

PLANNING YOUR WEDDING LITURGY

The Liturgy for The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage begins on page 422 in the Book of Common Prayer. At your third meeting with the clergy you will have closely studied the entire marriage liturgy. This is the form for all weddings in the Episcopal Church. While there is considerable room to "personalize" your wedding liturgy, the words and rubrics you find in the Book of Common Prayer are not subject to revision or alteration. Use this planner as a supplement to the Prayer Book in planning your service.

All weddings are considered public acts of worship, just like Sunday morning services. The whole world is invited, along with your invited guests. The point of the liturgy is to worship God. We do that by holding the two of you up before God in prayer as you exchange the solemn sacramental signs of Holy Matrimony.

The broad pattern of the liturgy is established. Within that broad pattern, however, are many points at which you make significant choices. Remember that YOU are the ministers of this sacramental act; you are leading us in worship. Therefore, such things as how you walk in, what music you choose, the Scripture passages you select, and whether we celebrate Eucharist are the ways YOU proclaim to the world who you believe God is calling you to be as a couple.

There are many so-called wedding "traditions" in our culture that are actually popular superstitions or inventions of the "wedding industry." Most such practices (such as "unity candles," throwing rice/birdseed/bubbles, sequestering the bride, self-composed vows, stretch limousines) are not part of our wedding practices and are prohibited or strongly discouraged. They add unnecessary complication, stress, and expense to the ceremony, but add no value, dignity, or meaning. The Episcopal wedding liturgy is beautiful as is and needs little adornment. We strongly encourage the KISS principle (keep it simple silly)!

Most importantly, planning your liturgy is an opportunity for the two of you to talk deeply with one another about your current faith lives, and your future faith life together. All decisions about the liturgy should be agreed between you. While the input of friends, family, and "wedding professionals" are welcome, it belongs only to the two of you (and not just the bride!!!) to craft this service with the assistance and supervision of the clergy.

This leaflet walks you step by step through the decisions the you need to make in planning your liturgy. The clergy will explain these more closely at the third preparation session. Take your time, and call your priest with any questions or confusions.

1. Will this be the Wedding Office only, or will it be a Wedding with the Holy Eucharist?

This decision affects many of your subsequent decisions. If Holy Eucharist is an important part of who you are as a couple, then by all means this is the way to go. If it is not a part of your spiritual life, or if it is likely to cause confusion or awkwardness for your guests, then the "office" alone is advisable.

**2. What music will be played in the 10-15 minutes before the ceremony?
(Our Director of Music will consult with you on all musical selections)**

3. How will the participants enter the Church?

- a. Instrumental music or congregational hymn?
- b. How will the attending party enter?
- c. How will the couple enter?
 - i. Separately or together?
 - ii. Escorted by father/mother, or other?

4. Which readings from Holy Scripture will be used?

On page 426 of the Prayer Book are suggested readings from Holy Scripture. You need not limit yourselves to these. If there are Scriptures that speak more to your hearts about you as a couple, consult the clergy about using those.

a. IF EUCHARIST WILL BE CELEBRATED:

You will need at least two readings, one of which must be from the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John).

If you choose three readings, one should be from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament epistles, and one from the Gospels. A psalm or hymn may be used between each reading.

The Gospel will be read by the priest. You will need to appoint a reader or readers for the other reading(s)

b. IF EUCHARIST IS NOT CELEBRATED:

You will need at least two readings. A psalm or hymn may be used between the readings. You will need to appoint a reader or readers for the readings.

Some couples wish to have non-scriptural readings/poems used in their liturgy. Such readings may not be used in place of Holy Scripture. It is appropriate to share these with the priest, who may choose to incorporate them in his/her homily.

5. The Marriage

YOU MUST MEMORIZE YOUR VOWS! These are found on page 427 in the Prayer Book. You may, if you wish, use the form on page 436.

You may, but are not required, to memorize the ring exchange. Please make sure someone has the rings!!!!

No other form of vows may be used. If the couple wish to compose some kind of additional statement of promises, these may be incorporated into the homily at the discretion of the priest.

6. How will the Prayers of the People be offered?

Immediately after you are declared married, we pray. If the Eucharist is not to be celebrated, the priest will begin with the Lord's Prayer, then the prayers on page 429 will commence. If Eucharist is to be celebrated, the prayers on 429 begin after the declaration of marriage.

The Prayers are offered by persons you appoint. There are many ways this can be done:

- a. Each prayer is offered by different persons in the congregation
- b. Each prayer is offered by a parent or grandparent
- c. Two persons are appointed to offer the prayers from the pulpit and lectern
- d. Members of the wedding party take turns offering the prayers.

7. The Nuptial Blessing?

There are three prayers of blessing on pages 430-31. The third prayer is always prayed. You need to select which of the first two you wish prayed.

8. The Peace

The couple greet one another for the first time as spouses with the kiss of peace. It is appropriate here for the couple then to greet their attendants and their new in-laws.

- a) If Eucharist is not to be celebrated, the service concludes here with the procession out.
- b) If Eucharist is to be celebrated, the bride and groom will move to the back of the church and carry forth the wine and bread for communion. A celebratory congregational hymn is appropriate here.

9. The Eucharist (if desired)

- a) Choose a Eucharistic Prayer (pages 361, 367, 369, 372)
- b) The couple receives communion first, then may assist the priest in giving communion to the remaining congregation. Or, the couple may be seated and other persons appointed may help with communion. Communion is always shared with the entire congregation.
- c) Instrumental or choral music is appropriate during communion.

10. Departing into the World

The priest blesses the congregation. The couple departs with either instrumental music or a congregational hymn. The rest of the wedding party also departs. Depending on plans for reception, photography, etc., and depending upon weather, a receiving line may or may not be formed.

As the date of the wedding nears, a parish Wedding Coordinator will be assigned to you. This person will help you with many of the practical matters of preparing for and executing the liturgy. She will be on hand to assist the clergy and wedding party on the day of the service. Her phone number should be made available to your florist, photographer, and any other wedding professional you are employing.

A week or two before the wedding, the couple, the priest, and whatever one or two other persons may be deemed absolutely necessary, will meet for a private rehearsal. This ensures that everyone is on the same page as far as the service is concerned. The priest alone will conduct the formal rehearsal.

A word about "Wedding Consultants." Some couples now engage wedding consultants to assist them with planning and executing their wedding plans. While such consultants are welcome to be present for the rehearsal and ceremony, they need to understand clearly that the priest and parish wedding coordinator have the final word on all ceremonial questions. Wedding consultants who fail to observe this protocol will be instructed to leave the church.

A word about decorum. Weddings in our culture are often occasions for the enthusiastic consumption of intoxicants. Saint Peter's clergy do not presume to control or comment upon the behavior of wedding participants beyond church walls. However, all participants at the rehearsal and in the wedding liturgy will comport themselves with sobriety and dignity. Any person who, in the opinion of the priest, is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or who does not comport him/herself appropriately for public worship, will be dismissed from the service. If either member of the couple is in any way impaired, the liturgy will be cancelled on the spot. The authority and discretion of the clergy in this regard is absolute. In the event of such dismissal or cancellation, the clergy and parish will bear no responsibility for any financial costs or embarrassment suffered.