

SOME SIMPLE & BASIC GROUND RULES
for the
CELEBRATION of WEDDINGS at ST. MATTHEW'S

Since Our Lord's appearance at a wedding in Cana of Galilee (The Gospel of John, chapter 2), weddings have been part of the Christian Tradition and Story. Since September 1904, people have been celebrating their weddings in or through St. Matthew's. Over the years, we have learned some things. This is written as a basic Guideline, to answer some continual and basic questions.

TWO THINGS to REMEMBER

1. Most wedding ceremonies really are *simple*. Most of the dynamics underneath are *not*.
2. The wedding ceremony is relatively *brief*. Most wedding ceremonies last twenty to forty minutes. With variations on music, etc., the ceremony can last longer. The preparation, for those twenty to forty minutes, *takes much much much longer*.

BASIC UNDERSTANDING

St. Matthew's is an Episcopal Church, a part of the Anglican Communion, a part of the Family of the Christian Church. To get married at St. Matthew's is NOT to get married in a building; to seek to be married at St. Matthew's is to seek to be married within that Community and Family of People. (The building is holy and special because of the People who are St. Matthew's, not vice versa. In seeking to get married at St. Matthew's, one is also seeking to be part of that Family and People.) To seek to get married at St. Matthew's is to seek to ask the blessing of God upon your relationship, and an invitation and commitment to Our Lord to be part of that relationship. A "Declaration of Intention" stating, among other things, this understanding of marriage is signed by the couple at the time they schedule their first pre-marital counseling.

BASIC NATIONAL CANONS (LAWS) REGARDING WEDDINGS

As part of the Episcopal Church, St. Matthew's is part of a national Church and therefore bound by National Church Laws (canons). Regarding Weddings, these are:

1. At least one of the couple must be a baptized Christian and there must be at least two witnesses at the ceremony. (In theory, you can have a small wedding, with only 5 people present. This rarely happens.)
2. There must be **at least 30 day's** notice given to the Church prior to the wedding.
3. There must be pre-marital counseling and instruction.

PRACTICAL ADDITIONS ST. MATTHEW'S MAKES to the ABOVE CANONS:

1. Recall the "Basic Understanding" above. If you are a member of another Church, St. Matthew's will want to know why you want to get married in *this* Church.
2. If there have been previous marriage or marriages, and those marriages ended in divorce, there must be **at least 60 days' notice** given. [*See below.*]

Note: There are exceptions to these laws, but they are limited.

Pre-Marital Counseling

The purpose of the Pre-Marital Counseling and Instruction is to shift the discussion from WEDDING (which, see above, is basically simple) to MARRIAGE. In most instances, pre-marital counseling involves 4 to 6 sessions, but often longer, of 2 or so hours each. Most couples have found this all helpful. Other variations on pre-marital counseling do occur, and the counseling can be done by others, or non-Church agencies.

SCHEDULING of WEDDINGS

1. By long-standing Christian tradition, weddings are NOT celebrated in the Church Season of Lent.
2. For practical consideration, weddings are NOT celebrated at St. Matthew's in the 3 days before Christmas; or on the Day of the Golden Days Parade in July.
3. For practical considerations, two weddings are NOT scheduled for the same day. There are sometimes *rare* exceptions to this.

CAN WE GET MARRIED OUTDOORS, etc?

Yes. There is no requirement that the ceremony must be celebrated within the Church Structure.

CAN OTHER CLERGY DO THE WEDDING, or BE PART of IT?

St. Matthew's is an Episcopal Church and the wedding ceremony is an Episcopal ceremony. As such then, Episcopal clergy *must* officiate. Clergy from other churches or denominations can assist or participate in the Ceremony, *with permission of the Rector*.

HOW MANY PEOPLE CAN COME?

There are 26 pews within the Church; and each pew holds 6 to 8 people. Most of the time it is *impractical* to add further seating in the Church.

WHAT about MUSIC?

Music is often a part of the Ceremony. If requested, St. Matthew's can supply the names and telephone numbers of organists. The fee for the St. Matthew's Organist is \$100, this is because she comes to the rehearsal as well. It is **the couple's responsibility** to contact the organists, or other musicians, and to make the arrangements. It is almost always best if the musicians are also present at the rehearsal. The organist can often help with the selections of music, if desired. St. Matthew's assumes, *in a broad sense*, that the music is appropriate for a ceremony within a Church.

