



Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish

Guidelines for Weddings at Grace Church

Revised as of:

June 10, 2010

Introduction

Christian marriage is a sacrament of the Church, “in which the woman and man enter into a life-long union, make their vows before God and the Church, and receive the grace and blessing of God to help them fulfill their vows” (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 861). Grace Church offers brides and grooms a wedding ceremony of dignity and beautiful simplicity according to the rites of the Episcopal Church. These guidelines and suggestions are offered to make each wedding a happy and personal ceremony, within the liturgical guidelines of the Book of Common Prayer and the traditions of Grace Church.

Weddings in Grace Church are reserved for members of Grace Church and their immediate families.

The Engaged Couple's responsibilities

In accordance with the Canons of the Episcopal Church, a request to be married in the church must be made of the Priest as far in advance of the contemplated date as possible, and in any case, no less than 30 days prior to the contemplated date. There are several reasons for this:

- ❖ Any couple may contract a civil marriage so long as their intentions conform to the laws of the state. By contrast, a marriage solemnized in the church is a marriage which seeks the blessing of the Church and the participation of family and fellow-members of the Body of Christ. The solemnization of such a marriage is the result of a process of preparation.
- ❖ Before a priest may solemnize a marriage in the Episcopal Church, the canons require that the priest shall have ascertained:
 - That both parties have the right to contract a marriage according the laws of the State.
 - That both parties understand that Holy Matrimony is a physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman, entered into within the community of faith, by mutual consent of heart, mind, and will, and with intent that it be lifelong.
 - That both parties freely and knowingly consent to such marriage, without fraud, coercion, mistake as to identity of a partner, or mental reservation.
 - That at least one of the parties has received Holy Baptism.
 - That both parties have been instructed as to the nature, meaning, and purposes of Holy Matrimony by the Member of the Clergy, or that they have both received such instruction from persons known by the Member of the Clergy to be competent and responsible. (*Constitution & Canons of the Episcopal Church*, Title I, Canon 18)
- ❖ It is always within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to solemnize any marriage.
- ❖ In addition, the contemplated marriage date must be available on the parish church calendar, as well as on the Rector's personal calendar.

These reasons indicate that the invitation to and the request for the Church to be involved in the solemnization of a marriage, and the process of preparation for it, entail care, reflection, and time. As the liturgy for the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage says, "marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with purposes for which it was instituted by God" (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 423).

Therefore, please do not “set” a date, nor communicate a contemplated date to family members and friends, for a wedding at Grace Church until after the Rector has agreed that you may do so.

The process of pre-marital preparation at Grace Church will usually involve 5-6 sessions, each lasting an hour to an hour and a half. These sessions are usually scheduled from two weeks to a month apart. *The purpose of these sessions is preparation for marriage.* Preparation for the wedding will, of course, also be discussed, but the primary purpose is to help the couple prepare mentally and spiritually for the marriage that will be solemnized at the wedding.

The Rector is the final authority on all arrangements for a Grace Church wedding, and should be consulted before any definite plans are made. [*Please Note: These guidelines are to be followed even if the ceremony is performed by a priest other than the Rector of Grace Church.*]

After the first meeting with the Rector, a tentative date may be placed on the Parish Church calendar. The purpose of the tentative date is to indicate a couple's priority for that date, for the rehearsal, and for the use of the parish hall for either or both the Rehearsal Dinner and Reception. If another request is received for the same tentative date, as well as for a set date, the first couple will have scheduling priority in terms of service and Rehearsal times and building use. *Note:* Advent and Lent are *not* appropriate seasons for weddings.

The Liturgy

The Liturgy for all weddings at Grace Church will be the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage as set forth in The Book of Common Prayer (1979). No other services will be allowed. The Book of Common Prayer intends that the Marriage be conducted within the context of the Holy Eucharist. In this context, the new husband and wife offer themselves, their marriage, and the rest of their lives to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, and the congregation, as their fellow members in the Body of Christ, share together with them in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Other, non-liturgical and non-scriptural ceremonies, such as "Unity Candle" or "The Mother's Rose", are not appropriate in the context of the Marriage Rite in the *Book of Common Prayer*. If desired, these elements may be planned as a part of the reception after the wedding.

