

St. John's Episcopal Church

Wedding

Guidelines & Policies



St. John's Episcopal Church
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Decatur, Alabama 35601

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An Invitation

All those whose marriages are celebrated and blessed at St. John's Episcopal Church become part of our church's rich history. As you begin preparations for your wedding, these guidelines and policies will help in your planning as you conform with the canons, customs, and special traditions of the Episcopal Church.

I. Rector's Welcome

Congratulations on your upcoming union and thank you for considering St. John's for the location for your wedding! As a priest, one of my greatest joys is being able to spend time with couples as we discuss and prepare for their marriage, and I very much look forward to traveling down this path together.

While weddings are one of the most joyful events that take place in our lives, they can also be one of the most stressful. There are many different stresses and expectations that are placed on wedding ceremonies, and my job will be to keep you focused on what is truly important: that you are making solemn vows to God and to each other in the witness of the Church and community. At the end of the day, whether it rains or shines, whether you cry or not, whether you stumble through your words or not, that is what this is all about.

My hope is that this understanding, along with these guidelines, and our sessions together, will help to alleviate most of the anxiety associated with your wedding. In the upcoming months, we will work together to make sure that the celebration and blessing of your marriage will be an opportunity to rejoice with family and friends, to set a holy framework into which your married life will begin, and most importantly, to glorify God as we gather in God's holy name.

Please take time to review these policies carefully, as I suspect that they will answer many of your questions. Afterwards, please contact me directly to set up an initial meeting for the three of us. At that meeting and through future conversations, we will take whatever steps are necessary to prepare for your wedding and the life that follows it.

In Christ's love,

The Rev. Chase D. Ackerman
Rector

A Prayer before Marriage

O God, our Heavenly Father, we pray for thy grace and blessings as we take upon ourselves the sacred vows of Christian marriage. Let our love for each other be pure and enduring; give us understanding of each other's minds and needs; help us to share our joys and sorrows; and keep us ever faithful to our promise to live together according to thy will till death shall separate us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

II. What is Marriage & Why Get Married at St. John's?

The Episcopal Church considers marriage to be a sacrament. That means that the holiness of a marriage is not only experienced by the two people getting married but is shared within the life of a parish family. Since the vows between two people are to be lived out in the community of faith, they become a celebration of the entire church—even though only some of the parishioners may be invited to the wedding. Because of that, marriages at St. John's are only celebrated and blessed for members of the parish and for individuals who are directly related to parishioners. If you are not a member but would like to celebrate your marriage here, we warmly invite you to join our church. After regularly contributing to the church's ongoing ministry for at least six months, the Rector would be happy to discuss the possibility of having your wedding here. Occasionally, St. John's offers hospitality to members of other Episcopal congregations who for certain reasons cannot get married in their home parishes. Please ask the home Rector of either party being married to contact the Rector of St. John's directly to ask about these arrangements.

A service of the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage is first and foremost an occasion of worship. All worship services, including weddings, are performed at the direction of the Rector. All weddings at St. John's will be officiated by a member of the clergy of this parish. Other clergy may be invited to participate but only at the invitation of the Rector. Also, all marriages must conform to the canons of the church, and the Rector or other parish clergy officiating at your wedding will help you make sure that happens.

Ultimately, when a bride or groom stands in the chancel of St. John's and makes their promises to each other, they do so in front of family, friends, fellow parishioners, and God. At St. John's and in the Episcopal Church, we believe that there is no better way to begin a life of marriage than by grounding that union in prayer and seeking God's blessing of that lifelong partnership. Every time we plan a wedding, we do so with this central fact in mind: we gather at St. John's to thank God for the gifts of love, marriage, and family and to ask for God's protection and support in the years ahead.

III. First Steps

Discussions regarding a wedding begin with a conference between a member of the clergy and the two individuals wishing to be married. The Rector will work with you to schedule a date for that initial conference.

A date for your wedding will not be established until this initial conference with the Rector or another member of the parish clergy has taken place. Except in cases of extenuating circumstances, weddings are not held during the seasons of Advent (the four weeks before Christmas) and Lent (the seven weeks before Easter), during the first weekend after Easter Day, or on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve or Day, or New Year's Eve or Day. After the wedding date is determined at this initial conference, the date must be confirmed with the Financial Administrator and entered on the church's master calendar of events. Then, you may share that date with family and friends.

During the initial conference, the clergyperson will explain the role of premarital counseling and will set a date for your next meeting.

