

# Wedding Guidelines

## St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church

### **CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR PLAN TO BE MARRIED!**

We hope that the time of preparation for your wedding and marriage is joyful and as stress-free as possible. The following guidelines are made available directly to every couple inquiring about a wedding at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, Laytonsville, MD. It is this church's hope that these guidelines will offer couples an initial understanding of what marriage and a wedding ceremony in an Episcopal Church entails and of what our own church's particular procedures and policies are.

### **According to the Canons of the Episcopal Church, a marriage ceremony is permitted when:**

1. At least one of the persons being married is a baptized Christian.
2. A minimum of 90 days notice, dated from the first meeting with one of the clergy, is given. Reserving a date six months or more in advance is highly recommended
3. All marriage ceremonies will be taken from the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.
4. If one or both parties has been previously married:

It shall be within the discretion of any member of the clergy of the church to decline to solemnize any marriage. Divorce is not in itself a barrier to remarriage but the Episcopal Church requires certain steps to be followed in order to be remarried in the Church.

Permission to solemnize the wedding has been obtained from the Bishop, with a minimum of 120 days' notice.

No arrangements can be made until any divorce is absolute and the person legally free to marry. A copy of any Decree of Divorce Absolute (issued only when the period of time stated in the divorce Nisi decree has elapsed) must be seen and verified.

### **DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE**

Marriage is both a legal and a spiritual union. The priest acts as an agent of the state and signs the marriage license. Christian marriage is also a sacramental relationship, lifelong in intention. In the Marriage ceremony, the priest pronounces God's blessing upon the couples' love and life together. It is the Church's hope that Christian marriage begins and matures within the context of a Christian community; and, indeed, one reason it exists is for the benefit of the Christian community. "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 in God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture with the knowledge and love of the Lord" (Book of Common Prayer, page 423). Thus, couples requesting a marriage ceremony in the Episcopal Church are expected to attend worship services before and during the time of preparation of the marriage ceremony. The Church itself is not for rent to couples and other ministers to perform a marriage ceremony.

### **WEDDING PREPARATION TIMELINE**

1. Make appointment with the priest to discuss a potential Wedding at St. Bartholomew's Church, or another location.
2. With clergy agreement, set the wedding date and time. Due to the penitential nature of the season of Lent, no weddings are scheduled during this portion of the Church's year. The Rector is unavailable for weddings the week before and the week after Easter and Christmas due to parish responsibilities during that time of year.
3. Make appointments for marriage preparation with the rector of St. Bartholomew's, or another Episcopal priest located where the couple live or work.
4. Meet with the Music Director to select music appropriate for a marriage service.

5. One month prior to wedding, send completed bulletin components to Parish Admin. Asst. The church office can make copies of a simple bulletin, using covers provided by the couple. More elaborate bulletins are the responsibility of the couple.
6. One week before wedding, bring marriage license, bulletins if printed elsewhere and all fees to the Church office, or to the rehearsal.

### **FEES AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS**

- For **pledging members**, there is no fee for the use of the church. Nor is there any fee for the priest, although an honorarium of \$300 is suggested, paid directly to the priest.
- Since pledging members contribute to the maintenance of the church facilities, staff salaries and the ministries of the parish, **non-pledging and non-contributing members** will be charged \$500 for the use of the Church, payable to St. Bartholomew's Church and \$300 for the clergy's time in marriage preparation, the rehearsal and officiating at the wedding, and \$50 for the preparation and clean up of the sanctuary, bathrooms and parish hall before and after the ceremony.
- A \$250 fee paid directly to the Director of Music regardless of whether the bridal party is a pledging member or not.
- Specifics about payees will be provided the week before the wedding.
- The Organist of St. Bartholomew's Church plays for all weddings, unless other arrangements have been previously made with the Organist and the Rector.
- All musical participants need to be approved by the Director of Music.
- No outside facilitator/director is permitted to be part of the rehearsal or ceremony.
- \* No outside minister may perform a marriage ceremony at St. Bartholomew's without the permission and invitation of the rector of St. Bartholomew's.

