



## WEDDING CUSTOMARY

ST. JAMES'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

1018 Farmington Avenue

West Hartford, CT 06107

[www.stjameswh.org](http://www.stjameswh.org)

860.521.9620

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**We rejoice in your decision to exchange your vows  
in the presence of God at St. James's Episcopal Church.**

The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is a solemn and public covenant in which the couple enters into a lifelong union, making their vows before God and the Church, and receive the grace and blessing of God to help them fulfill their vows. It is required that at least one of the parties be a baptized Christian and an actively participating member of the Episcopal Church, be regular in attendance at the Eucharist, and maintain a pledge of financial support of the church's ministry. The ceremony must be attested by at least two witnesses and must conform to the canons of The Episcopal Church and the laws of the State of Connecticut.

### **MARRIAGE IN THE CHURCH**

The Episcopal Church has both a sacramental and a covenantal understanding of marriage. The marriage should take place in the church as set forth in The Book of Common Prayer or in I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing. The appropriate context for the Celebration of a Marriage is the Eucharist, whereby the first act of the newly married couple is to receive the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. All baptized Christians present are invited to join the couple in receiving the sacrament. Circumstances sometimes make this celebration impossible; your priest will discuss this with you in preparation for your wedding.

The physical and spiritual union of the couple is symbolized by the holding of hands, the exchange of vows and the giving and receiving of rings. In giving themselves to each other, the couple are both the sacrament itself, and the ministers of the sacrament. In making their vows, not only to one another but also to God, the couple acknowledge that their relationship is not merely contractual, but truly covenantal, with God as its source and goal.

The Episcopal Church's liturgy for the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage presumes the presence of the community of faith, meaning that a marriage is not a private arrangement between two people. It is in the Church, the community of the faithful, that a couple should seek to have their marriage solemnized and supported in the years ahead. In the Church, all are equally honored and affirmed in their best hopes for each other.

The Celebration of a Marriage is also a liturgy of the Church. The rites and ceremonies of the Church seek to protect the integrity of that liturgy and to emphasize the ministers of the Sacrament – the couple; and, the sanctity of the Sacrament – the vows they make. Music, decorations, the physical movement of the wedding party and people, and other Episcopal traditions are an effort to express the Church's understanding of marriage as sacrament and covenant of two people in the community of the faithful.

## PREPARATION FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

*Couples desiring to be married at St. James's must contact the rector at least three months prior to the proposed date of the marriage. For those previously married, more advance notice is wise.*

All weddings conducted by clergy of St. James's should take place at the church unless the rector approves an off-site location. As is traditional in the Episcopal Church, weddings are not usually scheduled during Lent. Any priest or other clergy not on the staff of St. James's Church must be invited by the rector to assist at a marriage service.

### Remarriage of Divorced Persons

If either partner has been married previously, the priest in charge must obtain the written permission of the Bishop of The Episcopal Church in Connecticut to officiate at the wedding. The priest must satisfy the Bishop that he/she is sufficiently acquainted with the couple to know that they intend to live a life in the Church as a couple and that there are positive signs favoring the creation of a good Christian marriage.

The Bishop expects that previously married persons shall have been divorced at least six months and separated from a former spouse for at least eighteen months. The Bishop may 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.

## THE MARRIAGE SERVICE

### Procession

When the family members of the couple have been seated in their pews at the front of the church, the marriage service begins with an entrance procession. A hymn or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music played, as the wedding party enters the church. The procession may include a crucifer and torchbearers, the wedding party, clergy, ring bearer, flower girl, and the couple. The order may be discussed with the officiating clergy.

Either or both members of the couple may be accompanied by a parent, or other presenter, or the couple may enter together. The parents of both may accompany them during the procession and present them. However, there need not be a presentation.

