

## **WEDDING GUIDELINES**

**Grace and Holy Trinity Episcopal Church  
Richmond, Virginia  
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**LAST UPDATE MAY 2011**

**I. Introduction:** The Grace and Holy Trinity Church family congratulates you on your engagement to be married! The staff and members of the Church look forward to supporting you as you take this important step. Your wedding will be a highlight of your life together and we wish to assist you not only in making sure that the ceremony is a reflection of true Christian joy but also in establishing a firm foundation on which you can live life together after your wedding day.

These guidelines will answer many questions you might have concerning your wedding. However, before we move on to a discussion of pre-marital counseling and other important elements in wedding preparation and planning, it is good to reflect a moment on marriage itself. A wedding ceremony takes place on just one day, while a marriage is meant to last a lifetime.

Edward S. Gleason, in his book entitled “Redeeming Marriage” offers some words you might find especially meaningful:

*The Christian religion is rooted in Christ's love, whose continuing revelation comes to us through the presence and person of others. Nowhere is this clearer than in marriage, because marriage is the crucial and powerful revelation of the presence and person of Jesus Christ. To be married means to be Christ to one another, the Christ who loved us when we did not deserve it. His love is ours and ours alone in the love of our own beloved. It is the power and presence of the love of Christ, who loved with all his life, even to death, his own bride, the Church. This Christ dwells in our very midst in marriage.*

*For those whose wedding follows the service in the Book of Common Prayer, that liturgy provides a common understanding of marriage...The words of the liturgy are few in number, chosen with care, combined to form a vivid tapestry. It is a tapestry that illustrates what marriage is when it takes place in the name and presence and power of Our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*The love of Christ expressed in marriage is not based upon any service, function or act. It is not based on merit, or on good behavior, or on complete and total fulfillment of any code or agreement. It is based only on love, freely offered, freely received, undeserved. To be married means to be redeemed. To be married is to be loved only for who we are, not who we might wish to be or who we might seem to be. To be married means more than living together, more than going on vacations together, more than providing a series of goods and services for each other. To be married means to be Christ to one another.” (Redeeming Marriage, page 9-10, Cowley Publications, 1998).*

The marriage ceremony itself also helps us to understand and express what a Christian marriage is intended to be. The marriage service begins on page 423 of the Prayer Book. If you are receiving these instructions in the mail, a photocopy of the service should be enclosed. The Prayer Book is also available on-line via our web site ([www.ghtc.org](http://www.ghtc.org)). Your first “assignment” is to read through the service as a couple and to discuss its meaning. The words at the exchange of the vows and the exchange of rings merit particular attention.

You might also like to include the following prayer in your daily devotions as you approach your wedding day.

*O gracious and everliving God, you have created us male and female in your image: Look mercifully upon us as we prepare to exchange the marriage vows in your Church and assist us with your grace, that with true fidelity and steadfast love we may honor and keep the promises and vows we shall make; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (Adapted from the marriage service in the Book of Common Prayer, page 425.)*

**II. Practical Considerations:** The following guidelines have been prepared to answer many basic questions concerning weddings at Grace and Holy Trinity Church. Some are merely procedural while others reflect the canonical requirements of the Episcopal Church. As you plan your wedding ceremony, please bear in mind that a wedding places considerable demands upon this parish, its staff and its volunteer laypersons. We have developed these guidelines so that all involved may be treated fairly.

**A. Who May be Married at Grace and Holy Trinity Church:** It is the general policy of this Church that only active and current members of the parish (and their children) may be married here.

If you do not have a church home and are thinking about getting married we would love to talk with you. We recommend that you come and take part in Sunday worship and in the life of this community for several months to determine if this is where you would like to live out your faith following your wedding. You may follow this link ([http://ghtc.org/docs/Bo/How\\_Can\\_I\\_become\\_a\\_Member\\_of\\_the\\_Episcopal\\_Church.pdf](http://ghtc.org/docs/Bo/How_Can_I_become_a_Member_of_the_Episcopal_Church.pdf)) to learn about becoming a member. The Rev. Bo Millner and/or Carolyn Chilton would be happy to talk with you about membership. They may be reached at the church office (804-359-5628).

For pastoral reasons, the facilities of Grace and Holy Trinity Church might be made available to members of other congregations. All exceptions will be reviewed by the Rector in conjunction with the Junior and Senior Wardens of the Vestry.

