

A Marriage Customary



St. Christopher's by-the-Sea

Episcopal Church and Montessori School

CONGRATULATIONS on your engagement . . .

Several years ago at a highly publicized wedding ceremony, the Bishop of Canterbury sermonized that, unlike fairytales that end with the bride and groom getting married and living happily every after, the wedding is the beginning of a life long process.

Marriage, by definition, includes the civil component of a contractual agreement between two people. In order for a marriage to be legally recognized, a marriage license must be obtained and properly executed. Christian marriage also includes that same civil component. But by contrast, it includes so much more.

You have chosen an Episcopal priest who believes the ritual of marriage itself becomes sacramental. The sacrament of marriage cannot be understood in terms of a single ritual which magically transforms a couple from two into one forever. The sacramental celebration of marriage in the rites and ceremonies of the Christian Church must be the celebration of a process already well under way and of a process which has still some considerable way to go.

In a wedding each person speaks for her/himself. The wife pledges what she, not they as a couple, will do and the man promises what he, not they together will do.

The spiritual relationship of marriage is so embedded in humankind, the early Church leaders drew upon the symbolism to express the liturgy of Christ's relationship with the Church. In other words, each spouse acts in *persona Christi* by loving the other as Christ loves the Church in all circumstances until death itself severs the bond. The couple who co-love with God's love, effectively cooperate with God in redeeming each other.

Faithfully,
The Reverend Susan M. Bruttell+

Session Three: Sex, Money and Politics

Reviewing Homework
Sexuality and Marriage
Personal and Family Finances
Values, Goals and Pet Peeves

Assignment: Write separately and then negotiate together a premarital contract in which you each state what you expect to give and to receive in your marriage. Include expectations for family planning and childrearing, for division of labor, for conflict resolution, for finance, for intimacy, for privacy and for self expression.

Session Four: Communication and Conflict Management

Reviewing Homework
Sharing Thoughts and Feelings
Fair Fighting
Making Up
Support Systems
Privacy and Respect

Assignment: Remember an argument that you have had. Separately, write out answers to these questions:

1. What happened?
2. Who said what?
3. How was the argument resolved?
4. How do I feel about it now?
5. What would I do differently next time?
6. Share your responses.

Premarital Counseling

This is a six session program including homework assignments. Persons seeking to remarry after divorce must also comply with Diocesan Guidelines and Canons on remarriage.

Session One: Getting Started

Declaration of Intent
Expectations for Church Attendance
Expectations of Premarital Counseling
Theology of Marriage

Assignment: write out individually and bring to next session, but do not share responses in advance: Why I want to be married in a Church, Why I want to be married at St. Christopher's, What I believe about marriage and why I want to share that life with you.

Session Two: Getting Acquainted

Reviewing Homework
How You Met
Family Backgrounds
Spiritual Autobiographies

Assignment: Set aside one night per week. For one hour (total) tell each other something about your life that the person does not know, and talk about it.

Week one: pre-school years
Week two: elementary school years
Week three: high school years
Week four: adult life

The Purpose Of This Customary

The purpose of this customary is to aid couples in the planning of their wedding.

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Christian Marriage

Christian marriage is a solemn and public covenant between the couple in the presence of God. It is the highest expression of love between the two people, a sign of God's love for all creation, and more specifically, of Christ's love for God's people, the Church.

The spiritual dimension of human life, as distinguished from the intellectual and physical dimensions, is at the core of Christian Marriage. Marriage is as much about holiness as it is about happiness.

Marriage, therefore, is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

The ceremony is normally held in the church, though under special circumstances, the use of "some other appropriate place" is allowed.

Unless there are special pastoral considerations, the Wedding normally includes a celebration of the Eucharist. Thus your first act as a newly married couple would be that of receiving the sacrament of the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation.

The physical union of the couple is symbolized by the joining of hands and the giving and receiving of rings. In giving yourselves to each other, you are the sacrament itself, and the ministers of the sacrament.

Marriage is the only relationship where $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ do not make a whole. It takes 2 whole people to make a whole relationship. In making your vows not only to one another but to God, you acknowledge that your relationship is not merely contractual but truly a covenant, with God as its source and its goal.

Some Common Questions

How many witnesses do we need? You will need at least two witnesses.

Can we have a civil marriage blessed? Yes.

May the minister decline to solemnize a marriage? Yes. A minister may decline to solemnize any marriage.

May family members participate in the service? Yes. It is, for example, appropriate for friends and family to serve as lectors, chalice bearers, or acolytes.

