

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

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**CELEBRATION &  
BLESSING OF A MARRIAGE**



**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S**  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

**AT**  
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**EPISCOPAL CHURCH ~ ATLANTA**

## Marriage & The Episcopal Church

## Notes

The Episcopal Church honors the union of two persons in marriage with a ceremony that is both solemn and joyous. We understand marriage to be a covenant of mutual fidelity and steadfast love. As a couple exchanges vows, they pledge to love each other in the same way that Christ loves the Church, and to live in faithfulness as God is faithful to God's people. The following information will serve as a helpful guide to you in planning a wedding that reflects its sacred nature. The religious meaning of the event is, of course, our primary pastoral concern and, after all, the only reason to get married in a church.

### To be married in the Episcopal Church, *it is required*

- that both parties have the right to marry according to the laws of the State and consent to do so freely, without fraud, coercion, mistake as to the identity of either, or mental reservation;
- that at least one of the parties is baptized (*at St. Bartholomew's, it is required that one of the parties be a member of the congregation or in process or interested in becoming a member*);
- that both parties have been instructed by the Member of the Clergy, or a person known by the Member of the Clergy to be competent and responsible, in the nature, purpose, and meaning, as well as the rights, duties and responsibilities of marriage;
- that before the solemnization, the parties are required to signed the following Declaration of Intent :

*We understand the teaching of the church that God's purpose for our marriage is for our mutual joy, for the help and comfort we will give to each other in prosperity and adversity, and, when it is God's will, for the gift and heritage of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of God. We also understand that our marriage is to be unconditional, mutual, exclusive, faithful, and lifelong; and we engage to make the utmost effort to accept these gifts and fulfill these duties, with the help of God and the support of our community.*

## Checklist

- ❑ Return Information Form and deposits to the church.
  - ❑ Contact the Rector.
  - ❑ Complete counseling.
  - ❑ Secure marriage license.
  - ❑ Contact Flower Guild Chair.
  - ❑ Contact Director of Music.
  - ❑ Inform wedding party of rehearsal time and the need for promptness.
  - ❑ Meet with the officiating priest to plan the service.
  - ❑ Deliver bulletin information to the church office with the remainder of the fees two weeks before the service.
- that at least two witnesses shall be present at the solemnization, and together with the Member of the Clergy and the parties, sign the record of the solemnization in the proper register; which record shall include the date and place of the solemnization, the names of the witnesses, the parties and their parents, the age of the parties, Church status, and residence(s).

## The First Step

You must first consult with the Rector, at least 60 days in advance of a proposed wedding. You and the Rector will select a tentative date, which will be held on the church calendar upon payment of fees as specified below and the return of the enclosed information form. The Rector will review and confirm all the arrangements for the wedding at this time and begin the preparation process, including, assigning a priest to supervise the wedding and preparation process.

## Place

Both the church and the chapel are available for weddings. We do not do weddings in other locations.

## Premarital Counseling

In light of our belief that “marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly” and in compliance with church law, the officiating priest will provide spiritual counseling for you prior to the wedding and assist you in arranging relationship counseling from an appropriate source. In the case of local residents, that source is the Emmanuel Center for Pastoral Counseling which offices at St. Bartholomew’s. Both research and experience confirm the wisdom of taking time for reflection at this important time. Couples are expected to schedule three sessions with one of the therapists at the Counseling Center.

## Divorced Persons

If either party has been divorced, you must bring a copy of the divorce decree to the supervising priest in the initial interview. The priest will forward all of these documents together with a petition for permission to officiate at the wedding, if appropriate, to the bishop for approval after all counseling is completed. One year must have passed after a divorce is final before the petition can be submitted.

## Liturgical Seasons

It is not appropriate to celebrate a wedding during Lent, the six-week season of penitential preparation for Easter. The Rector will consider an exception in the case of genuine emergency, but in no case may music, flowers, or more than two attendants be used at a Lenten wedding. Weddings may be held at any other time of the year, but decorations must conform to the liturgical season. For example, Christmas decorations are not appropriate in Advent. Subject to other church events, parish worship, and clergy schedules, weddings may be scheduled on any day of the week.