After the initial conference with the clergyperson, the couple being married should contact the St. John's Wedding Coordinator, who assists the officiating clergyperson with the wedding. The Wedding Coordinator is present at the rehearsal and the ceremony. The Wedding Coordinator also schedules when the church can be opened and available for the delivery and arranging of flowers. In addition, the Wedding Coordinator opens the church three hours prior to the beginning of the wedding, assists with the procession into the church, and will make sure members of the wedding party are escorted out of the church after the marriage.

IV. Premarital Counseling

Generally speaking, the clergyperson who is officiating at your wedding will be responsible for conducting the premarital counseling that must take place before the wedding. Those conversations are held between the clergyperson and the two individuals being married. They are confidential and are intended to explore the nature of marriage, individual and family backgrounds, the practicalities of married life, as well as planning the service.

The extent of premarital counseling necessary for each couple is at the discretion of the officiating clergy person. For most couples, three one-hour sessions are sufficient.

If there are additional questions that require more in-depth conversation (like a previous marriage), more sessions may be needed. Also, the clergy person may require that you seek outside counseling to prepare for your marriage.

There is no fee for premarital counseling, but couples should recognize the commitment that the clergy person is making by offering to lead those sessions. Please honor that commitment by being prompt and attentive.

V. The Rehearsal

Unless alternate arrangements are made, rehearsals take place at St. John's the evening before the wedding at a time agreed to by the officiating clergy person. The purpose of a rehearsal is to ensure that all participants are comfortable with the next day's service so that they might enjoy and worship with joyful rather than anxious hearts.

The officiating clergy person will lead the rehearsal and will be assisted by the Wedding Coordinator. Other wedding consultants or directors are only permitted to observe the rehearsal. The entire wedding party, including all those participating in the wedding service (i.e. readers, ushers, etc.) are required to attend the rehearsal. Other family members and friends are welcome to attend, but they are asked to sit quietly in the church while the rehearsal takes place.

For planning purposes, the rehearsal should take no longer than one hour, however the rehearsal will not begin until all are present. Please encourage your participants to be prompt. Any rehearsal dinner planned should be scheduled with this time requirement in mind.

At the start of the rehearsal, the couple will present their completed, but UNSIGNED and UN-NOTARIZED, Alabama Marriage Certificate (<https://dph1.adph.state.al.us/marriage>) to the clergy person. The certificate will be signed and notarized after the completion of the wedding service.

VI. The Wedding

A. The Service

At St. John's, all services of the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage follow the liturgy of the *Book of Common Prayer* and others as authorized by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. We do not allow couples to write their own vows. There are some options contained within the service (e.g. readings), and the clergy person officiating at your wedding will discuss those with you.

Holy Eucharist, also known as Holy Communion, is often included in a wedding. It further expresses that the union between the two individuals being married is an image of the union between Christ and the Church. If you would like Communion at your wedding, please discuss it with the clergy person officiating at the service.

For a fee, the church will provide service leaflets if you request them. If you would like to have your own service leaflets printed, they must be approved by the Rector before being printed and must follow the service as outlined in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Assisting clergy may be invited to take part in the service but only at the invitation of the Rector.

If nursery care is needed for the wedding, please contact the Financial Administrator in the Church Office. Child safety policies require that at least two nursery workers be present at all times if nursery care is provided and there is a charge for nursery workers.

B. The Wedding Party

The wedding party consists of the two individuals being married and their attendants. The chancel of our church is relatively small, so please keep that in mind when choosing the number of attendants.

There are two locations available for the wedding party to prepare prior to the service: the Library and the Choir Room. Please ask someone to check both dressing areas after the service to make sure that all personal belongings have been collected. The use of a laundry basket is recommended. If items are left behind, they will be placed in the parish's lost and found and may be collected during normal business hours.

The church's facilities will be opened by the Wedding Coordinator three hours prior to the wedding. That time should be used for getting dressed and taking pictures.

Alcohol is **NOT** permitted in any areas of the church before, during, or after the rehearsal and/or the wedding service without express permission from the Rector. **Any member of the wedding party** who appears to the officiating clergy person to have been drinking alcohol prior to the wedding service will not be allowed to take part in the service.

C. Other Participants

Ring Bearers and Flower Girls—Children must be mature enough to receive and follow spoken instructions from the officiating clergy person in order to participate in the service. It is strongly recommended that children under six not be included. Miniature brides and grooms are not allowed.

Acolytes—One or three acolytes will serve at your wedding, depending on the structure of the service. Please speak with the officiating clergy person about selecting acolytes.

Readers—Couples are encouraged to invite one or two persons to read some of the lessons in the service. The officiating clergy person will help you choose the lessons and give advice on readers.

