

The Wedding Customary
The Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration

Revised December 14, 2018

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY MATRIMONY

Congratulations on your engagement! Marriage is a sacred and life-giving relationship, and we share your joy and celebration at this decision. We pray that God will bless you both richly throughout this process, both before the wedding and after, and we hope that this guide helps answer questions you may have about conducting a wedding at the Church of the Transfiguration.

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage

Christian marriage is a covenant relationship between two people, proclaimed in a public setting. By covenant relationship, we mean it is initiated by mutual promises to love, honor, and cherish one another for a lifetime. In the Episcopal Church we believe marriage to be a sacrament, which means we believe it is reflective of God's relationship with us: it is characterized by trust, sacrifice, generosity, and forgiveness. Through marriage, God's grace is made known to us and through us in real and visible ways, and it enables us to grow more completely into the man or woman God has created us to be.

A wedding is a liturgical expression of the sacrament of marriage. The couple are the ministers of the sacrament. The priest officiates and pronounces God's blessing on the relationship, but the couple are the ones who proclaim the covenant. It is in their lives that the sacrament is lived out. They are the “outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace” (*The Book of Common Prayer*, 857).

At the Church of the Transfiguration all weddings are in accordance with the authorized liturgies of the Episcopal Church. They provide some choices and flexibility that enable the service to feel unique and personal, but also contain certain required elements that may not be fundamentally altered. If there is any question about the liturgy, it is always best to check with the Rector or officiating priest. Couples are strongly encouraged to prayerfully read and reflect on the standard marriage rite of the Episcopal Church, which is found on pages 422-438 of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

A couple should make their intent to be married known to a member of the clergy staff as soon as possible. An initial meeting with the officiating clergy is required before the wedding can be officially scheduled. Premarital counseling is required of all couples, and is arranged through the officiating clergy. It is unwise to make deposits related to the reception until the wedding has been formally scheduled, which only happens after that initial meeting, and after the couple has signed the Declaration of Intent, located at the conclusion of this document.

Eligibility

The Church of the Transfiguration is available for weddings when one or both persons of the couple are members of Transfiguration, or the child of a Transfiguration member. Membership formally occurs when a person is a baptized Christian and has their Letter of Membership on file in the parish register (arranged by contacting the Chief Administrative Officer), but membership is *expressed* by regular attendance at worship, involvement in the ministry life of the church, and giving in proportion to one's means.

The marriage ceremony must be witnessed by at least two persons, and it must conform to the laws of the State of Texas and the canons of The Episcopal Church.

In cases of re-marriage after divorce, it is necessary for the officiating priest to receive the Bishop's consent before performing the ceremony. This request must include a copy of the divorce decree, a written explanation of the reasons for the prior marriage's dissolution, and a description of how the couple has addressed past behaviors and intends to nurture their relationship so that it may thrive and flourish.

In the case of remarriage, it is frequently the case that more time is required for premarital counseling, and it is expected 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 either of the persons has been married and divorced three or more times.

If there is any question about membership or the possibility of having your wedding at Transfiguration, you are encouraged to call the church office to schedule a meeting with the Rector.

Same-Sex Marriage

Same-sex couples are absolutely eligible for marriage at Transfiguration. All policies and expectations apply equally to heterosexual and homosexual couples.

Pre-marital Counseling

The Episcopal Church believes that adequate preparation is an important part of a marriage, and by canon law an Episcopal priest is required to meet with the couple for counseling as part of that preparation. In addition to meeting with the officiating clergy to reflect on the nature of Christian marriage and plan the ceremony, it is the custom at Transfiguration for the couple to meet with a professional marriage counselor for a minimum of three sessions. Adequate time should be allotted for these counseling sessions, and counseling fees will be incurred by the couple. Suggestions for marriage counselors can be obtained from the Rector.

Scheduling

Weddings are normally held on Saturdays at 11:00 a.m., 2:00 p.m. or 7:30 p.m. Weekday times may be scheduled around existing church services or activities. Weddings may not be scheduled during the seasons of Lent or Advent, on New Year's Eve or Day or on any major feast day of the Church year (schedule available on request). Upon request, a member of the Transfiguration clergy may officiate at a wedding location other than at the church, and the Rector may authorize a visiting priest to officiate at a wedding at Transfiguration. In cases of interfaith marriages, it is possible for a religious leader from another tradition to participate in the liturgy, and interest in such participation should be expressed by the couple at the initial meeting.

Wedding Coordinator

A volunteer Wedding Coordinator and members of the Wedding Guild work together with the officiating clergy to direct the wedding service. Professional wedding consultants do not participate in planning or conducting weddings at Transfiguration. The couple should schedule a meeting with the Wedding Coordinator as soon as possible after scheduling a wedding at Transfiguration. The Wedding Coordinator will review initial wedding plans, answer questions about church policies, assist with decisions about flowers and photographers, and schedule the rehearsal. She will also schedule Altar Guild members to assist with conducting the liturgy. The officiating priest and Wedding Coordinator conduct the rehearsal.

