

Christian Marriage

at the Church of the Annunciation



The Nature of Marriage: *The Book of Common Prayer* instructs us as follows:

Christian marriage is a solemn and public covenant in the presence of God (p. 422).

In the liturgy of the wedding service itself we hear the following:

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the 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 (p.423).

In addition, church canon laws require that all persons being married in the Episcopal Church sign the following statement before the wedding:

We, [Name] and [Name], 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: Under most circumstances, the Church of the Annunciation is able to offer the sacrament of Christian marriage only to members of the Episcopal Church. At least one party *must* be a baptized Christian. If neither party is a member of the Episcopal Church, we hope that you will first become active parishioners at Annunciation. Establishing formal affiliation with the Episcopal Church normally occurs through Confirmation or Reception by a bishop. Parish membership entails regular attendance at worship services, contributing financially to the support of the church, and becoming actively involved in the life of the parish family.

From time to time, we are able to accommodate weddings of non-members. We welcome inquiries a minimum of six months before a proposed date. Since non-members are not already supporting the mission and ministry of this parish church, we require a building-use fee, based on a sliding scale ranging from \$750 to \$2,500. While this can technically be considered a donation and thus deductible for income-tax purposes, it is not optional.

Although one of our clergy will officiate in all cases, we welcome the participation of ecumenical and interfaith clergy, and will happily discuss appropriate adjustments to the rite in such circumstances.

Applying for Marriage and Scheduling a Date: Contact the office at Annunciation to discuss arrangements as soon as possible after you know that a marriage will take place. This process usually starts six months or more before a proposed wedding date.

You may explore available dates and times for the wedding ceremony and rehearsal when you first inquire. No plans may be made definite, however, until after the first interview with the priest at Annunciation, after which the dates may be confirmed with the parish office. Non-members must make a minimum payment of \$750 before a date is confirmed. Normally, weddings are not conducted during the seasons of Advent (late November and December) and Lent (usually February and March), as they are penitential seasons of solemn preparation for Christmas and Easter. Rehearsals must also be scheduled.

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. Our practice is that there should be at least three meetings of an hour or more each. On rare occasions, a member of the Episcopal clergy from another parish may provide this counseling. If so, your clergy counselor must contact the clergy of the Church of the Annunciation personally to confirm these arrangements.

Divorced Persons: In the Episcopal Church, remarriage after divorce is based on the recommendation of a parish priest to the bishop, after meeting with the couple. If the priest makes such a recommendation and the bishop approves, plans for the wedding may proceed as usual. These procedures require at least two months' time before the wedding date.

If the divorced persons reside in another diocese of the Episcopal Church and are unable to consult with clergy at Annunciation, counseling and approval may be sought under another bishop's jurisdiction. Approval of the Bishop of the Diocese of Newark must also be

secured in order for the wedding to take place at Annunciation.

The Wedding Service: A careful reading of “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage” is recommended (*The Book of Common Prayer*, pp.423-32). The service may include many elements of scripture and music or it may be very simple. The Holy Eucharist can be a part of the ceremony, and often is at Annunciation. The officiating priest will discuss details with the couple. Weddings are public services of corporate worship to which all are welcome and in which the whole congregation takes part.

Music: Although not required, music adds greatly to the joy of the ceremony. The parish organist or someone designated by him will help you choose music and will perform at weddings at Annunciation, with the officiating priest as the final authority. If, in addition to the organist, you wish to have singers or instrumentalists, you must discuss this well in advance with the organist. The minimum organist’s fee is \$200.

The rehearsal at the church is an integral part of the wedding event. The following must be present at the rehearsal: all members of the wedding party, the parents, and others who are helping as lesson readers, ushers, or performers. The signing of the church register and any state certificate or license occurs at this time. The officiating clergy conducts the rehearsal itself.

Flowers usually include two simple arrangements on the altar, prepared in suitable containers by your florist. Flowers may not be placed on the pews, or anywhere else without specific explicit permission in advance.

Rice, birdseed, confetti, rose petals, or other things thrown are prohibited in the church and outside for reasons of maintenance and safety.

Photographs: No flash pictures may be taken during the ceremony. Guests as well as any professional photographer may use flash photography only before the wedding party enters the church nave. A photographer may *not* stand in the aisle and snap pictures during the procession. Other pictures may be taken during the service, using available light and so long as the photographer is discreet and unobtrusive. Posed pictures are best taken before the liturgy, although in some circumstances they can be arranged afterwards. We allow no more than 30 minutes for posed pictures. Ushers and groomsmen must inform arriving guests carrying cameras that flashes may not be used during the service, and this must be indicated on any printed service leaflet. The same procedures apply to videotape: no artificial lighting is permitted. The commercial sale of any photograph or video recording of the Church of the Annunciation is forbidden.

Professional Wedding Planners tend to interfere inappropriately with the religious service. For this reason, Wedding Planners may not be on the premises beyond 30 minutes prior to the starting time of the wedding.

Printed Order of Service: A printed service bulletin is quite unnecessary, although the couple may plan and provide this. Please consult with the officiating priest, who must approve the format and contents before printing.

The Wedding License and Certificate: You must obtain a license for marriage or civil union from the State of New Jersey if you wish to have legal benefits. The state contract can be executed prior to the church covenant, or concurrently with it.

Charges and Contributions: There is no fixed charge for the use of church buildings or for the services of the clergy for active members of the Church of the

Annunciation who are regular contributors of record. It is appropriate to make a special donation to the Rector's Discretionary Fund in thanksgiving to God for all that marriage means. Also, it is customary to give an honorarium to the clergy as an expression of your thanks in whatever amount you choose. The clergy will discuss details with you, and can advise you if you need guidance.

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