

## *St. Peter's by-the-Sea Wedding Customary*

*Congratulations on your engagement!* Marriage is a sacred and life-giving relationship, and we share your joy and celebration at this decision. St. Peter's has a long history "by-the-sea," and so has been the site of hundreds of weddings over the past century and a half. We pray that God will bless you both richly throughout this process, both before the wedding and after, and we hope that this customary helps answer questions you may have about conducting a wedding at St. Peter's.

### **THE CELEBRATION AND BLESSING OF A MARRIAGE**

According to *The Book of Common Prayer*, Christian marriage is a covenant relationship between two people, proclaimed in a public setting. By covenant relationship, we mean a relationship that is reflective of God's relationship with God's people. It is a relationship of grace. We neither earn nor deserve God's love. Likewise, we do not merit the love we need in a marriage. It is a relationship lived out in trust and forgiveness. Through marriage, God's grace can come to be known in real and visible ways. The relationship not only reminds us of God's grace, it draws us ever deeper into that grace. It is a redemptive relationship. We grow more and more into the man or woman that God has created us to be. In the Episcopal Church we believe marriage to be a sacrament.

A wedding is a liturgical expression of the sacrament of marriage. The bride and the groom are the ministers of the sacrament. The priest officiates and pronounces God's blessing on the relationship, but the bride and the groom are the ones who proclaim the covenant. It is in their lives that the sacrament is lived out.

At St. Peter's by-the-Sea all weddings are in accordance with *The Book of Common Prayer*. The BCP provides for some choices and flexibility, but beyond that, things may be neither added nor deleted. The guiding principle to remember is that marriage is a sacramental rite in the Episcopal Church, and a regular worship service of the church. If there is any question as to the permissibility of anything, it is always best to check with the Rector, or the priest who is officiating at the wedding.

The canon law of the Church states that Holy Matrimony is a union "entered into within the community of faith." It is expected that, under normal circumstances, those who marry at St. Peter's will nurture their marriage in the context of this worshipping community. A wedding is a pastoral sacrament, which rightfully takes place where it will be supported through pastoral relationships and community worship. *For those who have no intention of regular involvement in any church, it would be more appropriate to be married in a different setting.*

### **FIRST STEPS**

It is advisable to verify the availability of St. Peter's by-the-Sea and to "pencil the date in" by calling the Church Office. The couple must also make an appointment and meet with the Rector before any plans are finalized. The presence of both the bride-to-be and the groom-to-be at that meeting is expected.

## **ELIGIBILITY**

St. Peter's by-the-Sea is available for weddings when the bride or groom (or both) is a member of St. Peter's or is the child of a St. Peter's member. This isn't out of a desire to be exclusionary, but simply to honor the way that Christian marriage appropriately occurs within the religious community that a couple is a part. In that light, to be married in a church of which neither person has any affiliation would not make sense. At St. Peter's by-the-Sea, "membership" looks like either of the following:

### *Letter of Membership*

The most definitive membership at St. Peter's consists of being confirmed or received by an Episcopal bishop and having your letter of membership here. If you were confirmed or received at St. Peter's, your letter is automatically here. If you were confirmed or received at some other Episcopal church, some steps need to be taken to transfer your letter here. Please contact the Church Office for more information about confirmation or reception.

### *Baptism and Desire*

*The Book of Common Prayer* says that membership in the church comes through baptism and active participation. So although the couple may not be technically on our membership rolls, they may still demonstrate an active desire to be a part of St. Peter's through attendance in worship, participation in the ministry of church, and financial support at a level appropriate for one's resources. Doing so would qualify the couple as "members" in every sense of the word.

If there is any question about membership or the possibility of St. Peter's as the place for your wedding, you are strongly encouraged to call the Church Office and schedule a meeting with the Rector. We would love to welcome you to the St. Peter's community and the active life of following Christ, as well as learn more about you and your story.