WHAT about DECORATIONS?

1. Pew bows, etc. are allowed if they are hung from the pew. No tape nor tacks are allowed.
2. NO DECORATIONS are to be placed on the altar without permission of the priest or deacon celebrating the service.
3. **THIS IS AN ABSOLUTE STATEMENT: The furnishings within the Church – baptismal font, lectern, prayer desk, icon, banners, plaques, candles, etc. – are NOT TO BE TOUCHED OR MOVED WITHOUT FIRST ASKING THE RECTOR.**

WHAT about PHOTOGRAPHY?

By Church Tradition, ***no pictures are allowed during the actual ceremony.*** Generally, this means that photographs are allowed through the entrance of the Bride, and then again at the Recessional. An exception is made for one or two video cameras, provided they are stationary. Photographic lighting (giant Hollywood lights, etc.) is not allowed during the ceremony. *The priest or deacon celebrating the service is responsible for the ceremony, and the Church, not the photographer.* Most of the professional photographers in Fairbanks are well experienced with weddings and wedding customs at St. Matthew's. When pictures are being taken before or after the ceremony, no one is allowed within the Church Sanctuary (the area beyond the altar rail, around the altar) *without first seeking* permission of the celebrant.

THE USE of ALCOHOL

1. The serving or drinking of alcohol is NOT permitted on Church grounds.
2. **THIS IS AN ABSOLUTE STATEMENT: All members of the Wedding Party must be sober for the Ceremony to be celebrated. Otherwise, it will not happen.**

WHAT about FLOWERS?

Flowers are often a part of a wedding. If you wish to have flowers in the altar vases, and those flowers remain as part of the Church's Sunday worship (with a notice in the Sunday bulletin), contact the Church Office Administrator.

WHAT about COMMUNION, EUCHARIST, the MASS?

Within the Episcopal Church, Holy Communion is an optional part of the wedding ceremony. It generally adds about 20 minutes to the service. When thinking, and praying about it, remember that Holy Communion should bring people together, and not divide them.

BIRDSEED, GRASS SEED, WALNUTS, etc?

Any throwing of anything is to occur *outside* of the Church. Practically, and in recent years, this activity seems to have shifted to the Reception, and has rarely occurred at the Church.

CAN WE USE THE CHURCH PARISH HALL for THE RECEPTION?

The Church Parish Hall can be used for Receptions, providing scheduling permits. Additional fees apply. Note that alcohol *is not* permitted.

WHAT about CLEANING UP?

It is the couple's responsibility to arrange to remove all personal belongings and wedding decorations *immediately following* the Ceremony. The actual cleaning of the church will be taken care of by the Church Sexton

"WE WERE MARRIED BY THE JUDGE, BUT NOW WE'D LIKE TO GET MARRIED AT THE CHURCH"

This often occurs. The Ceremony can range from a brief 5 minute private ceremony to a complete, giant "church wedding". There is some re-wording of the traditional vows and ceremony. Most of the above guidelines still apply.

SO HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

It costs nothing to walk in the front door of St. Matthew's; it costs nothing to come to Church on Sunday morning; it costs nothing to be baptized here; it costs nothing to take Holy Communion; it costs nothing to be buried from within the Church. Freely have we all received from God, freely do we give.

St. Matthew's (see above "Basic Understanding") is a Community, a Family; and one can't "rent" a Family. The only fee associated with the Church is the Deposit, which is paid to the sexton for cleaning up after your ceremony (\$100). The couple hires and pays the organist or musicians directly.

One may wish to make a contribution to the Church Operating Fund, to help with the expenses. This amount is determined by your own Heart. (The rector did read an essay once that suggested the Biblical Tithe (10%) should be suggested to couples – i.e., 10% of the total cost of the wedding.)

FINALLY.....

Weddings are wonderful and holy and exciting and God-filled occasions, and we are thankful you are considering St. Matthew's as the place and Family within which to celebrate your love. The best way to begin is to come to Church on a Sunday morning, and begin to get to know the Family that calls St. Matthew's Home.