### Exhortation & Charge

The priest stands at the upper chancel steps and the wedding party stands on the nave floor at the lower chancel steps. The Exhortation is then addressed to the congregation by the priest, using the full names of the couple. (Christian names are used thereafter.) Next, the Charge is addressed to the couple, and their Declaration of Consent is sought. Finally, an affirmation of support is asked of the congregation. If there is to be a presentation, it takes place here. (Ref. The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 423-425).

## **The Ministry of the Word**

Before the readings are given, a hymn, psalm or anthem may be sung. The Collect is said by the priest and the congregation sits for the reading of the lessons. One or more passages from Holy Scripture is read; if more than one, each should come from a different portion of the Bible. Family members, friends or members of the wedding party may read the lessons. Care should be taken that the readers are persons who are comfortable and competent at reading before a congregation. The priest or deacon reads the Gospel, which always concludes the readings if there is to be a communion.

A hymn, psalm or anthem may be sung between the readings; following the readings, the priest may offer a homily. (Ref. The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 425-426).

## **The Marriage**

If there is a bride, she gives her bouquet to her maid of honor and if wearing a veil, has it lifted from her face (if not during the presentation). During the exchange of vows, the couple faces each other, takes hold of the other's right hand, and either reads the vow from the Prayer Book or I Will Bless You..., or repeats it in short phrases after the priest. Then the priest holds out the book to designated members of the wedding party (the best man or maid of honor, for example), who place the rings on it, which are blessed, and then exchanged with words prompted by the priest in short phrases, "N., I give you this ring ...," as they place the ring on the other's ring finger. The priest may then use the stole – the chief sign of the presbyter – to bind together the right hands of the couple as they are proclaimed as united in matrimony.

## **Prayers and the Blessing of the Marriage**

Another family member, friend, or wedding party member may be appointed to read the prayers for the newly married couple. The priest will offer the blessing, after which the couple stand, are greeted by the priest with the exchange of Peace, exchange the kiss of Peace with one another, and, if they choose, with members of the wedding party, family and members of the congregation. (Ref. The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 428-431).

## **At The Eucharist**

Following the Breaking of Bread, all persons present in the congregation are invited to come forward and receive Communion. Music appropriate to this part of the service may be presented here. When all have received, the final hymn may be sung, after which all offer the postcommunion prayer (Ref. The Book of Common Prayer, p. 432). The wedding party then leaves the church in the reverse order in which they entered, the couple going first.

## MUSIC IN THE SERVICE

Because a church wedding is a service of worship, the music chosen best proclaims and exemplifies the Christian understanding of marriage as held by the church, the couple and the congregation. The music should be appropriate to the solemnity of the occasion, and texts sung are theological or biblical in content. Secular music is better saved for the reception. Music is provided at those points in the service designated by the rubrics in *The Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 422-432.

As you begin planning the music for your wedding, contact the organist/choirmaster at least 60 days prior to the wedding date to make your music arrangements. All selections must be finalized four (4) weeks prior to the wedding ceremony. The organist will be happy to assist you in the selection of music and can recommend additional instrumentalists and vocal soloists, if you desire. There is an additional fee for rehearsal time with each instrumentalist or vocalist and these additional fees will be payable to the organist. St. James's requires that you use the parish organist. The rector must give final approval for all music used in a wedding. See *Wedding Readings and Hymns* document for suggestions.

## FLOWERS AND DECORATIONS

The beauty of St. James's Church needs little enhancement. The couple may use the florist of their choice, though the rector may offer a recommendation. Flowers may be placed on the pedestals of the church or the chapel, in front of the altar, lectern, and/or pulpit. These are the only flower arrangements allowed inside the altar rail. Some of the flowers for the wedding will be used on the Sunday following the wedding as a sign of the thanksgiving of the couple for their marriage and can be acknowledged in the Sunday service leaflets by submission of the desired wording to the parish administrator at least two weeks prior.

Floral arrangements may be placed on the pedestal in the narthex and/or cloister (church foyers). Additional arrangements may be added to windows and pew pillars upon request, in consultation with the rector. No other floral decorations will be permitted in the church. For weddings in the Christmas season (December 23 until the Sunday of or before The Epiphany, January 6), the church decorations for the season will be left in place with no other flowers added except for the two vases of flowers on the retable or the shelves in the narthex.