## **REMARRIAGE OF DIVORCED PERSONS**

In the Episcopal Church it is necessary for any priest to apply for and receive the Bishop's consent prior to officiating at a marriage in which either or both of the parties has been divorced from a spouse who is still living. The bride and groom do not need the Bishop's permission to get married; rather, the priest must have the Bishop's permission to officiate at the service. The priest is required to submit a written request to the Bishop including an account of the preparation of the couple for the new marriage.

In cases where a previous marriage (or marriages) is involved, it is frequently the case that more time is required for premarital counseling. Divorced persons will be asked to discuss the previous relationship and reason(s) for the divorce. It will be necessary to present copies of all relevant divorce decrees. Unless there are extreme extenuating circumstances, it is normative that there be at least a year between the date of the final divorce decree and the date of the proposed wedding. When there are special circumstances, it may be possible for a priest to receive consent to officiate at a third marriage, but that is by no means assured. The Bishop does not give consent for priests to officiate at weddings where one or both of the parties has been married and divorced three or more times.

## **PREMARITAL COUNSELING**

The Episcopal Church believes that adequate preparation is an important part of a marriage. According to canon law, an Episcopal priest is required to meet with the couple for counseling as part of that preparation. The priest who will perform the ceremony will want to meet with the couple for an initial session, and additional counseling sessions may be scheduled with the priest depending on the particular needs and desires of the couple.

At St. Peter's it is customary for the couple to meet with a professional marriage counselor for a minimum of four sessions, in addition to the meetings prescribed by the presiding priest. In such cases, the couple will likely incur counseling fees. Suggestions for marriage counselors can be obtained by asking the Rector.

## **INTERFAITH CEREMONIES**

All plans for the wedding ceremony must be made in consultation with the Rector. Clergy from other churches in the Episcopal Church and other denominations may be invited to assist at a wedding, with the Rector's permission. In cases of interfaith marriages, it is possible to include a religious leader from another faith.

## **LOCATION**

While there is no hard and fast policy at St. Peter's by the Sea that prohibits the Rector from presiding at weddings in locations other than St. Peter's (e.g. an outdoor garden), it should be noted that the most appropriate place for a wedding is in the church. There are practical considerations, such as Altar Guild and the ability to control the environment. But, beyond the practical considerations, it is most appropriate to physically begin and proclaim the covenant of marriage in the place where it will be spiritually nurtured.

## **EUCHARIST**

Eucharist (Holy Communion) is a meaningful way for Christians to mark the beginning of their married lives. The word "Eucharist" means "thanksgiving" and by setting the wedding in the context of the Eucharist there is a focus on giving thanks to God for the gift of love and for this relationship. Whether or not to have Eucharist at the wedding is a decision that should be made by the couple with the advice of the Rector or officiating priest. If Holy Communion is planned as a part of the ceremony, it will be available to all guests present who are baptized and desire to receive the sacrament.

## **SCHEDULING**

At St. Peter's by-the-Sea we do not have weddings during the forty days of Lent, i.e. from Ash Wednesday through Easter Day. While social custom clearly prefers Saturday weddings, there are no theological or liturgical reasons to prefer one day to another. For practical reasons Sunday weddings can work a hardship on both the Altar Guild and the priest and are discouraged.

Weddings may be scheduled for any time of the day that is convenient and not in conflict with existing commitments. Saturday weddings may not begin later than 7:00 p.m. If two weddings are scheduled for the same Saturday there must be a minimum of three hours between the starting times, provided there is no reception in the Parish Hall following the first wedding. The first wedding placed on the Church calendar will have priority on choice of time.

### **MARRIAGE LICENSE**

A marriage license is the instrument that conveys to the priest the authority of the state to officiate at the ceremony and to sign the license making the marriage official in the eyes of the state. Without a marriage license, the priest cannot proceed; it is illegal. In the State of Rhode Island, a marriage license may be procured no more than three months before the date of the wedding. The marriage license should be given to the priest at the time of the rehearsal. It is the responsibility of the priest to complete the license and return it to the County Clerk's Office. If you have questions about the proper procedure, you are encouraged to call the Narragansett Town Hall at (401) 789-1044.

