

Questions Regarding Marriages Performed at Trinity Episcopal Church

"Who may be married at Trinity Episcopal Church?"

Any man and woman¹ if:

- They are sincerely committed to establishing a Christian marriage;
- One of the two parties is baptized;
- One of the two parties is presently a member or intends membership in Trinity Episcopal Church or another Episcopal Church²;
- They are willing to conform to the good standards of this letter and attend the premarital counseling required by the clergy.

"How are wedding arrangements made?"

After reading this document and agreeing that marriage in a Christian context is the desire of both parties, the couple contacts the Rector to schedule an initial meeting, to ask any questions not answered herein, and check possible dates for the rehearsal and wedding. (If there are any questions about the required information, you may wait until the meeting and the clergy will assist you.)

Please note: No wedding can be scheduled until the accompanying forms are on file in the Parish Office. This means, of course, that no wedding announcements may be made until the date and time are established. If one or both of the parties has been married before, no booking of a wedding can be made until the couple has met with a member of the clergy staff. (When divorce is involved, announcements ought not to be ordered until the couple has received final permission from the Bishop of Texas to be married.)

¹ If there has been a divorce of one or both parties intending to be married, permission of the Bishop of the Diocese of Texas must be obtained. This upholds the Church's pastoral responsibility to ensure that divorced persons fully comprehend the reasons for the failure of the first marriage. (More than half of second marriages end in divorce, often because of unresolved issues present in the previous marriage.) This process requires interviews with officiating clergy. Thus, when there is a divorce an initial meeting with the clergy will need to precede the regular steps involved in receiving instruction. Second divorces further complicate the matter and the Bishop rarely grants the right to be married by the Church.

² In some circumstances, members of other area parishes may plan a large wedding that cannot be conducted in their parish church. Their parish priest may contact a priest on the staff of Trinity Episcopal Church who, with permission of the Rector, may authorize the use of the facilities.

“Where do weddings take place at Trinity Episcopal Church?”

The main church is available for weddings. The church holds approximately 400 people.

“What takes place at the initial clergy meeting?”

The couple receives counsel from the clergy about the nature of Christian marriage. One might anticipate such a meeting lasting one to one and a half hours. Subsequent meetings will be scheduled at the time of the initial meeting or by calling later for another appointment. Couples should anticipate four to six sessions with the clergy.

“How does the Wedding Coordinator help?”

After the initial meeting with the clergy, the couple may wish to spend some time with the Wedding Coordinator to discuss any additional mechanics relating to marriage at Trinity Episcopal Church. The couple reviews the particular details involved in their wedding (i.e., information regarding time for the wedding, rehearsal, flowers, music, choice of lessons).

“What is the nature of the service?”

Marriage at Trinity Episcopal Church is performed within the tradition of the Episcopal Church. Only the “Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage” as contained in the Book of Common Prayer may be used as a liturgical form for the service and the final decision relating to all elements of the service rests with the clergy of Trinity Episcopal Church who will serve as the officiant. To assure the uniqueness of each service and the participation of the couple in the design and execution of their wedding service, each couple is asked to specify:

- The readings and/or lessons they desire,
- Whether or not they desire the Holy Eucharist,
- What music (hymns, processional and recessional music, soloists, etc.) they would like to incorporate (selections must be approved by the clergy)

and a number of other particulars relating to the conduct of the service. These determinations are not terribly time-consuming and they can be explored in consultation with the clergy and/or the Wedding Coordinator.

“Who may officiate?”

No service of Holy Matrimony may be conducted at Trinity Episcopal Church without one of the parish clergy as the primary officiant. Episcopal clergy, clergy of other Christian denominations and non-Christian denominations may participate in the service, when that involvement seems justified.

“What hours of the day and time of year are best for weddings?”

Weddings are prohibited during Lent, Holy Week, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Thanksgiving weekend, New Year’s Eve, or New Year’s Day. Weddings are normally held on Saturday, and only under the rarest circumstances are weddings scheduled for Sundays. If a Sunday wedding is scheduled, it will be held during the regular Sunday morning service. Weddings are generally scheduled between 10:30 in the morning and 7:30 in the evening, with generally a three-hour long interval between any other scheduled weddings.

“What is involved in the rehearsal?”