**B. Holy Baptism:** In order to be married in the Episcopal Church, at least one of the parties must be a baptized Christian. The Episcopal Church recognizes all baptisms which have been done with water and in the name of the Holy Trinity.

**C. The Declaration of Intention:** The purpose of Christian marriage is stated in the "Declaration of Intention" from the canons of the Episcopal Church. This Declaration states "we do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer. 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 when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the Lord. 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." Both parties must affirm and sign this statement, no less than thirty days prior to the wedding.

The canons of the Episcopal Church state that "It shall be within the discretion of any Minister of this Church to decline to solemnize any marriage." Such action may be taken if the priest thinks that the couple does not intend to build a Christian marriage. For this reason counseling sessions must be completed and the celebrant should have given consent to perform the ceremony prior to any invitations being mailed.

**D. Premarital Counseling:** Counseling by the priest who will solemnize the marriage (or by someone approved by that priest) is required by canon and has been proven to be of great assistance to couples. Generally premarital counseling involves three to four sessions. There may be more sessions should the couple desire them or the counselor require them. In addition to discussing the purpose of Christian marriage and the role of faith in a couple's relationship, these sessions will help clarify what you expect from one another and give you the opportunity to express feelings, values and opinions. Areas of strength in the relationship will be identified and discussed. Also, the sessions will focus on issues identified as growth areas.

At the first session general questions will be answered and a premarital inventory called Prepare (or Prepare MC for previously married couples and those with children, or Prepare CC for cohabitating couples) is administered. Prepare is not a test but simply a series of questions designed to help you describe your relationship more completely. The questions cover 13 areas: Communication, religious orientation, family and friends, leisure activities, conflict resolution, financial management, realistic expectations, personality issues, children and parenting, sexual relationship, equalitarian roles, family adaptability, and family cohesion.

The inventory is tabulated by computer and this costs \$35. Please bring a check for that amount made out to Prepare/Enrich to the first counseling session.

It takes about two weeks for the results of the inventory to be sent by return mail. For this reason, the second session should be scheduled about two weeks after the first.

At the second session, the discussion will focus on the first eleven categories listed above. In the third session, issues concerning the degree of closeness in and the adaptability of your family of origin will be considered. More sessions may be scheduled as necessary or desired.

It is best for these sessions to be as close together as possible. This is the ideal but may not always be possible.

Please do not be overly anxious about these premarital counseling sessions. Usually couples find that counseling helps their marriage get off on the right foot and they enjoy learning more about their strengths and growth areas.

Usually, the priest who does your premarital counseling will be the celebrant at your wedding. There are times, however, when it is best for another priest of this Church to undertake the premarital counseling. The clergy of Grace and Holy Trinity will help you find someone to be your counselor. And at the end of the counseling sessions a letter should be sent from your counselor to the priest who will solemnize your wedding. The wedding cannot take place without this certification.

**E. Marriage of Divorced Persons:** The Episcopal Church does allow remarriage of divorced persons, but strict guidelines must be followed. This process takes time and divorced persons contemplating marriage must take this into account in making their plans. The counseling should be undertaken first and then a date for the wedding should be set.

It is necessary that the Bishop give consent to the remarriage and diocesan guidelines state that no date for marriage should be firmly set and none announced until consent has been received from the Bishop. The priest who will solemnize your marriage will write the Bishop and will inform you of the Bishop's decision. The letter to the Bishop must be mailed at least thirty days prior to the proposed date of the wedding. For obvious reasons, it is better to write the Bishop much sooner than thirty days prior to the proposed wedding date. In order to do this you must begin the premarital counseling process in a timely fashion.

You should bring your copy of the final divorce decree to the first counseling session, along with a copy for the Church's files. In addition to the premarital counseling process described above, the canons require that adequate continuing concern be shown for the previous spouse(s) and any children. Diocesan guidelines state that it is reasonable that at least one calendar year has elapsed since the date(s) of the final decree/s and the submission of the Petition. Exceptions are possible, but only if a minimum of 18 months' uninterrupted separation has occurred.

If any other minister of the Episcopal Church has declined to solemnize the proposed marriage this must be made known to the priest of this parish who is considering your

marriage. It is required that the minister who is contemplating your marriage consult with the one who declined to solemnize it.

