

Emmanuel Church

Bel Air, Maryland



THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE POLICIES, PROCEDURES & FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Introduction

This pamphlet is intended to be a general introduction to the Sacrament of Marriage as it is practiced at Emmanuel Church. The policies and procedures contained herein describe our own local customs and may be different from others you have seen or experienced. They are the product of a careful reading of the Prayerbook rubrics, faithfulness to long-standing Anglican traditions, our understanding of our Mission as a congregation in this community and many years of practical experience.

In what follows specific, non-negotiable policy assumptions and procedures are printed in italics.

What is Christian Marriage?

The Book of Common Prayer defines Christian Marriage as “a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God. It is this last clause that makes marriage in the Church different from a secular ceremony in the courthouse or in a banquet hall. The Church acknowledges and affirms the fact that God has been an important part of the lives of each of the individuals who come to be married, and prays that God will continue to bless them as they begin a new life together. The prayers and rites of a Christian wedding all point to God’s presence as the primary focus of the service. In the Episcopal Church, we call marriage a sacrament, since the words and actions involved are an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace that are conferred on wife, husband and congregation during the service.

Who May be Married at Emmanuel Church?

The Church recognizes that the decision to make the lifelong commitment that marriage requires is a momentous one, and often affords the opportunity to return to Church after some time away from it, or to discover God's presence in their lives for the first time or in a new context. It is a significant part of the Mission of Emmanuel Church to be an open door for the Bel Air and Harford County community to discover and be inspired by the presence of God.

That said, *Emmanuel Church expects that couples preparing for marriage will attend Sunday services on a regular basis* (three out of every five Sundays, as a rule of thumb), participate in other church activities, and make a pledge of their financial support of the church. (Information about costs is found later in this pamphlet.) Couples who do not live in the Bel Air area are expected to find a suitable church community to join.

“The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage”

The liturgy for Holy Matrimony is found in *The Book of Common Prayer* beginning on page 423. Additional liturgies suitable for same sex marriages are currently in preparation. You will find that the order of service is familiar and traditional, on the one hand, yet flexible enough to meet a wide variety of needs, on the other hand. The opening monologue marvelously invokes God's presence and succinctly outlines the Church's theology of marriage. The vows, prayers and blessings express the full range of divine participation in human activity and the experience of marriage. In short, for Christians, everything that need be said or done with respect to marriage is included. *Therefore, no alternative vows or ceremonial actions are permitted other than those outlined by the Prayerbook or provided by recent canonical changes..* By the same token, nothing that is included in the service may be omitted unless specifically allowed by the rubrics.

Can Gay or Lesbian couples be married in the Church?

At the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, held in the Summer of 2015, canonical changes were made and other policies clarified specifically to allow the Clergy

of the Episcopal Church to Officiate at and Bless any marriage sanctioned by state laws. *We welcome same sex couples to all aspects the life and ministry of Emmanuel Church, including those seeking to be married.* Authorized liturgies are available for such services and can be found online at

<https://www.churchpublishing.org/products/iwillblessyouandyouwillbeablessing>

Timeline and Steps in Preparation for Marriage

Since Christian marriage is a lifelong covenant, considerable time and energy should be invested beforehand to insure that a couple are truly ready to make such a commitment. Some latitude is given to local clergy to make exceptions to this norm for pastoral reasons, but generally six months of preparation time is required.

It is the policy of The Episcopal Church that couples be prepared for the sacrament of marriage through a process of pre-marital counseling. Emmanuel Church will provide couples with information about counseling services that offer premarital preparation. Typically this involves an all day Saturday workshop with other couples, or four hours meeting with a qualified counselor.

Remarriage in the Church

The dramatic increase in the divorce rate over the last generation is nothing less than a tragedy, both for society and for the individuals involved. Jesus recognized this in his earthly ministry and spoke out against divorce with vigor and clarity. The experience of divorce is almost always painful to those who undergo it. The Episcopal Church recognizes that the aftermath of a divorce can be an opportunity to find God's grace, and churches are filled with people who have found strength and solace in God's promises of forgiveness and renewal and in the fellowship of the local congregation.