### **WEDDING COORDINATOR**

A paid Wedding Coordinator assists the Rector and Church Office to administer all weddings at St. Peter's by-the-Sea. This individual is a good point of contact for questions related to flowers, photography, schedule and facilities. She will be present at the rehearsal and wedding to ensure smooth events. Her time is compensated as part of the wedding fees.

### **PRINTED PROGRAM**

You may request St. Peter's create the printed order of service. Requests must be made at least three weeks prior to the ceremony. The bride and groom may choose to have a program designed and printed elsewhere at their own expense. The Rector and the Organist must give final approval for all information contained in the program, regardless of where or how it is printed.

### **PHOTOGRAPHY**

The bride is to give the name and address of the photographer to the church office so that a copy of the St. Peter's policy can be mailed to them. St. Peter's requires that a photographer sign an agreement to abide by our policies before being allowed to photograph a wedding.

As a sacramental rite of the Church, the marriage service is not to be interrupted or disturbed by the distraction of videotaping or photographs being taken. It is the wedding party's responsibility to review these instructions with their photographer so that there will be no misunderstanding at the time of the wedding. Photographs taken prior to the ceremony must be concluded 45 minutes prior to the ceremony for all ushers and 15 minutes prior to the ceremony for all other participants. Photographs may be taken before and after the ceremony, and as the couple enters or leaves the front porch. There are designated areas in the Nave where the photographer will be permitted during the service; no other vantage points are allowed, to minimize the level of distraction. The photographer should be instructed that flash equipment must never be used inside St. Peter's at any time after guests have begun to be

seated for the ceremony or during the ceremony itself. The photographer is a guest of St. Peter's at the wedding ceremony and is expected to observe the rules adopted by the church. The photographer is encouraged to keep equipment with him/her at all times; St. Peter's cannot be responsible for loss or damage.

Because wedding guests occasionally attempt to take flash photographs during the marriage service, a sign will be posted at the church doors reminding guests that there are to be no photographs taken during the ceremony. Ushers will be asked to remind guests arriving with cameras that they are not to take photographs inside St. Peter's once the candles have been lighted. Flash photography can be disruptive not only to the wedding party, but to guests as well. The bride and groom – as well as the entire wedding party – can be helpful in encouraging friends and relatives not to take pictures.

Flash photographs may be taken inside St. Peter's after the service concludes and guests have left the church.

Videographers are permitted in St. Peter's in specially designated locations only. Video operators are not allowed to change the camera's location while the service is conducted. In general, movement by the videographer follows the same direction as that guiding a photographer (see above).

## **FLOWERS AND DECORATIONS**

The Wedding Coordinator is responsible for all floral decorations in the church. Arrangements for all floral decorations should be made only after consultation with the Wedding Coordinator and should be delivered at a mutually agreed upon time. An information sheet will be sent to the florist with the St. Peter's policy regarding flowers in the church. Flowers are limited to the altar area only. They should begin with the two main arrangements on the reredos (area next to the cross), with the possibility of two more arrangements (one on either side) in stands.

Bows are not to be used on any arrangements at the altar. Floral pew markers are permitted. Tacks, nails, or florist tape may not be used throughout the building. In general, it is well to remember that St. Peter's by-the-Sea is a beautiful building and that simplicity is the best approach to take in planning flowers and floral decorations. If floral decorations are determined to be inappropriate after they are delivered, the Rector and Wedding Coordinator reserve the right to alter them so they are in keeping with the standards for worship at St. Peter's by-the-Sea.

Candle poles are available for placement along the center aisle. Please consult the Wedding Coordinator for more information about this decorative possibility.

A kneeling cushion is provided St. Peter's for all weddings. Because of the danger of tripping, the use of a "runner" in the aisle is not permitted.

Please ensure that wedding guests do not throw rice, confetti, flower petals, birdseed or the like at any time. Similarly, the decoration of the church with flower petals is not permitted.