May ministers from other faiths participate in the service? Yes, by mutual arrangement of those ministers and the Priest.

Who actually marries the couple? The couple themselves are the ministers of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. The priest asks God's blessing on the couple and the priest and congregation witness the vows and pray for the couple.

Where and how do we get a marriage license? Marriage Licenses are issued by the Broward County Clerk. Call the County Courthouse for additional information. *The clergy cannot perform a wedding without a valid marriage license.*

a large number of booklets be needed, the booklet may be taken to be copied and/or printed professionally in advance.

Honorarium

Honorariums are in consideration of, but not limited to:

- ♥ Premarital counseling meetings with the Priest
- ♥ Ceremony planning and Service Booklet
- ♥ Supervising the wedding rehearsal and Execution of Marriage License
- ♥ Officiating at the Ceremony

Honorariums range from \$750 to \$850 and are left to the discretion of the couple.

Please be sure to bring your valid marriage license to the rehearsal; otherwise, the rehearsal will not proceed. **The license will be signed at the rehearsal.** The rehearsal dinner/party normally follows the rehearsal.

Also, please bring to the rehearsal any fees and/or honorariums that have not been rendered (i.e., church, organist, priest).

The Minimal Canonical Requirements

Any marriage performed by an Episcopal priest must be in accord with the laws of the State of Florida, the canons (requirements) of the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Southeast Florida.

1. Proof of the legal ability of the couple to be married (license) must be presented to the priest who will solemnize the marriage.
2. The intent of both parties must be for a lifetime commitment to each other in marriage.
3. It is the duty of the priest to determine that both parties consent to the marriage of their own free will to each other in marriage.
4. It is the duty of the priest to provide instruction for the couple regarding the nature of Christian marriage.
5. There must be at least two witnesses to the solemnization of the marriage.
6. In the case of remarriage by either party, other canonical requirements must be met, which the Priest will be happy to discuss with you should they apply. (Cf. Title I Canon 19. Constitution and Canons.)

The Declaration Of Intent

Both parties must sign the following Declaration of Intent: We, *A.B.* and *C.D.*, desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union. We believe that 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 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." (Title I Canon 18 Sec. 3(D). Constitution and Canons.)

Preparation For Your Marriage

Marriage is a sacrament and all aspects of the wedding should reflect its character as such.

The Wedding Service is planned by the Priest and the participants. The services of a professional “wedding consultant” are not appropriate in planning the marriage service.

Because a wedding is a worship service, it is recommended that family members, members of the wedding party, and other friends take part in the service by reading of the lessons and intercessions or in performing music.

All participants in your wedding should arrive at least 45 minutes prior to the start of the service, and should also arrive promptly at the hour appointed for the rehearsal.

Couples desiring to be married should notify the priest at least six months prior to the expected date of the wedding. At the first meeting with the Priest, the date and time of the wedding and rehearsal will be set.

In addition, the Priest will meet with the couple a minimum of three times prior to the wedding for premarital counseling. The sessions will last approximately sixty to ninety minutes.

The issues will include the following topics:

- ♥ Communication
- ♥ Management of money and household
- ♥ Relationships with family members and friends
- ♥ Religious commitment
- ♥ Sexual relationship

The Wedding Rehearsal

The priest will supervise the wedding rehearsal. All members of the wedding party must attend the rehearsal. The rehearsal normally takes place the evening before the wedding.

The persons who need to be present for the rehearsal are: bride, groom, best man, best woman, bridesmaids (if any), ushers, and participants in the service. Others are welcome to attend. The cleric is in charge of the rehearsal.

Please be sure to bring your valid marriage license to the rehearsal; otherwise, the rehearsal will not proceed. **The license will be signed at the rehearsal.** The rehearsal dinner/party normally follows the rehearsal. Also, please bring to the rehearsal any payments/honorariums that have not been rendered (i.e., church, organist, priest).

Music In The Service

Because a wedding is a religious service, the music must be appropriate; the texts from Scripture, the Book of Common Prayer, the Hymnal or texts compatible with those sources. The rubrics (directions) in the BCP designate those points at which the music is included in the service.

Flowers and Decorations

Flowers may be placed on either side of the altar or on the floor directly in front of the altar.

Photography

Photographs may be taken prior to the service. During the service, photos may be taken by one designated photographer, without flash. A video camera using natural light may also be used.

Order of Worship

To facilitate the congregation in participating in the Liturgy, the Priest will supply a simple bulletin of the Order of Service. Should