In the case where either party has had a second divorce the application for the Bishop's consent shall not be made (a) unless one year has passed since the final divorce decree, (b) unless both parties to the proposed marriage have sought and received professional marriage counseling, and (c) until the counselor has reported to the minister the belief that the two persons asking for permission to marry are, in the opinion of the counselor, adequately prepared for a lifelong union.

This professional counseling shall be in addition to the counseling described above and performed by a priest of this parish (or someone appointed by a priest of this parish).

**F. The Marriage License:** Virginia law requires that you obtain a marriage license from the City of Richmond, 800 E. Marshal Street (John Marshall Bldg. room 101), or from any other county clerk's office in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The office in Richmond is open Monday through Fridays from 8:45 AM until 4:30 PM. Regardless of where you reside, the license must be purchased in Virginia. Licenses are issued immediately and are valid for 60 days. No blood test is required but both parties must be present. You will need your parents' full names, your Social Security numbers and \$30 in cash. If this is a second marriage you will need the date of your final decree. More information may be obtained by calling the clerk's office at 804-646-2942. This license may be delivered to the Church one week prior to the wedding, but no later than at the rehearsal.

**G. Costs:** Grace and Holy Trinity Church does not profit from weddings. However, fees are required to help offset expenses. The clergy do not charge a fee, although a thank-offering is customarily given to the officiant. This is traditionally offered by the groom on behalf of the couple. When an offering is made it may be given directly to the priest. Couples often ask what amount is appropriate and this is a matter of discretion. An amount between \$150-\$400 is appropriate, taking into account whether the person performing the wedding has also done your premarital counseling.

Please see the current listing of fees on the bottom of the wedding day questionnaire. If any of the fees present a legitimate hardship, please speak to the officiant so that other arrangements can be discussed. When exceptions are made to these guidelines to permit, for pastoral reasons, the weddings of people who are not currently members or children of members the fee is typically double that of the one for members and children.

**III. Planning for the Ceremony and the Reception:** After the counseling is finished the wedding ceremony itself may be planned. Typically, time is set aside to discuss this at the last counseling session. To avoid a stressful schedule during the month leading up to your wedding it is best that counseling be completed eight weeks prior to the ceremony. As noted, counseling should be completed prior to the mailing of invitations. By canon the celebrant is not able to give consent to perform the ceremony until the counseling is complete.

**A. Basic Questions:** Here are some basic questions to help you make choices about a number of aspects of the ceremony.

1. Which lessons would you like to use (refer to the Book of Common Prayer for suggested readings or to Appendix A). Choose an Old Testament lesson, a New Testament Lesson and a Gospel reading. You may also choose a psalm.
2. Would you like a homily? If so, who should offer it?

3. Will the service include Holy Communion? This is recommended at weddings but not required.
4. Do you want hymns or only instrumental music?
5. Who you would like to read lessons and offer the prayers after the exchange of vows? (It is recommended that you choose people to do these things and not have the celebrant do them.)
6. Who you would like to serve as an acolyte?
7. Who would you like to serve as chalice bearers if there is communion?

After you have discussed these things with the celebrant for your wedding, you can make an appointment with our organist and choirmaster to finalize decisions about the music. You will need to meet at least four to eight weeks prior to the wedding, so please take this into account when you are scheduling counseling sessions.

**B. Music:** After the completion of pre-marital counseling, the couple is to set an appointment with the organist of Grace & Holy Trinity Church to discuss music for the service. Music at a wedding follows the standards for music in the public worship of The Episcopal Church. Final approval of the music rests with the Rector (or with the Officiant of the service as approved by the Rector) following consultation with the organist. When the couple wishes to have a choir sing at the wedding, they may request that a choir from Grace & Holy Trinity Church participate. If available, this will be arranged by the choirmaster. Other instrumentalists and soloists may be used, provided our organist agrees and assists in the planning. All instrumentalists and soloists must be approved by our organist/choirmaster. There is an additional fee if other musicians are used for the service and will be accompanied by our organist/choirmaster. (Please see the fee schedule in Appendix B.)

It is expected that the current organist of this parish will provide music for all services, including weddings. If there are extenuating circumstances where the choice of an organist is concerned, this issue may be raised with the Rector (or other priest on staff) and with the organist. Anyone who plays the organ in this church must be approved by the organist. If an organist other than the organist of Grace & Holy Trinity is approved and used, the organist of Grace & Holy Trinity will still be offered the fee by the party engaging the outside organist. (This is in compliance with the Code of Ethics of the American Guild of Organists.) If our organist is not available, she will secure a substitute. Regardless of who offers the music at the service, final approval of the music rests with the Rector following consultation with the Church's organist. The organist at Grace and Holy Trinity Church functions as the liaison with outside musicians and a list of the music for the service should be submitted for approval to the Church through our organist/choirmaster.