The church will be opened to receive flowers 60 minutes prior to the time of the wedding. If additional time is necessary, arrangements must be made through the church office. An additional fee is required in order to have a sexton open the building earlier for any additional time necessary. Contact the church office for these fees.

The only candles permitted for weddings will be those on the altar, those surrounding the credence table and lectern, and on candelabras. In the chapel, only the candles on the altar will be used. In Eastertide, the Paschal Candle will be used in its customary place. No other candles are allowed in the church or chapel. For safety concerns, an aisle runner is not to be used. The pews may have ribbons and small floral arrangements that can be tied to the pews with string, ribbon, or floral clips. No tape, tacks, or wire may be used. A Unity Candle is not used in the marriage service of the Episcopal Church.

## **PHOTOGRAPHY**

St. James's recommends that photos be taken before the marriage service with the couple arriving at least one hour before the time of the wedding, and the photographer finishing thirty minutes before the service begins. If photos are to be taken after the service, we recommend that out of consideration for guests at any reception, no longer than 30 minutes be taken for photographs.

The marriage service is a celebration of the worship of God. Photography is in no way to interrupt the attention of the congregation. No photography or bright artificial lights are permitted during the service by the photographer or guests. Available light photographs may be taken during the wedding by the photographer, but the photographer must remain behind the congregation at all times, or in the choir loft. One flash picture may be taken from the narthex of the church as the couple turns toward the door to leave the church. It is the responsibility of the bridal couple to inform the photographer and members of the family and friends as to the rules of St. James's Church concerning picture-taking during the service. Video recording is up to the discretion of the rector.

## **CONGREGATION CAPACITY**

Chapel weddings are suggested for smaller groups of people. The Chapel has a capacity of 64.

Larger weddings will require use of the church. The nave provides seating for large congregations, up to 450. More seating may be added upon consultation with clergy.

## **WEDDING REHEARSAL**

You must bring your marriage license to the church one week in advance of the wedding.

Please have everyone at the rehearsal on time and take into account travel time for the wedding party and when planning the rehearsal dinner. The rehearsal will last approximately one hour. All members of the wedding party take their places in the church which they will have in the wedding. Children involved with or attending the rehearsal are expected to be supervised.

A Saturday wedding will rehearse on Friday. Entrance to the church for the rehearsal is through the front door of the church or through the cloister doors off of the parking lot.

## **ACOLYTES**

St. James's acolytes are sometimes scheduled to serve for the wedding. The couple may choose relatives or family friends to serve as acolytes, if they are acolytes in another parish.

## **DRESSING AT THE CHURCH**

Women in the wedding party will be provided modest space for dressing prior to the wedding. We have no space for men to dress at the church. Smoking is not allowed in any building on St. James's property. Please arrange for someone in the wedding party to remove all personal belongings from the rooms immediately after the wedding (labelled shopping bags for the bride and her bridesmaids are helpful), and to be sure that these areas are picked up and left as you found them. The parish cannot be responsible for lost or stolen items. The dressing area will be opened 90 minutes before the wedding. (Please see Church Donations and Fees regarding fees for earlier opening.)

## **RICE, BIRDSEED, CONFETTI, FLOWER PETALS**

Rice, birdseed, and confetti are not to be thrown at or on the wedding couple, inside or out, following the wedding ceremony or reception. This is to insure the safety of the guests leaving the church as well as that of the wedding party, and church property.

## **GUEST BOOK**

A guest book may be displayed inside in the narthex (foyer) of the church before the wedding, but not afterward. St. James's strongly suggests that, for the sake of expediency, the guest book be opened at the reception. If open in the narthex, a member of the wedding party should close it ten minutes prior to the wedding time to prevent late entrance into the nave and therefore delaying the bridal party.