## **MUSIC**

Wedding music should be selected with the assistance of the St. Peter's Organist, Jim Morgan. If the St. Peter's Organist is unable to play for the service, it is his responsibility to designate a substitute organist. Only music appropriate for an Episcopal worship service at St. Peter's is to be used, whether instrumental, choral or vocal. It is important to remember that a wedding is first and foremost a worship service. There is much wonderful music appropriate for a wedding reception that is not suitable for a worship service. Music from movies, Broadway shows or popular culture is typically not suitable. The Organist (in consultation with the Rector) will be the final judge as to the appropriateness of all music used. Appointments to discuss the wedding music with the Organist may be made by calling Jim at (401) 737-5398.

## **THE REHEARSAL**

The time for the wedding rehearsal should be determined in consultation with the Rector or officiating priest. Rehearsals are normally scheduled for either 5:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. on the evening preceding the wedding. If there are two weddings scheduled for the same day, the first wedding to be placed on the church calendar will have the first choice of rehearsal times. No rehearsal will be scheduled to begin after 6:00 p.m. The officiating priest always conducts the rehearsal.

Bridal consultants and/or florists are not needed at either the rehearsal or the wedding, though they are welcome to attend to the bride and her needs before the wedding. If a bridal consultant is utilized, she/he should understand that she/he will work under the direction of the Rector and Wedding Coordinator.

It is required that the bride and groom both be full and active participants in the rehearsal. As one of the purposes of the rehearsal is to give participants a "feel" for the wedding liturgy and the space in which it is conducted, the use of a stand-in for either the bride or groom at the time of the rehearsal is not permitted. All persons associated with the wedding—readers, ushers, bridesmaids, groomsmen, musicians/vocalists, etc—are required to be present at the rehearsal. As those people from St. Peter's who are assisting with the wedding rehearsal often have other plans for the same evening, it is expected that every effort will be made to start and end the rehearsal on time.

## **THE WEDDING DAY**

In order to encourage timeliness and allow the Rector an opportunity to meet with the Bride and Groom before the ceremony, *the wedding party is to arrive at the church at least 30 minutes before the scheduled start of the service.* The building is unlocked one hour prior to the wedding, unless otherwise requested. Specially designated rooms are made available to the bridal and groom's parties for their comfort before the ceremony.

The Rector or officiating priest will instruct ushers at the wedding rehearsal. Generally, ushers are expected to be in the back of the church (the front porch) 45 minutes prior to the start of the ceremony. They are expected to begin seating the guests as soon as they arrive.

The Rector and Wedding Coordinator will assemble the wedding party and space them properly for the procession.

## **ALCOHOL AND BEVERAGE POLICY**

Alcoholic beverages are allowed at St. Peter's in the Parish Hall only when the reception is to be held on the premises; all other usage is prohibited. No smoking is allowed anywhere in St. Peter's buildings.

## **COSTS**

Fees are charged to cover the costs that the church incurs for a wedding; namely, overhead and administrative costs, the services of the Sexton, Organist, Wedding Coordinator, Altar Guild, and others. *The total fee for a wedding at St. Peter's by-the-Sea is \$875, though it is subject to change if the Rector is unavailable to officiate.* A \$400 non-refundable deposit is required to reserve a place on the St. Peter's wedding schedule; this is subtracted from the total wedding fee. The remaining cost must be delivered to St. Peter's no later than two weeks prior to the wedding date.

It is customary that the groom (or the couple) offers an honorarium to the officiating priest. This money "honors" the priest's time, and is a tremendous boost to the Rector's Discretionary Fund. The amount of the honorarium varies greatly depending on many factors and it is difficult to provide meaningful guidelines. Honoraria typically range from \$200-400.

## RECEIPT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have received and read the St. Peter's by the Sea Wedding Customary and agree to conduct my wedding rehearsal and ceremony in accordance with the prescribed rules, policies and guidelines established and detailed within the customary. I will inform the appropriate contractors, family members, etc. affiliated with my wedding (including florists, photographers, etc.) that they are also bound by these rules, policies and guidelines.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Groom

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Bride

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Please sign this acknowledgement. Then complete the Wedding Information Form on the reverse side, detach this sheet from the customary and return it to church office along with the \$400 deposit. No wedding at St. Peter's by-the-Sea will be confirmed until the signed Receipt and Acknowledgement, the completed Wedding Information Form, and the \$400 deposit have been received by the Church Office.*