This is the opportunity, the night before the wedding to review the details of the service. An enormously important part of the wedding preparation, it provides the opportunity to carefully “rehearse” the actual service and to answer the many last-minute questions that arise. The rehearsal lasts about an hour and involves walking the entire wedding party through the wedding service two or three times. Every effort should be made to have all the participants arrive on time for the rehearsal and remain until dismissed by the celebrant.

“What about music?”

The couple should contact the Director of Music to schedule a consultation with the Organist and/or Choirmaster, which will be held within three months of the wedding. Music must be selected from the large body of works written for the church. Therefore, no secular music (music written for non-church use or not involving the adoration of God) may be used without prior approval of the clergy.

Choirs, soloists, and instrumentalists may be contracted at the time of the wedding consultation with the Organist and/or Choirmaster. No musical arrangements should be made prior to the music consultation. Please contact the Director of Music with questions regarding fees for wedding musicians.

“Is there a bride’s room?”

Yes. The bride’s room is available for two hours prior to the service. If the dresses are being delivered, it is the bride’s responsibility to check the church to see if the dresses have arrived. If not, the bride will need to contact the store and send someone to the church to wait for the dresses. This is not the church’s or the Wedding Guild’s responsibility. If the bride and bridesmaids are bringing their own dresses, they can, of course, bring them at the time they arrive.

The Bride’s Room will be locked after the dresses have arrived. The room will be opened two hours before the service. During the service (and reception, if applicable) the room will be locked. The bride will be responsible for having all personal belongings removed from the room immediately after the wedding or the reception. If another wedding follows and the Bride’s Room is to be used, all personal belongings must be removed immediately after the service.

“What financial costs are to be contemplated?”

In addition to the wedding fees, it is also customary that a personal honorarium be made payable directly to the officiating priest, and/or, the priest who has provided the marriage instruction. The suggested minimum is \$200, made payable by name to the priest and presented at the rehearsal.

Information regarding specific costs pertaining to music should be obtained from the Director of Music.

“How are flower arrangements handled?”

Two arrangements only of fresh flowers are allowed in the church. They may include an Altar arrangement and an appropriate arrangement in the Baptismal Font. These must be in the liners of the church’s containers. If desired, small arrangements of flowers or bows may be placed on the ends of the pews by the center aisle. No other flowers or arrangements may be used.

Before a florist is chosen, the couple may contact the Wedding Coordinator for assistance in choosing a florist. Florists who are unfamiliar with the interior of the church are expected to acquaint themselves with both the setting and our containers.

In the case of two (or more) weddings scheduled for one day, the couples may contact each other to share the cost of the flowers if they agree on the arrangements they want. The altar flowers are a gift from the bride and groom to the church. Following the weddings, flowers remain in the sanctuary. They may not be taken to the reception or any other location.

“Tell me about candles.”

Candles provided by the church, on or near the altar, are used. No other candles may be used. (Pew hurricane candles may be used. This should be discussed with the Wedding Coordinator.)

“What about photography?”

Marriage is a sacred and solemn event and the staff of Trinity Episcopal Church labors very diligently to be assured that the two persons being married are prepared for that event and are not in any way distracted from its importance. To help accomplish this goal, flash photography may not take place during the course of the actual service. The following rules must be strictly observed:

1. Flash or still-light pictures may not be taken during the service or less than forty-five minutes prior to the service. In the main sanctuary, this includes the balcony. A flash photo may be taken during the processional and the recessional.
2. Flash pictures may be taken in the Bride’s Room and vestibule prior to and after a service.
3. During the service, the photographer or video cameraman may take pictures from the balcony or vestibule using available light. Even with available light photography, there should be no noise or motion that calls attention to the photographer and thus detracts from the service.
4. Flash pictures may be made as the bride and groom come near to the door of the vestibule after the service.
5. Photos may be taken in the church after the ceremony and after the congregation has departed. After the service, photography is limited to one hour from the time the congregation has departed the sanctuary.
6. Pictures in the church before the wedding must be coordinated with the priest and Wedding Coordinator. Often guests arrive 30 minutes before the service. All picture taking should be completed and bridal party out of the church **45 minutes before service time.**
7. Guests who are a part of the congregation are not allowed to take pictures (flash or no flash) during the procession or the service. The families should share this information with their friends.