On the day of the wedding, the Wedding Coordinator and Wedding Guild members ensure all aspects before, during, and after the ceremony go smoothly, and they are prepared to provide assistance to the wedding party and guests as needed.

Holy Eucharist

Holy Eucharist (Mass, Lord's Supper, Communion) is a deeply 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 appropriate focus on giving thanks to God for the gift of love and the sacramental life of marriage. As such, it is traditional that all weddings at Transfiguration include the celebration of Eucharist. If a couple has compelling pastoral reasons for not celebrating the Eucharist, such reasons should be expressed during the counseling meetings with the officiating priest. If the ceremony includes Eucharist, it will be available to all guests who are baptized Christians and desire to receive the sacrament.

Marriage License

The couple must obtain a State of Texas marriage license before the ceremony. It is illegal for the priest to conduct the ceremony without a marriage license. It is the responsibility of the couple to present the marriage license at or before the rehearsal, and it is the responsibility of the priest to facilitate its completion after the ceremony and return it to the County Clerk's Office.

Printed Program

Transfiguration produces the service program for the wedding. The Rector and the Music Director must give final approval for all information contained in the program, and the program information must be submitted at least four weeks prior to the wedding. The cost of the program is included with wedding fees.

Photography/Videography

The marriage service is a sacramental rite of the church and is not to be interrupted or disturbed by the distraction of videography or photography. The couple is to give the name and contact information of the photographer and videographer to the Wedding Coordinator. The Wedding Coordinator will schedule a meeting with the photographer and videographer to discuss church policies.

- Photographs may be taken in the narthex (small lobby with the holy water font), from the back of the Nave, from the choir gallery and other designated locations in the church. No other vantage points are allowed. There will be no pause for photos once the wedding procession begins.
- Flash equipment or additional lighting are not permitted inside the church after guests arrive or during the ceremony itself. Flash photography is permitted after the service concludes and the guests have left the Nave.
- Videographers are permitted at designated locations only and are not allowed to change the camera's location during the service.
- Photography and videography are permitted anywhere on the church property before the service, provided it does not interfere with other church activities. All photography outside of the parlor or groom's dressing area must be concluded 45 minutes prior to the start of the ceremony.
- A sign will be posted at the entrance to the Nave instructing guests that there are to be no flash photographs taken during the ceremony, and ushers are encouraged to remind guests of this policy. The bride, groom, and entire wedding party can be helpful in encouraging friends and relatives to refrain from flash photography inside the church.
- Photos may be taken in the parlor following the ceremony as the marriage license and church register are signed, and at the Bell Tower when the Transfiguration Bell

is rung by the couple. The photographer should make advance arrangements to be in place when these events occur to limit waiting by the couple or guests.

- Photos may be taken in the church for no more than 30 minutes after the ceremony, concluding no later than 4:45 on Saturday afternoon.

Flowers and Decorations

Arrangements for floral decorations should be made only after consultation with the Wedding Coordinator. The services of the Transfiguration Flower Guild are included with the wedding fees. Flowers in the church are limited to two arrangements on the reredos (one arrangement on either side of the shelf behind the altar and below the triptych), as well as a single arrangement adjacent to the Holy Water Font. No artificial flowers may be used. Flower Guild leadership will meet with the couple to receive suggestions and requests for color, type, and style.

If the services of a florist are contracted, the florist should contact the Wedding Coordinator to arrange a meeting in the Nave. Altar flowers from outside florists must be delivered between 9:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. for Saturday weddings. Please consult the Wedding Coordinator for flower deliveries on days other than Saturday. Personal flowers may be delivered two hours prior to the wedding. Transfiguration does not have cool storage for personal flowers.

Altar flowers continue to adorn the church until the conclusion of the Sunday worship (1:00 p.m.).

Six tall floor candles are always lit for weddings, and the altar candles if there is a celebration of Eucharist. No other candles may be used inside the Nave.

Guests may 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. No aisle runners may be used.

Rehearsal

The time for the wedding rehearsal should be determined in coordination with the officiating clergy and the Wedding Coordinator. Rehearsals are normally scheduled for 5:00 p.m. on the day before the wedding and typically last no more than 90 minutes. All persons associated with the wedding (ushers, readers, bridesmaids, groomsmen, and any family who will be formally seated during the prelude) are *required* to attend the rehearsal. Wedding consultants are not needed during the rehearsal, although they are welcome to assist the couple before the wedding. If a wedding consultant is used, she/he works under the direction of the Wedding Coordinator.

Music

Music adds beauty and joy to the ceremony and is chosen in consultation with the Director of Music and officiating clergy. Only sacred music is permitted for weddings at Transfiguration, although it may be come from sources outside *The Hymnal 1982*.