Program Attendants and Ushers—Although unnecessary, the use of up to two program attendants and up to four ushers other than those participating as wedding attendants is allowed. Please discuss this with the Wedding Coordinator.

D. Music

The Organist of the church will play for the wedding and will guide and approve the selection of music. Any music used at the wedding must be of the same high musical standards as that on a Sunday morning. Hymns sung by the congregation are a tradition in the marriage liturgy. The couple should contact the Organist to set up an appointment in order to select music. It is the responsibility of the individuals being married to schedule this appointment.

The Organist of St. John's is scheduled to play all weddings. If the family would like another organist to play, the guest musician must be approved by the Rector and Organist. In this case, the church Organist's fee is still required in addition to any arrangements made with the visiting organist. If the organist is out of town, a substitute organist will be secured by the church Organist in consultation with the Rector.

If the couple would like for additional instrumentalists (such as trumpeters, flutists, or violinists) to play for the service, they must discuss this with the Organist, who approves such a selection. An additional fee can be negotiated with the Organist for the extra rehearsal time necessary for this. The Parish Choir may be available upon request for an additional fee. Vocal soloists are not used at St. John's.

E. Flowers & Other Decorations

It is the responsibility of the individuals being married or their representative to see that the florist complies with these guidelines. It is strongly recommended that this section of the Guidelines & Policies be copied and made available to the florist for review.

Florists' Guidelines

Florists must contact the Wedding Coordinator to schedule their work at the church. This is very important as it is necessary to coordinate the delivery and arranging of the flowers when the church can be opened and available.

In all worship services in the Episcopal Church, including weddings, the Altar Cross should be the visual focal point. Flowers may not obscure the Cross, nor may floral arrangements extend any higher than the Cross (37-1/2" high from the bottom of the container) if placed on the reredos (the ledge behind the altar). Flowers that are too tall will be trimmed without concern for the arrangements.

Flowers may **NOT** be placed directly on the altar, although we usually refer to the main flower arrangements as "altar flowers." Flowers should be placed on the reredos (the ledge behind the altar) and/or on the pedestals (owned by the church) which can be fitted to either side of the altar. In those cases, arrangements on the pedestals may be taller than the cross, but they should not detract from the cross itself, which is always the visual center of our worship. Also, there may be no free-standing arrangements in the chancel, nave, or sanctuary.

Arrangements may be placed in the narthex and on the front doors. Pew markers may be used to reserve family members' pews but may not obscure the view of the Altar Cross. (Other pew markers must be discussed with the Flower Guild Chairperson.) Only fresh, live flowers and greenery may be used in decorating the Church. Artificial flowers are not allowed.

Florists may use the vases provided by St. John's or plastic containers that will not show. St. John's vases should not be removed from the church but rather fitted with a liner.

Florists are welcome to use the St. John's Flower Guild room but should clean up afterwards. Oasis and other supplies in the Flower Guild room are for use by the St. John's Flower Guild only and may not be used by the florist.

The florist or the wedding party's representative should remove all flowers (i.e. pew markers, door wreaths) from the church after the ceremony except the altar flowers. Altar flowers become the property of the church and will be left for the Sunday service in celebration of the marriage. Flowers, other than the altar flowers, are to be removed from the premises. A memorial or honorarium for the altar flowers will be listed in the Sunday bulletin if you give this information to the church office.

Candles

The two Eucharistic candles will remain on the altar if there is to be Holy Communion during the wedding service, otherwise they will be removed. In addition, the seven branch candelabra or the six single candlesticks, which belong to St. John's, may be placed by the Altar Guild on the reredos along with the flower arrangements.

Use of freestanding candelabra is NOT permitted, nor is the use of a unity candle.

F. Photography

Photographs may be taken in the church or on the grounds beginning three hours before the start of the service. Photographs in the church must be finished one hour prior to the service in order for guests to be seated.

Photographs may be taken in the church for up to 30 minutes after the service has ended. At that time, the church will be closed.

One professional photographer is allowed to take photographs during the service, but must remain at the rear of the sanctuary and may not use a flash. One flash photograph is allowed as the couple processes out at the conclusion of the ceremony. The photographer will be asked to leave the ceremony by the celebrating clergy person if they cause a distraction or do not adhere to these regulations.

Video recording of the service may be done only by a professional videographer who has the ability to set up a fixed camera out of the sight of the congregation and who can record the service remotely, with natural lighting, and without interrupting the service in any way. Videographers must be approved by the Rector before the service takes place.