## Marriage Liturgies

The Book of Common Prayer offers several choices for readings, prayers, and blessings within the marriage service (BCP, p.423). You must have the approval of the priest for any additions or alterations to the text. The vows themselves may not be altered. Since Eucharist is at the heart of our worship in the Episcopal Church, we encourage members of the parish to include it in their service. Non-members should consult the responsible priest. If your ceremony includes Eucharist, all those baptized Christians in attendance who wish to receive communion may do so. They need not be Episcopalian. It is not appropriate to communicate only the wedding party.

## Photography

Because of the dignity and holiness of a wedding service, pictures are not to be taken during the service. You are responsible for informing the photographer and wedding guests. The wedding bulletin will note that photography during the service (from the time of the processional entry into the church to the time of the couple's exit) is not permitted. No photography is permitted during the service at all, with or without flash, from the time the procession begins until the couple leaves the church. Before the service, it is important for the photographer to meet with the priest. The photographer may take pictures in the church either 30 minutes prior to the seating of the guests, or for 20 minutes after the service.

## A Minister of Another Church

A minister of another church or denomination may be invited to participate in a wedding at St. Bartholomew's with the consent of the Rector.

## Service Bulletin

If you would like a simple bulletin prepared by the church office staff you will need to have all the information turned in to the office *no later than* two weeks prior to the date of the wedding.

## Dressing Rooms

Dressing facilities are available two hours before the wedding for the wedding party. Please clean up as you leave, and remember to take your valuables with you. Alcoholic beverages are not permitted in these rooms, or in any area of the church, prior to the wedding. Let the parish administrator know if you intend to use the dressing rooms.

## Music

Since the central purpose of music in the wedding service should be to praise God, the sung texts must be theological or Biblical in content. Once you and the priest have chosen a date for the wedding, you should contact the parish's Director of Music at least 30 days in advance. Only in the event that our organist is unable to play for your wedding are you allowed to select another organist, subject in all cases to the Director of Music's approval. We encourage the use of congregational hymns. The Director of Music will be pleased to offer suggestions for appropriate hymns. All musical selections and their performance are subject to the approval and direction of the Director of Music.

The use of secular "wedding marches," such as those of Wagner and Mendelssohn are not used in this parish. Their non-liturgical, secular orientation makes them inappropriate for use in the Episcopal Church.

## Decorations and Flowers

As soon as you and the responsible priest establish the date for your wedding, you will need to contact the Flower Guild Chair. The Flower Guild is responsible for the arrangement of all flowers and decorations in the church. After the wedding, St. Bartholomew's will use the flowers in the church for Sunday worship. The Sunday bulletin will note that the flowers are given in thanksgiving for your marriage. Later, these flowers will be distributed to the sick and the shut-ins who are unable to attend worship.

The Episcopal Church does not include the "unity candle" as a part of the marriage ceremony.

Wedding guests may throw birdseed -- outside the building only -- as the couple departs. Neither rice nor confetti is permitted.

One or more passages of scripture may be read. You may invite someone to read after consulting the officiating priest. If you do, your reader will need to be present at the rehearsal. If you wish, the priest will arrange for a reader.

## Marriage License

You must obtain a license from the probate court in either your county of residence or the county in which the wedding will take place (DeKalb County for St. Bartholomew's). You will submit the license to the Officiant at the rehearsal.

## Preparation for the Ceremony

The parish administrator, under the supervision of the Rector, works directly with the couple to oversee all plans and procedures around the wedding service. Consult with the parish administrator at least 60 days prior to the wedding, following the approval of the Rector, for facility reservation and ministry leader contact information. The Rector or other assigned clergy will answer any questions you might have concerning the ceremony. Neither the clergy nor staff offers social advice about the wedding.

## Rehearsals

St. Bartholomew's schedules rehearsals the day before the wedding at 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. All members of the wedding party are expected to attend and to be on time. The rehearsal is conducted by the officiating clergy. It will last one hour.

If you choose to employ a wedding consultant, know that the clergy direct all aspects of service in the church. Please make it clear to him or her that the clergy oversee all the proceedings which take place at the church and there will be no need for them to attend the rehearsal or play any role at the wedding ceremony.

