" over the past few years. The number and variety of both photographs and videos taken to preserve a wedding day, and the cost of this activity, grows almost uncontrollably. St. John's does not support this excess.

It is our general policy that photography during the ceremony shall in no way distract from the service of Christian worship which a wedding ceremony is. We ask that there be no flash photography, from professionals or others, once the service has begun. In addition we ask that no photographer, professional or otherwise, insert himself or his equipment between the wedding party and the congregation at any time during the ceremony.

If you choose to have a video tape made of your wedding, we require that the video camera be stationary during the service. So that it is not a distraction to full participation by anyone during the service, we require that this camera be positioned where we put a video camera when the parish records any special services: at the rear of the church, near the baptismal font.

If you chose to have still photographs made of your wedding, the same provisions apply. The only exception for still photographers is that they may take individual pictures of the bridal party as they turn at the baptismal font at the rear of the church and begin to process down the center aisle during the entrance procession. After that point, the still photographer is requested to remain at the rear of the church.

You are welcome to take photographs in and around the church before or after the wedding ceremony. However, we ask that you plan your use of the building to take not more than two hours before your wedding ceremony begins and not more than one hour after it ends. Many bridal parties choose to dress here, but if you wish to use the full two hours for photographs we ask that you dress at home. If you coordinate a plan in advance with your photographer and dress quickly after your arrival, you will have ample time for photography before wedding guests begin to arrive. If it is your personal choice not to have the bride and groom seen together before the ceremony, you will still have time for photographs following the ceremony.

These restrictions grow out of our experience with a variety of photographers and wedding parties, and are based on two considerations. The first is that parish volunteers and staff must be present in the church building as much as two hours before your arrival in order to have the sanctuary ready for

your use, and then be out of your way when you are using the building. They also remain following your departure in order to prepare for Sunday's service. While they understand the time they give as a ministry of hospitality, it bears remembering that these people have lives at home and other things to do on a Saturday. The second consideration is self-evident: the church is not the only venue for photographs. The site of your reception is a place where many photographs can be taken with family and friends, and without the limitations imposed by the church.

We urge you to plan carefully and make a list of all those persons and groupings that you want to have photographed. Your photographer should be happy to help you plan this, and may have many recommendations to make based on his or her experience. **We assume that you will share all of our expectations with your photographer, and that any photographer who attends your wedding agrees to these expectations.** If they have any questions they are welcome to call the officiating priest for clarification. We ask that they do this well in advance of the wedding.

## THE ALTAR GUILD

The Altar Guild is a volunteer group of women members of St. John's whose ministry it is to care for the vessels and linens used in our worship, and to assist the clergy in preparing for any and all worship services at St. John's, including your wedding.

One member of the Altar Guild will be assigned to work with you as a consultant. She will arrange to meet you at the church and discuss such matters as flowers, additional candles, where you may dress if you choose to dress here, and the like. The consultant will communicate with the Altar Guild team scheduled for duty the day of your wedding. This team will do the actual preparations for your wedding, and then will prepare for the Sunday service after your wedding party departs. Several members may be in the church the entire time you are here. They can answer questions, help with flowers, find needle and thread if necessary, help the bridal party get in place for the procession, and the like.

These women are the "bridal consultants" of the parish, and assist the clergy as well. No other bridal consultants are necessary, and if you should elect to contract a professional consultant we ask that they confine their services to those details other than the ceremony within the church. Members of the Altar Guild are not paid, but do this work as a part of their ministry within the church. Any money they receive goes toward the purchase of candles, linens, or other items for use in the services of the church.

## MISCELLANEOUS

*St. John's does not use an aisle runner.* Our aisle is beautifully carpeted and that carpet serves the original purpose of an aisle runner, to protect the dress from the soil of a stone or dirt floor, quite well.