**C. Altar Guild:** The Altar Guild will arrange the flowers, set the pew markers and mark the Bible for the readings. They will also do other decorating, such as the candelabra if being used. The Altar Guild is informed of all weddings by the Administrative Assistant, and advised of the duties they will need to perform.

**D. Wedding Coordinator** Many couples use a coordinator to help on the day of the wedding. This person is often a friend, family member or a member of Grace and Holy Trinity Church. While the clergy person officiating at the wedding is the "director" of the service and of the rehearsal, many couples find a coordinator helpful. A wedding coordinator can make sure the corsages are delivered and handed out. A coordinator can help with the seating of family members and assist the ushers. It is up to the couple to designate a wedding coordinator and if

you chose to do this, please be sure to inform the Officiant. The Officiant will also be happy to confer with the coordinator prior to the wedding and the rehearsal to answer any questions.

**E. A word about Visiting Clergy, Flowers, Candles, Photographs, etc.**

An Episcopal wedding is a service of public worship and follows the liturgy of the church. The marriage services authorized by the Episcopal Church are straightforward, and the details of the ceremony are arranged to reflect those qualities.

All weddings in this parish will be conducted by the Rector (or other priest on staff) or by someone approved by the Rector. The rehearsal will be conducted by the priest who will solemnize your marriage. A member of the staff, a friend or a Church volunteer may serve as wedding coordinator. Ministers of other parishes and of different denominations may participate and assist when requested by the couple and when invited by the Rector.

Flowers will be placed in two vases on the altar. These are ordered by the Administrative Assistant and arranged by the Altar Guild. You may consult with the Administrative Assistant on the colors or types of flowers. No other flowers are used in the Church, except those bouquets carried by the actual bridal party and simple pew markers. The church's requirements keep costs down for the bride and the bridegroom, and maintain the simple dignity of the Church. Flowers for the bride, ushers, etc. are your responsibility and are not handled by the Altar Guild.

The only candles necessary are office lights (the seven branch candelabra), the Paschal Candle and the Eucharistic candles. If you do not want to have the candelabra present, please let the Administrative Assistant know.

No photographs, with or without a flash, are allowed prior to or during the ceremony by members of the congregation. A photographer may be stationed in the balcony and take photographs during the ceremony, provided no flash is used. Usually photographs are taken after the service and it is suggested that the couple have a list drawn up of each picture that needs to be taken so that the session may be expedited. A video cassette recorder, without lights, may be stationed in the balcony to capture the ceremony.

**F. Wedding Day Form to be sent to arrange for opening of building, using the Parish Hall for a Reception, Security concerns etc.:**

After plans have been finalized, please contact our Parish House Manager, Judy Miller, either in person, by telephone (359-5628) or via email ([jmiller@ghtc.org](mailto:jmiller@ghtc.org)) to arrange for building use, the services of our sexton and other services. The necessary form (attached as appendix B) should be filled out and returned to the Administrative Assistant (Valerie Aussanaire). If desired, an appointment may be made with the Administrative Assistant or the Parish Manager to enlist their help in filling out the forms and to answer questions.

Also, please note, that we do not provide "security" to direct parking or to keep an eye on belongings during the wedding. All valuables should be removed from the building and locked in the trunk of your car during the ceremony.

We encourage the use our facilities for the reception, provided it does not conflict with other parish functions. An extra fee does apply and please speak with Judy Miller about this. As a general rule, no alcoholic refreshments are to be served at the Church. Exceptions to this policy for wedding receptions must conform to the parish guidelines. Please speak with the Officiant of your wedding about this. Rice, which is hazardous to the birds if ingested, may not be used. Bird seed is suggested as a substitute.

It is important that you work out all the details of building use with the Parish House Manager. We expect that you treat the facilities of the church as you would your own home. While our sexton will be engaged to clean up, groomsmen and bridesmaids should pick up after themselves. Food and all trash should be disposed of properly.

**G. Bulletin:** Grace and Holy Trinity will be glad to provide a bulletin for the service. We only ask that you do the proof reading. All materials for the bulletin should be sent to the

Administrative Assistant no later than 3 weeks before the service. Please see the attached sample bulletin (Appendix C) for a guide to format.

