

SAINT THOMAS'S EPISCOPAL PARISH
276 South College Avenue – Newark, Delaware 19711-5235
302-368-4644

The Celebration and Blessing of Marriage at St. Thomas's

In the Christian tradition, marriage is a sacrament and covenant between two persons, entered into in the presence of God and the Church, and is never a private contract. For that reason, weddings take place in the Church and in the presence of witnesses, the invited guests, and God. We affirm Holy Matrimony as a sign of God's love for all of creation, incarnated in Christ's love for the Church, the people of God.

We believe that the spiritual dimension of human life is intertwined with the intellectual and physical dimensions. This belief is captured in the opening words from our liturgy for marriage

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“Christian marriage is a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God. The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for 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.” (Prayer Book, pages 422 and 423)

The Holy Spirit transforms our human love into Holy Matrimony. In addition to love, companionship, children, and the formation of a stable family, we believe God is shown and known clearly through the union of the two. Christian marriage, therefore, is a solemn and life commitment by two people to love one another and remain faithful to one another as the primary relationship of life.

Requirements for Marriage at St. Thomas's

DECLARATION OF INTENTION

All persons being married in the Episcopal Church are asked to sign this statement:

*“We, _____ and _____,
desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the liturgical forms of this Church.*

We believe it is for the purpose of mutual fellowship, encouragement, and understanding, for the procreation (if it may be) of children, and their physical and spiritual nurture, and for the safeguarding and benefit of society.

And we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help thereto.”

REQUIREMENTS FOR MARRIAGE

At least one of the partners must be a baptized Christian. If a person desires to be baptized prior to their marriage, this can be discussed with the priest.

APPLYING FOR MARRIAGE

As soon as possible after you know that you are going to be married, contact the Church. You will be sent an Application for Marriage form which should be returned to the Church as soon as possible. You may discuss tentative dates and times for the wedding ceremony, but no definite plans may be made until after an initial meeting with the clergy person who will officiate. The sooner such a meeting can be held the better.

PRE-MARRIAGE COUNSELING

Clergy in the Episcopal Church are required to instruct couples in the meaning of Christian marriage, to assess their readiness for such a relationship, and to prepare them for the wedding ceremony. Arrangements for the counseling will be made by the priest who will perform the ceremony. There may be a referral to a professional counselor if determined to be of help to the couple as a result of their meetings with the priest.

DIVORCED PERSONS

Divorced persons may be married at St. Thomas's. The procedure in the Episcopal Church for remarriage after divorce is for the parish priest, after meeting with the couple and being provided with a legal copy of the divorce decree, to determine whether to commend the proposed marriage to the Bishop. If the priest makes such a recommendation, there is a form which both the priest and the couple must complete. This is sent with a covering letter from the priest to the Bishop. If the Bishop approves, the plans for the marriage may then proceed.

THE WEDDING SERVICE

"The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage" is found in the Book of Common Prayer, pages 423-432. Some variations in the service are permissible in consultation with the priest. The service includes an introduction, lessons from scripture or other sources, the marriage vows, prayers, the blessing of the marriage, and the Holy Communion (which may be omitted).

MUSIC

Although not required, music adds greatly to the joy of the ceremony. The Director of Music at St. Thomas's will be contacted by the couple after the date of the ceremony has been approved by the priest. The Director of Music can suggest processional pieces, solos, and other elements. The Director of Music is in charge of all music and only musicians approved by and/or engaged by him may play or sing, in consultation and agreement with the priest as necessary.

THE REHEARSAL

The rehearsal is an integral part of the wedding event and is usually scheduled for the day before the wedding. Expected to be at the rehearsal are all members of the wedding party, the parents of the bride and groom, and any other participants such as readers of the lessons.

The rehearsal itself is held in the church and is conducted by the officiating priest. The parish wedding coordinator will supervise the entrance and recessional processions both at the rehearsal and at the wedding. “Wedding Consultants” are not needed for any aspects of the service in the Church.

POLICIES OF THE PARISH

Persons being married at St. Thomas’s are asked to abide by these understandings and practices:

- a. Public worship. Weddings are public services of corporate worship to which all are welcome and in which the whole congregation takes part along with the wedding party.
- b. Flowers. Flowers, if desired, are purchased and arranged by the Flower Guild of St. Thomas’s, which will make the best possible effort to fulfill the wishes of the wedding party.
- c. Rice, confetti, bird seed, rose petals, or other things thrown are, for maintenance and safety reasons, prohibited in the church or outside.
- d. Runners are dangerous and are not allowed.
- e. “Unity candles” are not part of our service.
- f. Photographs: Pictures may be taken prior to the service and in the Narthex during the procession. After that, to preserve the integrity of the wedding as a service of worship, photographs are forbidden until the couple is leaving the Church. The official photographer may take pictures during the service from the balcony only, using available light and without flash. Videotaping of the service is permitted under the same guidelines. All official photographers should speak with the officiating priest well before the service.
- g. Dressing for the wedding is best done before arriving at the Church.
- h. The officiating priest is in charge of the wedding and the rehearsal.
- i. Wedding leaflet: St. Thomas’s may provide a printed order of service. The officiating priest will determine, in consultation with the couple, the format and contents before it is printed.

THE WEDDING LICENSE

A marriage license must be obtained from the Office of the Clerk of the Peace (571-7590) in the City and County Building at 800 French Street, Wilmington /de 19801. The law requires that it be obtained not more than 30 days nor less than 4 days (for out-of-state residents) or 1 day (when both are Delaware residents) before the ceremony. The license, along with a check covering all costs plus a donation, is to be given to the Parish Administrator of St. Thomas's one week before the wedding rehearsal.

FEES AND HONORARIUMS

It is appropriate for a donation to St. Thomas's in thanksgiving to God for all that marriage means. A guideline in determining the amount for this donation is to calculate a tithe [10%] of the total cost of the wedding. Again, this is simply a guideline and not an expectation. Conversation with the priest about this donation is appropriate and encouraged as desired. The donation will be placed in the general funds of the parish for expenses and opportunities of ministry.

There are fees are as follows:

- Flowers – \$200. The Flower Guild of St. Thomas's will arrange a full version of the single arrangement on the lectern side of the chancel. Pew bows and/or pew arrangements are permitted and can be brought in by outside florists, but no other work by an outside florist is allowed in the church, or can be done by members of the wedding party. The pew bows/arrangements **MUST** be removed by the bridal party after the wedding. Arrangements should be made through the Flower Guild by calling the Guild Director.
- Organist – \$175. Any special music, instrumentalists, or soloists would be a separate fee.
- Use of Great Hall – \$150 for the services of the church sexton in room set up and clean up after reception.
- Clergy and Wedding Coordinator – There is no charge for the use of the church, the services of the clergy, or the wedding coordinator. If the couple desires to offer an honorarium to the clergy and/or wedding coordinator, it is deeply appreciated yet not expected.

The fees and the donation should be given in the form of two checks, one payable to "St. Thomas's Church" for the flowers and general donation, a second made out directly to the organist and given to the Parish Administrator **one week before the wedding rehearsal, along with the wedding license**. If the Great Hall has been used for the wedding reception, a third check is made out to our sexton and given to the Parish Administrator. Likewise, honorarium for the clergy and wedding coordinator should be made directly to the person[s].

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Please contact the Parish Office 368-4644 if you have any questions regarding the above information or the plans for your wedding.

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