It is the policy of The Episcopal Church to permit divorced persons to be remarried in the Church, though under certain conditions and restrictions. Permission for such a remarriage

must be secured in writing from the Bishop of the Diocese – a process that can take as three or four months.

Documentation

Any planning process for a marriage at Emmanuel Church is considered tentative until the paperwork is complete. This includes five documents (beyond that mentioned above):

1. **Bride's Information Form:** including contact information, basic demographic data and certification that these policies have been read and will be abided by.
2. **Groom's Information Form:** including contact information, basic demographic data and certification that these policies have been read and will be abided by.
3. **Wedding Information Form:** including details about the elements of the service for use by the Altar Guild and musicians.
4. A "**Declaration of Intention**" required by the Canons of the Episcopal Church. This certifies that the couple understands the theology of marriage as held by the Episcopal Church and its nature as a lifelong commitment. This is normally completed and signed at the last premarital counseling session.
5. A valid **Marriage License** *obtained from the Harford County Courthouse*. Please note that there is a waiting period from the time the license is ordered and the time it may be picked up. Generally they are valid for six months from the time that they are ordered, and it is strongly recommended that a license be obtained several months in advance of the date planned.
6. (If deemed necessary) A **Letter of Agreement** between the church and the couple indicating their pledge to abide by the terms of this policy, particularly concerning financial arrangements and proper dress.

A **Marriage Register** will be filled out by the couple and the witnesses at the wedding rehearsal and signed by the priest at the conclusion of the service.

Are There Scheduling Limitations to Consider?

Due to long-standing commitments to other ministries and the time it takes to clean and make ready the church for Sunday worship, *Saturday weddings are scheduled to take place between the hours of Noon and 5:00 PM.* Ancient Christian practice holds that weddings should not take place during the season of Lent, which varies by several weeks from year to year before Easter. Prior commitments, scheduled diocesan activities, clergy vacation and/or sabbatical time may affect the availability of particular dates or times.

Generally speaking due to the press of other obligations and preparation for Sunday worship, the priest will not attend the Rehearsal Dinner or the Reception.

Can we be Married at a Different Venue?

“Destination Weddings” and the use of outside venues have become increasingly popular over the last several years. Unfortunately, they miss one of the primary purposes of being married in the church, which is the public invocation of God’s presence at such an important moment and the recognition of the sacramental nature of matrimony. *The Policy of Emmanuel Church is that its clergy are not available to officiate at weddings other than in the church.* Couples wishing to use a different venue should contact the Clerk of the Court’s office to see what options are available for having a service performed.

Witnesses and Bridal Party Members

Both age-old Christian tradition and current state law require at least two witnesses to be present at a marriage. *It is the policy of Emmanuel Church that at least one witness must be a baptized member of a Church.* Though normally the responsibility of the Best Man and the Maid or Matron of Honor, an additional person may be called upon to meet this requirement. Though additional ushers and bridesmaids may be included in a bridal party, great care should be taken not to detract from the religious nature of the

service, the actions and words of the participants and the attention of the congregation by including too many others or by elaborate or inappropriate costuming.

Holy Communion as Part of the Wedding Service

By both form and intention, the marriage liturgy is most appropriately completed by a celebration of the Holy Eucharist. The decision about including communion as a part of the service is made by the couple. *It is the policy of Emmanuel Church, where communion is included, to offer the sacrament to any of the guests present who wish to receive it, as well as the groom, bride and official witnesses. It is the policy of The Episcopal Church that any baptized person is welcome to receive Holy Communion at any Church service.* The communion elements in use at Emmanuel Church include wheat wafers for bread (with a gluten free alternative available) and ruby port for wine. The clergy are available to discuss the variety of ways in which Holy Communion is received.

Can We Have Friends or Family Members Participate?

The Prayerbook service includes several opportunities for family members or friends to take active roles in leading the service as readers of scripture lessons (up to three) or of the prayers (one). Since musical offerings are a part of our regular worship, there are opportunities as well for friends and family to participate as musicians or vocalists (though the selection of pieces must be approved by the priest).

What about young children as Flower Girls or Ring Bearers?