8. Photographers must be unobtrusive and cooperate with these regulations. **It is the responsibility of the bride and groom to make clear these rules to the photographer and all persons involved in the wedding.**

“What other wedding protocol should we know?”

General Assistance

The bride and/or groom should contact the Wedding Coordinator after visiting with the Rector one to three months prior to the wedding. Her role is to make sure the church has all the information that it needs and to answer any logistical questions that the families may have. Her name and phone number are available at the parish office. **Under no circumstances will “wedding directors” (either close friends of the family or paid consultants) be allowed to assist with rehearsals or actual weddings.** The members of the parish Wedding Guild who are well versed in weddings at Trinity provide assistance in these matters.

Arrival Time

All members of the wedding party should arrive at the church no less than one hour or more than two hours before the scheduled time of the service.

Conduct

Under no circumstances will alcoholic beverages be allowed on the premises (including parking lot) of Trinity Episcopal Church. The couple and their families are responsible for explaining that any drinking prior to coming to church may result in our not being able to go forward with the service. The simple truth is that even the least bit of alcohol to “calm the nerves” is a mistake and inevitably takes away from the grace and meaning of the service.

Seating

Near the actual hour of the wedding, grandparents of the bride and groom will be seated. A few minutes before the service, the mother of the groom and then the mother of the bride will be seated. The seating of the bride’s mother is a sign that the wedding is about to begin.

Acolytes

Generally, an acolyte will carry the processional cross (just as at every other service in our church) into the church ahead of the wedding party. Acolytes will be scheduled in accordance with our regular procedures of church services.

Procession

The entire wedding party (clergy, groom, groomsmen, bridesmaids, bride, and bride's escort) enters the church successively from the narthex and proceeds down the center aisle to their appointed places. The attendants will enter "two by two" (women on the left arm of the men). The bride enters on the left arm of her father or other designated person. The other option is to have the men enter from the side with the clergy, with the women proceeding down the aisle before the bride.

Standing

The bride's mother and the rest of the congregation stand when the processional music begins (rather than when the bride enters). The congregation will sit, stand, or kneel at appropriate times throughout the service, under the direction of the officiant.

Ushers

Ushers should arrive at the church not less than one hour before the service. They are expected to expedite the seating of guests to minimize both congestion and noise in the narthex.

The center doors are kept closed, to reduce noise in the church, until the families are seated for the wedding and the procession is ready to begin. As one faces the altar, the seating on the left of the center aisle is often referred to as the bride's side of the church; the groom's side is on the right. Unless a guest requests seating on a specific side, however, ushers are asked to seat persons on either side, filling the pews toward the front first.

An usher normally offers his right arm to the woman in a party. Her escort follows them. Specific ushers need to be assigned to seat family members, and specifically the mothers of the bride and groom, and if desired, to escort them out of the church after the service. After the seating of the bride's mother, no one is to be escorted to a seat. Latecomers are directed to use the side aisles to enter quietly and find a place near the back of the church. Ushers may also assist in the Holy Eucharist by indicating when persons may approach the altar for Communion.

Licenses

Important! The couple must obtain the license, issued by the Civil Authority, at least three days prior to the wedding and not more than 30 days prior to the wedding. The Priest must have the License at the rehearsal. The rehearsal will not proceed if the license is not provided to the Priest at this time. The license will be signed by the Priest immediately after the service and mailed to the appropriate authority. The Civil Authority will record details from the license and the license will be mailed back to the couple at the address recorded on the license.

Flower Girls and Ring Bearers

Flower girls and ring bearers are permitted, but are discouraged due to unpredictable behavior of young children with the possible distraction of the worshipful content of the service.

Service Leaflets

The printing of service leaflets is the couple's responsibility, but the clergy and Wedding Coordinator are happy to assist you with examples, layout, and content. **A draft of the service leaflet must be submitted to the Wedding Coordinator and the Priest before printing.**

Nursery for Guests

Trinity Episcopal Church does not provide a staffed nursery for weddings, nor (because of insurance liability) can we provide space for a nursery.

General Notices

Rice, flower petals, birdseed, and confetti create a serious problem. These may not be used or thrown on church property, inside or out.