

Marriage Guidelines at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Altoona, Pa

“Christian Marriage is a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God. In the Episcopal Church it is required that one, at least, of the parties must be baptized Christians; that the ceremony be attested by at least two witnesses; and that the marriage conform to the laws of the State and the canons of this Church.”

-- The Book of Common Prayer

St. Luke's Episcopal Church frequently receives inquiries regarding proposed weddings from a couple, of which neither individual is a member of this parish. The Blessing and Celebration of a Marriage is the sacramental rite conducted within the Episcopal Church; this ceremony is a public recognition of the bond of Christian marriage which both individuals pledge to each other. The gathered congregation also makes a pledge – to support the newly-married couple in their marriage.

A wedding ceremony is the public celebration of the commitments which a couple makes to each other – that they will grow together in faith and love. Although the ceremony may seem to the high point of the couple's relationship, the actual marriage – the life-long union of the couple – requires careful preparation, prayerful communication, and hard work throughout the years! The Church is more interested in the marriage than in the planning for the ceremony, believing that God not only blesses the union, but is also intimately involved in the ongoing relationship.

Before deciding if a couple may be married at St. Luke's, therefore, the couple is required to meet with the Rector, who by Canon Law (Title I, Canon 18 & 19) “must ascertain whether a couple understand the viewpoint of the church regarding the legal, spiritual, and physical meaning of marriage.” Additionally, both parties must sign a Declaration of Intent and, if either party has had a previous marriage dissolved, he/she must show evidence of such to the priest.

An additional factor in the decision whether to consider a ceremony at St. Luke's is if either one or both parties has a clear, recent history of a meaningful relationship to a Christian denomination and a specific Christian parish. We do recognize that circumstances may preclude the participation in the life of a parish – after moving to a new town or after the dissolution of a marriage, for example. But we want assurance and substantiation that such participation has been a genuine and recent part of the life of at least one member of the couple to be married. Unless the couple resides outside the Altoona area, ***the couple is expected to worship at St. Luke's during the time of their marriage preparation.***

The final decision about whether or not a couple may be married at St. Luke's Episcopal Church resides with the Rector, who after three or more pre-marital counseling sessions will make such a decision.

Planning Your Wedding
St. Luke's Episcopal Church
(814) 942-1372

Definition of Christian Marriage:

“Christian Marriage is a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God. In the Episcopal Church it is required that one, at least, of the parties must be baptized Christians; that the ceremony be attested by at least two witnesses; and that the marriage conform to the laws of the State and the canons of this Church.”

-- The Book of Common Prayer

Title I, Canon 18 and 19 states:

That every Minister of the Episcopal Church must ascertain whether a couple understands the viewpoint of the church regarding the legal, spiritual, and physical meaning of marriage.

That both parties sign a *Declaration of Intention*.

That anyone who has had a previous marriage dissolved must show evidence of such to the Minister.

Basic Guidelines:

Both parties make Christian promises and sign a document stating that they intend to establish a Christian home, to make their union a permanent one, to seek God's help in upholding the nature and purpose of Holy Matrimony. A person whose religious beliefs are incompatible with these promises cannot be asked, in fairness, to make them. A person who takes such oaths without the intention of keeping them may jeopardize the entire basis of a marriage from the beginning.

Both parties must be of legal age or have full approval of their respective families, and must not be related within the prohibited degree of kinship.

Weddings are not normally solemnized during Lent or Holy Week.

Commitment as to time and date, and whether or not the wedding may be preformed, may be made only by the clergy of the church.

At least one party is a baptized Christian.

Consultation with Clergy:

At least 12 weeks before the wedding date, the couple shall make an appointment with the Rector.

- If either party has been previously married, the waiting period may be longer as the clergy must, as indicated above, request permission of the Bishop in writing. St. Luke's Rector must also view the legal documents pertaining to the divorce(s).

In a series of three or more sessions, the couple and the Rector will become better acquainted, will discuss issues relating to the marriage, and will arrange procedural details of the wedding.

Note: at the first session, the couple will be asked to take a survey regarding compatibility and readiness for marriage. This instrument will take about 40 minutes to complete. The cost of correction and analysis of the questionnaire is **\$30**, a cost borne by the couple.

Sometimes complicated personal histories or family relationships present great challenges to the couple as they prepare for married life. The Rector, who is a priest and pastor, but not a psychologist or therapist, may require the couple to seek advice from a marriage counselor *before assenting* to perform the marriage at St. Luke's.

Form of Worship:

The form of the wedding service is found in The Book of Common Prayer and is a traditional service based upon texts and rituals that go back even beyond the time of Jesus himself. We welcome you to our customs and traditions because we believe that they can offer you dignity, solemn joy, and historic continuity which will give your marriage a firm foundation in Christian faith and practice. We do not alter our form of service. If you decide that you wish something more informal, you would probably be pleased with a service elsewhere, and the clergy will gladly assist with a referral to other churches where you can find what you seek.

The Episcopal Church does not incorporate Unity Candles into its form of worship. We encourage you to consider lighting a Unity Candle at the reception.

Especially if both the bride and groom are active members of the Episcopal Church, the celebration of Holy Communion is an appropriate part of the marriage ceremony. If this is not possible, it is hoped that the couple will receive communion before or very soon after the marriage service, because Holy Communion is the central act of Christian worship.

Music

All weddings must conform to the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Episcopal Church. This applies to music, as well as to the liturgy used. Music should express the Word of God. Secular, popular, or folk music is inappropriate for the liturgy of the marriage service and is more appropriately performed at the reception. *All music selections must be approved one month in advance of the marriage service by the Organist and the Rector.*

Solo singers or instrumentalists may sing or play selections as a prelude or offertory, only with the advanced approval of the Organist and/or Rector.

The St. Luke's Organist may be asked to play for the wedding, with at least 6-weeks' notice.

Flower, Photos, and Miscellaneous:

No photos that distract the worshippers may be taken during the ceremony. “Available light” photographs or video recordings may be taken from the rear of the church or from a position approved by the celebrant at the rehearsal. Pictures may be taken immediately before or after the service; any parts of the ceremony can be “restaged” so that you can make a photographic record.

Flowers appropriate in the Episcopal Church are two vases of flowers at the altar. Artificial flowers or additional bouquets are not permitted.

Please ask guests to refrain from throwing rice or bird seed, both of which present safety hazards.

The use of the parish house for receptions is subject to the approval of the Rector; the fee for such use will be negotiated and will include an hourly fee for a sexton. *The serving of alcoholic beverages is not permitted.*

The couple is responsible for designating someone to care for young children during the wedding rehearsal and the post-wedding picture-taking times.

Legal Requirements:

Call the Blair County Prothonotary’s Office (693-3080) for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s legal fees and requirements.

Please bring your marriage license to the Parish Office at least 5 days before your wedding so that the parish staff may prepare all the paper work. You have 60 days to be married from the day you receive your license.

Fees: *(in addition to the survey fee above)*

For couples not canonically resident in the parish, there is a fee of \$200, which includes up to 3 hours of work by a sexton. Additional sexton’s fees may apply.

Couples who are not in any way associated with St. Luke's Episcopal Church are asked to pay a stipend of \$100 to “*St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Rector’s Discretionary Fund.*”

The Organist receives a stipend for all weddings for which s/he plays – the amount is to be negotiated between the couple and the organist.

When the couple does not have its own Wedding Coordinator, the parish Wedding Coordinator receives a fee of \$50 for assistance at the wedding rehearsal and on the day of the wedding.