The wedding liturgy begins with a procession up the main aisle from the back of the church, preferably led by a crucifer (cross-bearer). The groom and male attendants may walk with the clergy, preceding the female attendants and bride, or they may process in as couples. Specific decisions for the Liturgy, such as how various persons will process and where they will sit, will be discussed prior to the wedding, and addressed once again at the Rehearsal.

Wedding Music

1. The selection of wedding music is a very important part of the wedding plans. The music is an integral part of the worship service and therefore should be chosen liturgically. The

choice of music for the wedding should be made in consultation with the Parish Organist and the Rector. Once your date has been approved, you should contact the Organist (*number below*).

2. A wide variety of music is available and acceptable, but likewise there are some types of music which have been traditionally deemed inappropriate for Christian worship. The best place to begin is with the authorized worship music found in the 1982 Hymnal. Other music for weddings must be either overtly religious in character, or that which has been found to be complimentary to services of Christian worship. Music that is too "popular", sentimental, operatic, or from a context inconsistent with the aims and principles of Christian worship will not be allowed. To this end, Wagner's "Bridal Chorus" from Lohengrin or Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" from A Midsummer Night's Dream are not to be used.

3. In judging whether music is actually sacred in character, please know that the Rector and the Organist will give the matter their most serious consideration, but the final decision must be the Rector's.

4. As noted above, the use of hymns found in the Episcopal Hymnal 1982 is strongly encouraged. Selecting favorite hymns to be sung by the congregation, at various points in the liturgy adds a distinctively personal note to the ceremony and is a splendid way of emphasizing the sacred rather than the secular character of the occasion. Hymns also serve to involve the congregation in the worship experience, so that those who come to the wedding are more than spectators.

5. Vocal music may occur before the actual ceremony; however, once the liturgy has begun, only such music as would be used in a regular church service should be used. [*Please note:* The Lord's Prayer is a distinctly congregational item in the marriage rite. Under no circumstances will it be sung as a solo as an alternative to the whole congregation saying or singing the prayer together.] If the bride and groom are considering a soloist, (instrumental or vocal) this aspect of the music must be discussed with the Rector and Organist BEFORE any final arrangements are made.

6. Instruments such as trumpet, oboe, flute, harp or string quartet are very acceptable but should first be cleared through the Rector and Organist.

7. A vested choir, though not often seen at weddings, adds much beauty and dignity to a liturgy. A bride and groom interested in having a choir sing at the wedding should discuss this with the Rector and Parish Organist early in the wedding planning process.

The Organist

The Historic 1860 Pilcher tracker organ is to be used only by the Grace Church Organist, or someone that the Rector and Organist have approved and authorized. You should contact the Organist as soon as your date has been approved to make arrangements for the music. The fee must be paid to him/her at least two weeks before the wedding; otherwise he/she may drop your date.

Decorations

When decorating the Church for a wedding, respect should be given for the Grace Church tradition of dignity and simplicity in the worship of God. The primary purpose for decorations within a church on any occasion is to give God glory. They are expressions of our joy and our thankfulness. Unfortunately they are all too often used to "glorify" the occasion or to attempt to impress the congregation. The guidelines which follow will assist brides and grooms in appropriate and tasteful decoration of the Grace Church.

1. Please remember that as in all matters of worship, the Rector is the final authority. This is true as well for the decorations in Grace Church. Check with the Rector well in advance of the date of the wedding and certainly before making any arrangements with a florist or wedding consultant.
2. The Altar Guild Directress should be contacted as soon as approval for the wedding date is given by the Rector. She may be contacted at the number listed below, or by calling the Church Office.
3. Two bouquets of flowers or greenery on the altar are all that should be put within the sanctuary. No artificial decorations or greenery may be used. Flower arrangements on the Altar should draw the attention of the view to the Altar Cross, not away from it. Generally they should not be higher than the Altar Cross, and should certainly not be in front of the Cross.

Only church-owned vases may be used on the Altar.

Please note: Floral arrangements, once placed on the Altar are to be left on the Altar. Once they are given over to God's worship, they should not be removed from the worship space.