Couples may include young children in the wedding but are cautioned to consider carefully to what extent they may pose distractions to the bridal party and congregation. Emmanuel Church believes that “children behaving like children” is a good thing. Great care must be taken to see that their particular needs are addressed over the course of the service beyond their limited role. Any attempt to correct or discipline a child during worship will result in an admonishment from the priest.

Appropriate Dress

Though it should feel festive and joyful, please remember that a wedding in the Church is a solemn service conducted in the presence of God and in a place set aside and consecrated for holy use. Therefore the bride's dress and those of the bridesmaids should be suitable for a Church service. If necessary, a shawl or short jacket might be required for this portion of the festivities. Bridal veils are permitted during the procession, but the bride's face must be uncovered before the service can begin. *It is the policy of Emmanuel Church that no wedding shall take place with participants who are not properly dressed.*

How Many Guests can Emmanuel Church Hold?

Though Emmanuel Church can seat up to 250 people, including the use of folding chairs in the transept aisles, only about 150 seats have good sightlines to the altar, where the marriage vows are exchanged and where the nuptial blessing takes place. The Cathedral of the Incarnation in Baltimore regularly extends hospitality to Diocesan couples and clergy planning weddings that will involve larger crowds, with a limit of about 350 seats available there. Other venues may be contracted for larger congregations.

What about Flower Arrangements?

You are welcome to engage a florist of your own choosing to decorate the church. Please keep the following in mind: *No flowers may be placed on the altar (which is used exclusively for the consecration of bread and wine for communion). Flowers behind or near the altar must not exceed the height of the arms of the cross.* Florists will know how to create arrangements that can be taken from the church to the reception, if that is your wish.

Alternatively, you may work with Emmanuel's flower guild to produce arrangements that will then be used on Sunday morning for regular services. There is often a considerable cost savings with this option.

Flowers decorating the ends of the pews, or bow decorations, are difficult to do at Emmanuel, given the design of the pews and the candlestick fixtures -- to say nothing of detracting from the beauty of the sanctuary itself -- and are therefore not recommended.

No flower petals – either real or artificial – may be dropped on the aisle as part of the procession.

What are the Customs around Candles?

Church tradition has established appropriate configurations for the use of candles for particular services. Where Holy Communion is celebrated at a wedding, the configuration includes candles on tall stands flanking the altar and the cross. Where Holy Communion is not celebrated “office lights” are used, consisting of two smaller three-candle candelabra. During the Great 50 Days of Easter, the Paschal candle is also lit.

Emmanuel Church also has an array of old and fragile pew candles that can line the central aisle. These may be used for wedding services, though they greatly reduce the sightlines from many of the pews. Bridal parties wishing to use the pew candles must arrange for the purchase of them from the altar guild.

The use of so-called “Unity Candles” is a product of a 20th century marketing campaign and has no roots in Christian tradition. Their use is appropriately reserved for the reception. *No Unity Candle ceremony may be included in the wedding liturgy.*

Can We Use a Runner?

There is no liturgical purpose for the use of a decorative runner on the main aisle. Since most runners are made of flimsy polyethylene or light non-woven fabric, they are unsafe when laid down over the center aisle carpet (and more especially for shoes with sharp heels!). *It is the policy of Emmanuel Church that runners not be permitted.*

What about Music?

The Prayerbook service suggests that hymns or other musical offerings be included at several places during the service. Most couples choose to hire an organist to play from a more-or-less standard repertoire of wedding music. Emmanuel Church is blessed to have a talented organist in our employ for Sunday mornings, and we are happy to recommend him to you. Among his musical talents, he brings a knowledge of the instrument and a good sense of what sounds good played on it.

Other options are possible. These include (but are not limited to) flute and guitar duos, string ensembles, brass quintets, local bands, recorded music and bagpipes. Care should be taken that the music selected be appropriate for the Church setting (and note that many pieces that are associated with weddings in popular culture are not appropriate for church!).

The Canons of The Episcopal Church give final authority over music to the priest, and so all choices are subject to clergy approval.

Can We Move Any of the Church Furnishings?

Generally speaking the answer is “no.” Most of the pews and other items are permanently installed and bolted to floors or newels. Because the visual connection between the Baptismal Font and the Altar is symbolically important at Emmanuel Church, the Font may not be moved.

Is Emmanuel Church Handicapped Accessible?