VII. The Reception

Scheduling and Preparing for a Reception

If you would like to have your reception at St. John's, please notify the Financial Administrator when you call to place your wedding date on the church's master calendar. At that time, she will also reserve the Parish Hall for your reception. Receptions must be scheduled so as to end by 8:00 p.m. at the latest.

All plans for a church reception must be discussed in a meeting with the Financial Administrator, Wedding Coordinator, the couple being married, caterer, and florist. It is the couple being married's responsibility to set up this meeting.

Catering Service Guidelines

The caterer must provide all dishes, silver, linens, tables, etc. The church provides only the room. The caterer is responsible for clearing the room of St. John's furniture before the reception and for returning that furniture back to its original set-up when the reception is over. The caterer may use the refrigerators in the kitchen if space is available. The caterer may NOT use the dishwasher, coffee makers, or stove. They may use the warming oven to keep food warm until it is served. The caterer is to clean up the kitchen and parish hall and remove all items used for the reception when the reception is over. Neither St. John's nor its staff is responsible for the property of the wedding party or the caterer.

Miscellaneous

In accordance with the policies of the Diocese of Alabama, any request to serve alcoholic beverages at a reception in the Parish Hall must be approved by the Rector. No alcohol is to be served or consumed on St. John's property prior to the wedding service. There are no exceptions. Likewise, smoking is not permitted in any of the buildings or on the premises.

For reasons of safety and the maintenance of the church grounds, we require that bird seed be thrown rather than rice or confetti and that is only done outdoors. Bubbles may also be used. Fireworks, including sparklers, are prohibited.

No food or beverages are allowed in the Chapel or Nave at any time.

IX. Fees

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage is a sacrament performed in the life of the parish. Because of that, weddings are only held for parishioners and individuals who are directly related to parishioners. There is no charge for the service itself, but there are fees associated with the extra costs incurred by the parish for weddings.

Wedding Fees

Wedding Coordinator (Payable to the Coordinator)_____	\$200
Organist (Payable to the Organist)_____	\$300
<i>fee for extra rehearsal w/additional musicians can be negotiated with the organist</i>	
Parish Choir (If used – Payable to St. John’s)_____	\$200
Acolytes (Payable to St. John’s)_____	\$25 each
Clean-Up Crew (Payable to St. John’s)_____	\$150
Bulletin Printing Cost (If printed by the church – Payable to St. John’s)_____	\$100

Additional Reception Fees (if Held at St. John’s)

Parish Hall/Kitchen Fee (Payable to St. John’s)	\$250
Wedding Coordinator (Payable to the Coordinator)_____	\$100
Clean-Up Crew (Payable to St. John’s)_____	\$150

Nursery Fees (if Used)

A nursery can be arranged with the Financial Administrator for a fee of \$25 an hour per nursery worker. A minimum of two caregivers is required at all times, and a minimum of two hours must be paid to each caregiver. If needed, please let the Financial Administrator know several weeks in advance so that arrangements can be made.

Clergy Fees

While there is no fee or charge for a priest at St. John’s to counsel a couple or to perform the marriage ceremony, a traditional monetary gift either as an honorarium or a gift to the priest’s discretionary fund may be offered.

All wedding fees should be paid by the Monday before the wedding. Please use separate envelopes that are clearly marked indicating for whom each check is intended. These may be left in the church office with the Financial Administrator during normal church office hours.

Does the church require a bulletin? *No. The creation of a bulletin or program is the decision of the couple. There is no expectation that one be created. However, the officiating clergy person must approve any bulletin or program before one is printed. If you would like St. John's to print your bulletin, please speak with the officiating clergy person. There is a fee for this.*

How many people can be seated in St. John's? *Approximately 225 people can be comfortably seated.*

Is the phone answered at St. John's on the weekend? *No, the phones are available for outgoing local calls only. The bride and groom should arrive with all important phone numbers (florist, photographer, caterer, drivers, etc.) available in case they are needed.*

XII. Timeline for the Wedding Day

For your convenience, here is a timeline for your wedding day that encompasses all of the information contained in these guidelines.

Florist's Schedule to be approved in Advance by the Wedding Coordinator

Three Hours before the Service—Wedding Party May Arrive

Three Hours before the Service—Photography May Begin in Church

One Hour before the Service—Photography MUST Cease in Church

Forty-Five Minutes before the Service—Ushers Seat Guests

Immediately after the Service—Photography May Resume in Church

Thirty Minutes after the Service—Photography Must Cease

Forty-Five Minutes after the Service—All Wedding Party & Guests MUST Leave the premises unless the reception is being held at St. John's