The couple should contact the Director of Music to discuss availability for the wedding and to make musical choices for the ceremony; this meeting should occur at least six weeks before the wedding. If the Director of Music is not available for the scheduled date, he will arrange for a substitute organist. All musicians (choir, soloists, instrumentalists) are arranged by or must be approved by the Director of Music.

Wedding Receptions

It is possible to reserve Roper Hall for a reception. All arrangements must be made through the church office, and the fee is an additional \$500 above the basic wedding fee.

Reservation of Roper Hall includes use of round tables, bistro (tall) tables, rectangular tables, and chairs, as well as access to a kitchen. It does *not* include linens, dishes, glassware, utensils or serving pieces. If a caterer is contracted, the office must have the business' information on file, including proof of insurance. With the exception of tables and chairs, all set up and cleanup is the responsibility of the couple and/or caterer. All food, service items, and decorations must be removed immediately after the reception. Receptions must end by 11:00 p.m. and Roper Hall clean and vacated no later than midnight. A member of the church custodial staff is present to assist until the party concludes and every guest departs; if the hall is not vacated by midnight, a fee of \$50/hour is incurred.

Beer, wine, and champagne may be served at the receptions, and must be served by a licensed third-party vendor, with appropriate liability insurance (a copy of which must be presented at least a week in advance and on file in the church office). Suitable non-alcoholic alternatives must be offered. Hard spirits are not permitted, and no alcohol may be served on the premises prior to the wedding.

Arrangements for audio equipment may be made through the church office at least two weeks prior to the reception. Tasteful recorded or live music may be used at the reception.

Glitter, rice, and/or confetti are not permitted.

Fees

The fee for a wedding at Transfiguration is \$1,500. This cost covers access to the church, setup/cleanup, lights, sound, bulletin printing, and other operational details for the wedding ceremony.

- The fee includes consultation and performance at the wedding by the organist, but does not include any additional musicians; arrangements may be made for soloists and other musicians in consultation with the Music Director.
- The fee includes standard altar flowers. Additional floral design may be arranged through the Flower Guild at additional cost.
- There is no additional fee for a member of the clergy to officiate at the marriage ceremony. Couples who want to give an honorarium in gratitude may do so.
- There is no additional fee for services provided by the Wedding Guild. Couples who want to give an honorarium in gratitude may do so.
- All financial arrangements are made with the Parish Administrator in the Church Office. Check(s) should be made payable to Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration, and all fees must be paid in full at least two weeks prior to the wedding.

This fee may be reduced by the Rector in response to a compelling financial hardship.

Additional Wedding Policies and Customs

1. Weddings begin promptly out of courtesy to the guests and participants.
2. The congregation stands at the sound of a chime marking the entrance of the processional cross followed by the wedding party (groom's and bridal parties)
3. A bride may be escorted to the altar or she may enter the church alone. If she has an escort, she enters the church on the right side of the escort.
4. The groom's honor attendant has custody of the rings. Ring bearers may be used, but the rings held by them are merely imitations.
5. A unity candle is not permitted. The bride's and groom's parent(s) may choose to light a votive candle and say a brief prayer prior to being seated.
6. Decorations and flower arrangements in place for major festivals may not be removed for weddings.
7. Weddings are conducted around the life of the church. The church may be involved in projects that include displays to be arranged in the corridors leading to the church, and such displays cannot be removed for weddings.
8. The wedding party should arrive at the church no earlier than three hours prior to the service and no later than one hour prior to the service.
9. Use of drugs is not permitted on this property, and alcoholic beverages may not be consumed anywhere on the property prior to the wedding service and after the wedding service only if the reception is on-site.
10. Members of the Wedding Guild will assist the bride(s) and her attendants in the parlor. Hair and make-up should be completed prior to arriving at the church and require only last-minute adjustment. Members of the Wedding Guild will assist the groom(s) and his attendants in a designated waiting room. It is suggested that only members of the wedding party enter these rooms.
11. There is a 5:30 p.m. church service every Saturday evening. Access to the Nave is not available until the conclusion of this service at approximately 6:30 p.m. It is expected that the wedding party will refrain from making noise or congregating in the Gathering Space (labyrinth area) during the church service.
12. On-site childcare may be arranged during the rehearsal, wedding, and/or on-site reception. The fee is \$30/hour and arrangements are made through the Church Office.
13. All personal items must be removed from the Parlor and groom's dressing room and taken to cars prior to the wedding.

Declaration of Intent

We, _____ and _____, desire to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Episcopal Church, and we do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of two people as it is set forth in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

We believe that the union of two people in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort of 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 God; 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.

Furthermore, we agree to abide by the customs and practices governing weddings at Church of the Transfiguration as enumerated in the Wedding Customary.

Dated this _____ day of _____, 20_____

Signature

Signature

Name (please print)

Name (please print)

Address

Address

City, state, zip code

City, state, zip code

(must be signed and on filed a minimum of 30 days prior to the wedding)