Though both the sanctuary and the parish hall are wheelchair accessible, sadly, they do not meet the most current standards of the “Americans with Disabilities Act.” There is an accessible bathroom in the parish hall, though traveling from the church to the hall involves going outside and around the block. Please let us know if any of your guests have particular needs and we will do all that is possible to accommodate them.

Should we have a Service Bulletin?

The full text of the service is found in The Book of Common Prayer and the priest will announce the page numbers and cue congregational responses in course. The priest is happy to consult with the creation of a service bulletin, but it is the responsibility of the wedding party to print and distribute it.

What about Photography and Videography?

Most professional photographers know to consult with the priest before a wedding to go over any ground rules. Please be sure that yours does, *at least two weeks before the wedding. At Emmanuel Church the following rules obtain:*

- 1. Flash photographs are not permitted during the service itself, though a good photographer will have no trouble getting excellent natural light shots.*
- 2. Flash pictures may be taken by the photographer from the aisle during the procession and at the recession.*
- 3. No one else is permitted to take pictures from the central aisle of the church, or to obstruct anyone's view in any way.*
- 4. Videotaping of the service is permitted, but only from a single camera mounted on a tripod underneath or from the balcony. No additional lighting is permitted for the video camera. No microphones may be placed anywhere in the chancel, or in the sanctuary so as to distract or be a hazard to any guest.*
- 5. Neither photographers nor videographers are permitted in the chancel area or in either transept during the service.*
- 6. A notice will be printed in any service bulletin describing this policy. In addition, an announcement will be made by the priest at the beginning of the service asking guests to refrain from taking flash photographs during the service.*

The bridal party and family may use the church for up to 30 minutes following the service for portraits. However, it is important to note that the configuration of the

chancel and the background colors make family portraits challenging. It is recommended that the bridal party consult with the photographer about the possibility of setting up a backdrop at the reception. If you do decide to have photographs in the church after the service, please work up a list beforehand with the photographer so that all included parties can be assembled and dismissed quickly.

What about a Receiving Line?

The configuration of the Broadway tower and Main Street porch entryways do not lend themselves to creating a receiving line, especially with respect to the steps involved. It is recommended that any receiving line be saved for the reception hall. If Addicks Hall is being used for the reception a receiving line may be formed in the Slype.

Can We Throw Rice or Bird Seed or Blow Bubbles?

The sidewalks around Emmanuel Church are public thoroughfares. As good stewards of our community's property, nothing can be deposited on these sidewalks that could create a hazard for the public. This specifically includes rice, birdseed and bubble soap. No confetti or anything else that might be considered litter may be thrown.

How Much Will it Cost?

There is no charge for members who have maintained "good standing" at Emmanuel Church (as defined by the Prayerbook and referenced above) for the past calendar year, either for the use of the church or the time and services of the clergy. (There are charges for use of the Parish Hall and Kitchen, to be arranged separately.)

The time and resources required for Emmanuel Church to host a wedding cost about \$600.00. For couples who have joined the congregation in the process of preparing for their wedding, the church suggests a donation of \$600.00 minus the total of any contributions they have made to the congregation. (And please note that "pledged contributions" to a church are tax deductible, where sonations for weddings are not!) An accounting will be done 30 days in advance of the wedding.

The costs of an organist or other musicians are negotiated and paid in advance, separate from the contribution to the church.

The Final Caveats

These policies and procedures do not cover every conceivable issue with respect to the celebration of a marriage. Couples are welcome to inquire about possibilities, interests or concerns not covered here. As mentioned above, a significant part of the Mission of Emmanuel Church is symbolized by our open doors and our willingness to work with couples who may not have much experience with the Church.

The pastoral latitude left to priests working with couples preparing for marriage is broader than in many other circumstances. Policies and procedures outlined above can be modified or in some cases waved for good cause, though the earlier in the planning process such a request is made the easier it will be to consider.

That same latitude also allows a priest to determine that, *when relevant policies and procedures have not been followed faithfully, plans for a wedding in the church can no longer be sustained*. Sadly, weddings have been cancelled in the past due to non-compliance by the couple or their family members. This authority extends all the way to the date and time scheduled for the wedding.

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