4. Arrangements of flowers, plants, etc. in the chancel or nave are to be kept to a minimum. It would be inappropriate for anyone's wedding decorations to be bigger or fancier than those used to celebrate Easter or Christmas in the church. Most people agree that Grace Church is already so beautiful that the building does not require massive displays of flowers in order to "look good". Instead the flowers are used to draw the attention of the congregation to the places of important activity: i.e. the Altar, and the Chancel steps.
5. Candles are not be used in decorations because of obvious fire hazards. Only the Altar candles, 7-branch Candelabra, and the Paschal Candle may be lit. (*Please note the point made above concerning the inappropriateness of a "Unity Candle"*).
6. The Altar Guild is responsible for setting out and removing Altar flowers, festal linens, Altar Hangings, and candles. No one except an Altar Guild member is allowed behind the communion rail unless invited by the Rector or Altar Guild member.
7. No tacks, glue, tape, etc. may be used on church furniture, nor may Grace Church furniture be moved to accommodate decorations.

8. All decorations with the exception of the Altar flowers must be removed by 6:00 a.m. the morning following the ceremony. Naturally, the Bride and Groom are responsible for seeing that the Church is cleaned prior to the next service.

Wedding Photographs

Christian marriage is a sacrament and your wedding is a religious service. Therefore, NO pictures are to be taken during the ceremony. Please inform family and friends of this. Pictures may be taken during the processions, but only if the Photographer can do so unobtrusively and without distracting the congregation. Pictures may be taken before or after the ceremony. The Priest will be happy to "stage" photos after the Church has been cleared of worshipers. The Photographer is to identify him or herself to the Rector before the service.

When it is desired that a Wedding be video-taped, be advised that no additional lights may be used, and that only stationary cameras, at the rear of the Nave, or out of view of the congregation and in the vicinity of the organ, will be permitted.

Rehearsal

The Rector is in charge of the rehearsal, which will begin promptly at the appointed hour.

Significant liturgical and ceremonial matters should be discussed with the Rector during the pre-marital preparation process, so that careful thought can be given to each detail of the liturgy. The Rehearsal itself offers little time to try and make significant changes.

It is important that every member of the wedding party be present on time for the Rehearsal. It usually takes about one hour, so please be prompt. Delays in starting the Rehearsal may adversely impact the schedule of post-Rehearsal events. Please speak with members of your wedding party before hand to impress this point upon them.

Save any celebrating until after the rehearsal so everyone will get full benefit from the rehearsal and instruction. [It is most unseemly when bridal party members enter God's House for a Rehearsal, *or for a wedding!*], under the influence of alcohol.]

The organist will not normally attend the Rehearsal, except for guest organists who should do so, that musical cues can be practiced.

Wedding Day Protocol

To insure an orderly and reverent wedding service, it is forbidden that alcoholic beverages be served or consumed on church property prior to the start of the wedding service. Please remind all members of the wedding party of this.

No rice, confetti, flower petals or other items may be thrown in or around the church.

It has long been a custom of Grace Church to have the Church bell rung at the beginning and conclusion of the service. The bride and groom are invited to ask a stout-armed relative or friend to ring out this joyous peal.

Miscellaneous

Acolytes and crucifers (of any age over 10 years), if desired, may be selected by the bride and groom. They must come to the rehearsal for training, if they are not normally Grace Church acolytes.

Seating capacity of the church is approximately 300 – 350 adults.

Fees and expenses

Church Building: no fee

Clergy: Honorarium at the couple's discretion

Organist: \$ 300

Chalicebearer, lay reader, chorister, or acolyte: a hearty "thank-you" is enough.

Conclusion

We hope that these rules and suggestions, based as they are on Canon Law, simple good taste, theology, and experience, will answer any questions you and the planners of your wedding might have. If, however, you have questions not covered above, we will be glad to answer any other issues for you personally. Please address them to the Rector, Organist, or Altar Guild member, as most appropriate.

Our only goal in formulating these guidelines is to assure each and every Bride and Groom a beautiful, memorable, and holy wedding.

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