### **PRE-MARITAL INSTRUCTION**

Pre-marital instruction is a requirement in the Episcopal Church of all couples requesting a marriage ceremony, regardless of whether it is a first or second marriage for one or both persons. At St. Bartholomew's, this takes the form of private counseling with the Rector (4-5 sessions). In order that adequate counseling may be given, the couple should make arrangements to meet monthly with the rector on a weekday or after the second Sunday service. This allows adequate time between sessions for prayer and thought on what has been learned in the counseling sessions. If one or both persons has been married and divorced, the priest must obtain permission of the diocesan Bishop in order to officiate at the marriage ceremony. The priest writes a letter to the Bishop requesting permission after meeting with the couple for pre-marital counseling. The Bishop requests a minimum of 60 days to respond.

### **WHO MAY OFFICIATE**

The officiating priest is usually the Rector. Should another clergy person be desired, the couple should not speak to the other priest about it until the matter has been discussed with the Rector, who will invite the other clergy person to officiate.

### **CONCERNING THE LITURGY, FLOWERS AND DECORATIONS**

The Episcopal Church treats the marriage ceremony as a worship service that praises and thanks God for all the blessings of this life. Thus, planning a wedding should be regarded as planning a worship service. In this regard, it should be kept in mind that dresses of the bridesmaids should be of modest design and good taste. Additional elements, such as "unity" candles, rice or confetti, or decorations other than altar flowers and pew markers are not permitted. Runners, floral arches and candles on pews are strictly prohibited. The latest time of day for a wedding is 6 p.m.

The wedding couple is responsible for ordering and paying for two arrangements of **altar flowers**. The couple may use the church's florist that delivers altar arrangements to the church - The Only Olney Florist 301-774-0190, or use a florist of their choosing. The altar flowers must fit into the brass containers used by the Altar Guild. The **altar flowers** normally remain on the altar for the following Sunday services as a reminder to the congregation that a wedding has taken place. Prayers of thanksgiving for the marriage are said at the Sunday service following the wedding. A member of the church's Altar Guild will attend the rehearsal and wedding to guide the entrance and recession of the bridal party. An **Acolyte** may also be provided if requested by the couple and the rector.

**Holy Communion** is a sign of the union between Christ and the congregation, and the couple and it may be included in the marriage ceremony, if the couple and the majority of those attending the ceremony will participate and receive communion. The celebration of Holy Communion adds 20 minutes to the length of the service.

### **CONCERNING MUSIC**

As the music is an integral part of the service, it is under the direction of the Rector, as is the case in every aspect of the worship in the parish - although the Rector may delegate this authority to the organist, subject to the Rector's review. In keeping with the dignity of the sacrament rite of Holy Matrimony, only music appropriate to a worship service will be permitted. This includes hymns from the 1982 Hymnal and other sacred or classical music. The singing of secular love songs is inappropriate in the context of a worship service. Those songs may be sung at a reception following the marriage ceremony

### **CONCERNING PHOTOGRAPHS**

In order to preserve the dignity of the service, photographs shall not be taken during the wedding itself. Pictures may be taken as the wedding party processes in and out of the church. If pictures of the ceremony at the altar are desired, they may be posed after the ceremony. The use of a video camera during the wedding ceremony may be allowed, with filming from a distance on a fixed tripod, if arrangements are made previously with the Rector. A receiving line is not physically possible at St. Bart's. After recessing out the door, the couple should depart to the reception or return through the back door for photography in the church. Out of consideration for their guests who are going to the reception, the time of post-wedding photography should be brief.

### **CONCERNING THE REHEARSAL**

The rehearsal is a very special and important step in the preparation of a wedding. Families of the bride and groom are often meeting each other for the first time. It can be an emotional time when the couple stands before each other and repeat the vows for the first time. Laughter, tears and mistakes are expected. No wedding is perfect, something unplanned or expected often happens at the rehearsal or the wedding. The rehearsal for the marriage ceremony is always under the direction of the officiating priest and not a wedding planner. The rehearsal takes place at the same location as the site of the marriage ceremony. Those participating in the rehearsal should be present 15 minutes before the appointed time. A rehearsal usually takes 1 hour for a 30 minute marriage ceremony since the couple practices their entrances and exit, their vows, the ushers practice escorting parents and grandparents, flower girls and ring bearers practice their entrances, and readers of prayers and bible lessons practice their reading.