

# The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage

*At*



O gracious and everliving God, you have created us in your image: Look mercifully upon this couple who come to you seeking your blessing, and assist them with your grace, that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may honor and keep the promises and vows they make; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

*Book of Common Prayer, page 425*

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# Table of Contents

Introduction	page 2
The Sacrament and Vocation of Holy Matrimony	page 2
Weddings at Saint Mark's Church	page 3
Preparing for your Wedding	page 4
The Marriage Celebration: An Act of Worship	page 5
Wedding Fees	page 8
Check List for Marriage Preparation	page 9
Staff of Saint Mark's	page 10

*A complete copy of the services, including suggested readings from Scripture,  
are available from The Book of Common Prayer online:*

[www.bcponline.org](http://www.bcponline.org)

*Saint Mark's office is able to produce an "Order of Service" only in the comprehensive format used  
for Sunday worship (see section on additional fees).*

## Introduction

*Congratulations to both of you on your decision to make this important commitment to each other in the presence of God, your friends and family and the wider community of faith. Christian marriage is both a sacrament of the church and a vocation for Christians. Sacrament and vocation are of primary importance, so your co-operation is needed in making your wedding at the Church a holy and joyful worship service.*

*Marriage is also a wonderful opportunity for people who may have drifted away from the church to return, and in many cases to re-connect with a Christian family for fellowship, education and the support of a worshipful community.*

*We have prepared this booklet to assist you in working with us as a team: to know what we expect from you, and what you can expect from us as you prepare for your wedding day. Certain practices must be followed from your initial contact with the church until you recess down the aisle as a married couple. In turn, the clergy, music director, and wedding coordinator all look forward to helping you in any way possible to insure that your wedding day is as joyful and meaningful as you hope it will be.*

## The Sacrament and Vocation of Holy Matrimony

**Sacrament:** Christians hold that a wedding is a "solemn public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God." (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 422.) It is distinguished from the secular understanding of weddings in that the presence of God and the sacramental nature of marriage is foremost in the service.

The ministers of the sacrament are the couple, and not the presiding clergy. Technically, you will not be married by the clergy, but, instead, will marry one another. The function of the priest is to preside at the service and, on behalf of God and the congregation, to pronounce the nuptial blessing. As you prepare for reception of this Holy Sacrament in partnership with the clergy person who will preside at your ceremony, you will come to see that much of the day revolves around this understanding.

In our society, virtually any couple who wishes may present themselves to a legal authority and have their union sanctioned by the state government. While clergy are licensed by the state of Ohio to perform this function, the church holds that this is of secondary importance to reception of this sacrament. This means that there is a distinction between "The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage" at the church, and the rest of the events traditionally surrounding the celebration of a marriage. It is important to keep this distinction in mind as we proceed.

**Vocation:** Many people are called to commit to a loved one in marriage, but not everyone is called to the vocation of Christian marriage. Vocation in the church means that a person, or in this case, the couple, perceive that God is calling them to a relationship through which they will serve one another and grow in their faith in God and commitment to Jesus Christ. Not all weddings are necessarily focused on this concept of vocation. At Saint Mark's Episcopal Church, only those who recognize and celebrate the concept of vocation are encouraged to be wed in or through our parish.

## Weddings at Saint Mark's Church

The Episcopal Church requires that at least one of the couple be a baptized Christian, that the marriage be attested to by at least two witnesses; and that the marriage conform to the laws of the State of Ohio and to the Canons of the Episcopal Church. This sacrament is celebrated both for couples of different and the same sex.

Saint Mark's offers our services to those who are active members of our parish and to their children or grandchildren, members of other Episcopal churches who for some reason require a different location, or anyone actively exploring Saint Mark's as their parish home.

The Episcopal Church does allow for marriage of divorced persons. However, if one or both of you has been married once before, the process requires consent of the Bishop after recommendation by the clergy. Ninety days is needed between the time of your first meeting with the clergy and your wedding date, in order to do the work necessary to obtain the Bishop's approval.

In the Diocese of Southern Ohio, the Bishop will not approve any third, fourth or more marriages, and so we are unable to offer the sacrament to you if either of you has been married and divorced more than once.