#### **IV. Time line:**

**12 to 9 months** from desired wedding date...contact the Rector and the Administrative Assistant. Set a date for ceremony and for premarital counseling. Where there is a divorce, more time may be necessary at this phase.

**9 to 2 months** prior to the ceremony...counseling undertaken.

**2 months** prior to ceremony...counseling should be completed; obtain marriage license; plan ceremony with counselor/celebrant and then meet with organist/choir master.

**1 month** prior to ceremony... file finalized plans for ceremony with Church. Return all forms to Administrative Assistant - Attn: Valerie Aussanaire (she will make a copy of appendix B for the Altar Guild) and send all fees to the Financial Secretary - Attn: Judy Miller.

#### **V. Contact Information:**

**The Rector** – The Rev. Bollin M. Millner, Jr. (359-5628 or email: [bmillner@ghtc.org](mailto:bmillner@ghtc.org)). Please make this your first call.

**The Administrative Assistant** - Mrs. Valerie I. Aussanaire (359-5628 ext. 23 or email: [vaussanaire@ghtc.org](mailto:vaussanaire@ghtc.org)) - Check with her to see if your desired wedding date is available on the church calendar.

**The Parish Manager** - Mrs. Judy Miller (359-5628 ext. 14 or email: [jmiller@ghtc.org](mailto:jmiller@ghtc.org)) - Check with her for building use, the services of our sexton and other services.

**The Organist** - Dr. Elizabeth Melcher Davis (359-5628 ext. 18 or email: [emelcherdavis@ghtc.org](mailto:emelcherdavis@ghtc.org)) - Check with her to discuss music for the service.

**Appendix A: Suggested readings – from the Book of Common Prayer, p. 426**

**The Lesson:**

Genesis 1:26-28 (Male and female he created them)

Genesis 2:4-9, 15-24 (A man cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh)

Song of Solomon 2:10-13; 8:6-7 (Many waters cannot quench love)

Tobit 8:5b-8 (*New English Bible*) (That she and I may grow old together)

*Between the Readings, a Psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said.*

*Appropriate Psalms are 67, 127, and 128.*

**The Epistle:**

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (Love is patient and kind)

Ephesians 3:14-19 (The Father from whom every family is named)

Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33 (Walk in love, as Christ loved us)

Colossians 3:12-17 (Love which binds everything together in harmony)

1 John 4:7-16 (Let us love one another for love is of God)

*If there is to be a Communion, a passage from the Gospel always concludes the Readings.*

**The Gospel:**

Matthew 5:1-10 (The Beatitudes)

Matthew 5:13-16 (You are the light . . . Let your light so shine)

Matthew 7:21, 24-29 (Like a wise man who built his house upon the rock)

Mark 10:6-9, 13-16 (They are no longer two but one)

John 15:9-12 (Love one another as I have loved you)



*There is a further charge of \$50 for each additional musician.*

**Appendix C: Bulletin Information Form**

**PLEASE FILL OUT ONLY IF G&HT IS DOING YOUR BULLETIN.  
INFO MUST BE RECEIVED AT LEAST 2 WEEKS BEFORE WEDDING AND  
BRIDE and/or GROOM MUST PROOF AT LEAST 1 WEEK BEFORE WEDDING**

Prelude: \_\_\_\_\_

Processional: \_\_\_\_\_

Old Testament Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Gradual Hymn: \_\_\_\_\_

New Testament Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Hymn: \_\_\_\_\_

The Gospel Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Wedding Homily: (yes or no) \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, clergy? \_\_\_\_\_

Recessional: \_\_\_\_\_

THE FOLLOWING IN ITALICS IS ONLY DONE IF YOU ARE HAVING COMMUNION

Hymn during altar preparation: \_\_\_\_\_

Communion Hymn: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like the altar flowers to be given in memory of any family?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Would you like Reception directions to be included on the back?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Would you like the couple's new address listed on the back?

\_\_\_\_\_

The Organist, Dr. Elizabeth Melcher Davis and either the Rev. Bo Millner, the Rev. Lauren Kuratko or the Rev. Michael Cadaret can assist you in picking out hymns and other music. If you are interested in having other musicians participate, you should speak with Dr. Melcher Davis. Additional fees are charged when other musicians are used.

**PLEASE INCLUDE A LIST OF THE WEDDING PARTY!**