

Wedding Customary

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Wedding Guidelines for St. James Episcopal Church, Groveland, MA

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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. Marriage ceremonies can be taken from the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.
4. If one or both parties has been previously married:

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. A first step is to obtain permission to solemnize the wedding from the Bishop, with a minimum of 60 days' notice.

No arrangements can be made until any divorce is absolute and the person is legally free to marry. A copy of the Decree of Divorce Absolute is necessary. (Thirty days after the order is entered (usually the date of the hearing), a Judgment Divorce Nisi is issued.

The Judgment Divorce Nisi becomes an absolute Judgment of Divorce after 90 days.)

Definition of a 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 couple's 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 for a marriage ceremony.

Wedding Preparation Timeline

1. At least 6 months in advance, make an appointment with the priest to discuss a potential Wedding at St. James Church or another location.
2. With clergy agreement, set the wedding date and time. 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. James, or another Episcopal priest located where the couple live or work.
4. Meet with the Organist to select music appropriate for a marriage service.
5. One month prior to wedding, send completed bulletin components to Parish Administrator. 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 or can be made by our Administrator for a fee.

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

	Pledging/Contributing Member of St. James	Non-Contributing Requests
Church	No charge	\$500
Priest	honorarium payable to Rector's Discretionary Fund	\$500 (Made payable to rector's discretionary fund)
Sexton Fee:Preparation and clean up	No charge	\$100
Altar Guild	No charge	\$50
Organist	\$250 paid to organist	\$250 paid to organist

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. James, this takes the form of private counseling with the Rector (5 sessions). In order that adequate counseling may be given, the couple should make arrangements to meet with the rector to allow 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 to bless the marriage after meeting with the couple for pre-marital counseling. The Bishop requests a minimum of 60 days to respond . Pre-marital sessions are concluded one month before the marriage ceremony.

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, additional elements, such as rice or confetti, or decorations other than altar flowers and pew markers are not permitted.

The wedding couple is responsible for ordering and paying for two arrangements of altar flowers. Holy Communion is a sign of the union between Christ, 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.

The altar flowers must fit into the 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.

Concerning Photographs

In order to preserve the dignity of the service, photographs may not be taken during the wedding itself. Pictures may be taken as the wedding party processes in and recesses 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. Out of consideration for their guests who are going to the reception, the time of post-wedding photography should be brief.

For more information and to answer questions, please contact the Rector.