## Preparing for your Wedding

### *First Steps*

While many couples seek to first establish a wedding date with the church, the actual first step is for the couple to set an appointment with the clergy. At this appointment the requirements listed above are first explored. It is helpful if this appointment takes place at least **six months before** the planned marriage date to allow time for counseling and preparation.

Should the requirements for marriage at Saint Mark's be met, the priest will then receive basic information about the couple, outline the process, and discuss fees and the wedding date.

### *Participation of Additional Clergy*

If the validation of the marriage by another religious denomination and/or the participation of a member of the clergy from that denomination is desired, then arrangements assuring that support and/or participation should be initiated as soon as possible.

### *Pre-Marital Counseling*

At least three sessions with a priest or deacon from Saint Mark's form the basis of the preparation for marriage and the celebration event.

1. Introductions. Review of process and Declaration of Intention
2. Exploring areas of life and marriage
3. Planning the service. (this session will include our wedding coordinator)

The pre-marital counseling may be arranged with a member of the clergy or counselor in another

city or religious denomination chosen in consultation with Saint Mark's clergy. All counseling preparation for the marriage should be completed **thirty days prior** to the marriage date. A letter stating that such counseling has been done is required before you meet to plan the marriage ceremony.

## The Marriage Celebration: An Act of Worship

Because the celebration of marriage is first and foremost an act of Christian worship, it is subject to the same standards as the weekly liturgies at Saint Mark's. This has implications for a number of aspects of the marriage celebration such as music, flowers, photography, etc. The clergy in charge will be the final authority for any special requests.

### The Marriage Service

The traditional marriage service is found in the *Book of Common Prayer* (1979) of the Episcopal Church on pages 423-432. In 2015 this service was amended to make the language gender neutral. Either service may be used depending upon preference. Variations may also be made for inter-faith marriages. During the pre-marital counseling the priest will review the service with the couple.

### The Holy Communion

The Holy Eucharist (or Holy Communion) is the principal act of Christian Worship on the Lord's Day and for other major celebrations in the Church. It is the sacrament commanded by Christ for the continual remembrance of his life, death, and resurrection, until his coming again. In the Holy Eucharist our union with Christ and with one another is strengthened making this sacrament particularly appropriate for the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage.

While not required in the Marriage Service, the Holy Eucharist is recommended for those couples for whom this great sacrament of the Church has meaning. When the Holy Eucharist is part of the Marriage service it constitutes the second half of the service and is the first communion of the newly married couple.

### Music

Music is often an integral part of the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage and adds to the joyful nature of the worship service.

Our Director of Music will work with you to make sure that the music chosen for your marriage service is appropriate for the occasion and enhances the worship experience. Music for the wedding should be appropriate for use in the church. Because this is a worship service, modern popular

music or music deemed overly "secular" is more appropriate at the reception.

The organist at Saint Mark's will be the organist at all weddings; or, should he or she not be able to be present at the service, a person whom he or she appoints.

Should you wish a soloist to sing, the organist has a list of persons who can perform this function. Sung music is also chosen in consultation with the organist.

Instrumental music other than organ is also a possibility, and such decisions should be made in consultation with the clergy and organist.

Should you wish vocal or instrumental music, they should make an appointment with the Director of Music **at least three months prior** to the marriage date to allow time for the learning and practice of the music.

If hymns are to be played, they should be familiar and joyful (such as "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee") to help the congregation participate.

*Many hymn words and tunes may found at*

[www.cyberhymnal.org](http://www.cyberhymnal.org)

Due to the sacred nature of the occasion, pre-recorded music is never appropriate.

## Flowers

One large floral bouquet may be placed in front of the altar, or at an appropriate place in the church chancel as determined in consultation with the Wedding Coordinator. Arrangements should all be lower than the Altar (36"). Bows, and/or flowers, may also be used on several of the pews. The couple's florist will be guided in their work by a member of the Altar Guild. In the case of a Saturday wedding, the couple may wish to leave the flowers for the use of the church on Sunday and should indicate at an early time if they desire to do so.