## **THE MARRIAGE LICENSE**

As of October 1, 2009, marriage licenses in Connecticut may only be obtained from the town of occurrence. You will need to apply for your license in the Town Clerk's Office, 3rd floor, Room 313, Town Hall 50 South Main Street. Once issued, the marriage license is good for 65 days. There is no waiting period between applying for and receiving your license.

The couple must appear in the office to sign the Marriage License and present photo ID's such as a driver's license or passport. We advise couples to apply for their license about two weeks before the ceremony. Please plan to arrive 30 minutes prior to closing in order to process the Marriage License. You may complete the application on line.

The license will be printed when you arrive at the office.

The fee for a marriage license is \$30.00. We suggest that the couple order and pre-pay an additional \$20.00 for each certified copy of the marriage license, which will be mailed to them automatically upon our receipt of the marriage certificate after the ceremony. A certified copy is required by social security and DMV to make a name change. They accept cash or a personal check, they do not accept credit cards.

For further information, please call the Town Clerk's Office at (860) 561-7430.



The marriage license should be brought to the St. James's office one week prior to the wedding date. The license will be handled and returned to the appropriate parish office for filing by the priest.

## **RECEPTION FACILITIES**

Approval is needed from the rector if the reception is to be held at St. James's. The specific parish facilities needed for the wedding and reception must be reserved through the rector.

Decorations for receptions are the responsibility of the florist, subject to the approval of the rector.

Candles are limited to tea tables with prior approval.

No decorations may be fastened in any manner to walls, woodwork or ceiling.

Only light alcoholic beverages (champagne, table wines, beer) may be served. No hard liquor (whiskey, gin, rum, etc.) may be served. Where alcoholic beverages are served, alternative beverages (nonalcoholic) must be provided with equal attractiveness and accessibility.

Catering services must be arranged for by the bridal couple or their families. Immediately after the reception, the hosting family will make certain that the caterer or others remove all decorations, except flowers, from the main room and the adjoining rooms. The church sexton will return all church furniture to its proper location.

## **CHURCH DONATIONS AND FEES**

As a sacrament of the church, officiating at the marriage is offered by the priest without charge.

The fee for use of the Parish Hall is \$35/hour (\$50/hour with kitchen use) for parishioners in good standing and their children. The rental period covers the entire time of the event as well as set-up and clean-up. We request that Saturday evening receptions end by 10:30 p.m. in our intention to be good neighbors to those living behind the church.

For information regarding donation schedules and a breakdown of services other fees cover, please contact the church office. If there are one or more soloists, or instrumentalists, the organist has an additional charge for extra rehearsal time. The church is open 90 minutes prior to the wedding time. All fees and charges are due and payable at the church office two weeks prior to the wedding. The church office is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., except during the summer when the office is closed on Fridays. Other holidays may affect the office schedule as well.

Clergy receive a nominal fee for pre-marital counseling. The organist, if used, receives \$350 for the service and consultation. The couple is encouraged to offer a donation to the parish.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

Neither members of the wedding party nor guests are allowed to bring or consume alcoholic beverages that are not part of the post-wedding reception. Smoking is not permitted inside any building or anywhere on St. James's property.

**ALL ARRANGEMENTS FOR WEDDINGS ARE SUBJECT TO THE FINAL APPROVAL  
OF THE RECTOR.**

Church Office 860-521-9620 Cheryl Batter, Parish Administrator

Organist 860-521-9620 x706 Vaughn Mauren, Church Organist and Choirmaster

**NOTES**

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### RECEIPT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have received and read the St. James's 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 will inform the appropriate contractors, family members, and others affiliated with my wedding that they are bound by these rules, policies, and guidelines.

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Signature of Spouse #1

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Printed Name of Spouse #1

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Signature of Spouse #2

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Printed Name of Spouse #2

*The signed acknowledgement and completed Wedding Application form with Declaration of Intention should be completed and returned to the church office.*

*No wedding will be dated or confirmed without receipt of these documents.*