*We request that nothing be "thrown" on the bride and groom* inside or outside of the church. Rice, birdseed, confetti, flower petals, bubbles, even chilled butterflies, are in use these days. Whatever the meaning of this custom, it has no place at the church and, except for the butterflies, simply leaves more to clean up. The use of butterflies raises other issues about the way we value other forms of life for the purposes of our personal enjoyment. If you really want something thrown on you, please arrange for that at the site of your reception.

We ask that you *form any receiving line you wish to have at the site of your reception* (which is, after all, the proper place to "receive" people). If you wish to have your guests remain in their pews until they are dismissed by yourselves as the bridal couple, remember that this will add twenty minutes or more to the time necessary to clear the church, and reduce the time available to you for photography.

If you wish, *the parish office can prepare a simple service bulletin*, although such a bulletin is certainly not required. We will use simple 8 ½ x 11-inch paper, and will have the bulletin in time for the rehearsal. You are certainly free to have such a bulletin printed elsewhere if you wish. If you wish a bulletin the final form and text of the service-related portion must be approved by the officiating priest no later than two weeks before the wedding date regardless of where you have it printed.

*If one member of the couple is an active member of another Christian body, and would like to have his or her priest or pastor involved in the wedding ceremony*, we will be happy to explore that possibility. There are parts of our wedding service that are quite appropriate for another clergy person to share. We do expect that the guest priest or pastor, or the church they represent, will

place no requirement on the couple as a condition of the guest's participation which could be inferred as questioning the validity of either the understanding of or preparation for Christian Marriage as found in The Episcopal Church.

## FEES AND OFFERINGS

The following schedule explains the most common fees that may pertain to your wedding at St. John's. It does not include fees for additional musicians or additional time or services requested of our Director of Music. These would be negotiated separately. Nor does it include fees if the parish Commons is used for the reception. A schedule for that rental is available from the Parish Administrator.

The clergy of St. John's are paid a competitive salary for the exercise of their ministry. Part of this ministry is to officiate at the administration of the sacraments of the Church. The priest has, then, already been paid to officiate at the weddings he or she agrees to do, and no further payment is expected. You may wish to make an offering nonetheless. Such gifts may be made payable to St. John's Church, noted for the Discretionary Fund of the clergy person who officiated at your wedding.

If another priest or pastor is involved in the ceremony at the request of the couple, it is only common courtesy for the couple to see that the guest is given an honorarium, and is compensated for any travel expense that may have been incurred.

## FEE SCHEDULE

(Effective 2/18/2009)

1. *Sexton services (\$25)*: For cleaning the church following the wedding ceremony in preparation for our Sunday morning services. This includes policing of the other areas used by the wedding party such as the Bishop's Parlor, any necessary moving of furniture, etc.
2. *Director of Music (\$250 cash or check payable to Michael Bennett)*: For consulting with the couple regarding music and playing brief programs before and following the ceremony, as well as the ceremony itself. If another organist is selected, this serves as the consulting fee so that we have staff review of the music used at the ceremony. Does not include any fees for additional work with musicians, or required participation in the rehearsal, which may have been separately agreed to.
3. *Altar Guild services (\$25)*.
4. *Additional Candelabra Fee (\$30/pair)*. For a pair of seven-branch candelabra, if desired.
5. *Service bulletin (\$50)*: For the production of a bulletin if prepared in our office. Bulletin text to be approved by officiating priest two weeks in advance of the wedding date. Bulletin to be available for the rehearsal.
6. *Building Use Donation (\$600)*: This donation is requested of those who are not contributors and participants of record at the time they approach St. John's about the possibility of their wedding being held here.

7. *Discretionary Fund (amount of the individual's choice):* For those who wish to make a thank offering for the ministry of the officiating priest in their marriage preparation and wedding. The Discretionary Fund is for use by the clergy of St. John's for non-budgeted, ministry-related needs.

*Excepting the musician(s), all fees may be paid in cash or one check to St. John's and we will see to distribution. All fees, together with the appropriate documents from the County Clerk's office, must be delivered to the church office by the Wednesday before the wedding. Without the appropriate paperwork from the County Clerk, the wedding cannot proceed.*