*Note: Arrangements for flowers should be made with the Wedding Coordinator (listed at the end of this booklet) as soon as possible following the first session with the clergy member.*

## Photographs and Videotaping

Photographs may be taken before the marriage celebration and after the exit procession. **However, we ask that no flash photos - by either the wedding photographer or guests - be taken during the service (which begins with the processional music).** Experience has shown that flash photography is disruptive to the worship experience.

A video camera may be used during the service and we have a location in the chancel that seems to

work quite well.

The appointed photographer and/or person videotaping the celebration should meet with the clergy one-half hour prior to the service to discuss placement and procedures during the service.

Posed photos in the church may be taken – with flash - before or after the service.

## Additional Considerations

The church building will be open 2 hours prior to the service and one hour after, allowing ample time for preparation and photographs.

We do not use **aisle cloths** at Saint Mark's.

We recommend the use of bird seed or soap bubbles instead of **rice and confetti** as the couple leaves the church at the end of the service because of the difficulty of removal of these items and the danger to birds and animal life.

The Bishop's Library (on the first floor of the education wing) is available for the use of the women in the wedding party, and the Youth Lounge (on the second floor) is available for the use of the men in the wedding party.

## Marriage License

The marriage license (and related official state documents) and the checks to cover all fees should be given to the priest on the Monday prior to the wedding. If that is not possible, then these items should be given to the officiating clergy at the beginning of the wedding rehearsal.

## Marriage Service Expenses

	For Members* and Their Immediate Family	For Non- Members
<b><u>Regular Fees</u></b>		
Use of Church	None <sup>#</sup>	\$750.00
Clergy Fee	None <sup>#</sup>	\$200.00
Organist	\$250.00	\$250.00
Maintenance Staff Fee	<u>\$50.00</u>	<u>\$75.00</u>
<b>Total Regular Fees</b>	<b>\$300.00</b>	<b>\$1,275.00</b>

### **Additional Optional Fees**

“Order of Service” Booklet produced by Saint Mark’s Office: \$100 (for up to 200 copies)

Additional Music Rehearsal (if soloist or instrumentalist is needed)	\$35.00	\$35.00
Soloist from Saint Mark’s Choir	\$100.00	\$100.00
Eldred Johnston Parish Hall	\$125.00	\$125.00
Kitchen	\$75.00	\$75.00
Maintenance Staff Fee for reception	\$75.00	\$75.00
Service booklets or bulletins (optional)	\$100.00	\$100.00

***All fees should be made directly to the individual involved (ie - organist, soloist, etc) whenever possible and not to the parish.***

*\* A member is a “communicant in good standing” as the term is defined by the Episcopal Church and is determined through the parish register listing on the date of application for the wedding. Briefly, this means that the member is active in the worship life of the congregation and also gives financially to God through the ministry of the congregation.*

*<sup>#</sup> There are no clergy fees or church use fees for members of the congregation and their immediate family. However, it is appropriate to make a gift to the Discretionary Fund of the officiating priest. Gifts on the order of \$150.00 are normal. Visiting clergy assisting in the marriage at the couple’s request should be compensated directly by the couple.*

Please note that no couple otherwise eligible to be married in Saint Mark's Church should be excluded from doing so on the basis of finances. Part or all of the fees listed above may be waived in cases of need.

## Check List for Marriage Preparation

### Six Months Prior to the Marriage Day

- \_\_\_ Meet with one of the clergy of St. Mark's Church
- \_\_\_ Make arrangements for validation by another denomination, and/or the involvement of other clergy, and/or counseling by another clergy/counselor

### Three Months Prior to the Marriage Day

- \_\_\_ Meet with organist to select any special music (i.e., other organ or vocal or instrumental) (Note: This is also the time required of clergy to submit to the Bishop a request to marry previously married/divorced persons.)

### Thirty Days Prior to the Marriage Day

- \_\_\_ Complete pre-marital counseling and service planning

*While the clergy are honored to receive an invitation to the service - and invitations to the rehearsal dinner and reception – due to the number of services conducted every year, it is customary for them to only attend the church ceremony.*

### The Monday Prior to the Marriage Day

- \_\_\_ Bring Marriage License and check for fees made payable to Saint Mark's Episcopal Church and give to the priest.

## Saint Mark's Staff

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