



The Gulf Atlantic Diocese Policy for the Sacrament of Christian Marriage

The Sacrament of Christian Marriage

The Anglican Church in North America and the Gulf Atlantic Diocese hereby affirm our Lord's teaching that the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is in its nature a union permanent and lifelong of one man and one woman.

The Book of Common Prayer calls Christian marriage a "solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God." The purpose of marriage is for the creation (if it may be) and nurture of new life and for mutual support and enjoyment. The covenant relationship between husbands and wives is to mirror the same kind of loyal, unswerving and faithful love which God has for His people, as revealed by Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christian marriage is an exclusive and permanent relationship modeled after Christ's total self-giving to us. By solemnizing a marriage in the Church the man and woman are making a "faith statement" which says that they desire to enter such a covenant relationship before God and in the presence of God's people. On the wedding day they will stand before the altar and commit themselves to each other for the rest of their lives, stating their intention to live their married life within the community of the Church. At this service they are inviting God's life and love to be at the center of their marriage and have come into the Church to ask a priest to bless their commitment and to have the congregation gathered to uphold them in prayer. Their wedding day will now mark the beginning of a Christian marriage, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ whose grace and love can also sustain them in their life together.

Marriage in the Anglican Church

In order to be married in the Anglican Church in the Gulf Atlantic Diocese, an Anglican priest, duly licensed in the diocese must preside at the wedding. The priest is the agent of both the State and the Church. As such, the priest is bound by the laws of the State as well as *The Book of Common Prayer* and the canon law. These obligations require the priest to ascertain the couples' rights to enter into marriage and to determine that both of the parties are freely consenting to marry. Also, the priest must ensure that they understand the nature, meaning, and purpose of Holy Matrimony and that they are aware that they are entering into a lifelong covenant of physical and spiritual union.

In all cases a priest must decline to preside at any marriage that he or she believes should not take place.

Wedding Eligibility

Because matrimony is a sacrament, joining a couple as one body in Christ our Lord, we do not marry Christians and non-Christians. Those wishing to be married will have been communicants in good standing at the parish for a minimum of six months before beginning the discernment process. A communicant in good standing is one who is regular in worship attendance and active in the life of the parish. Both parties shall be baptized. Any exception to this policy requires the permission of the Bishop.

The Discernment Process

Discernment may begin with a licensed diocesan priest as early as one year, but no later than four months, prior to a proposed wedding date. The priest may conduct the discernment process in a manner of his or her choosing, but shall include the following elements:

Following the discernment process, there shall be a minimum thirty (30) days notice of intention to marry unless waived for weighty reasons, in which case the Bishop shall be notified immediately and in writing.

The Clergy shall provide counsel to both parties on Holy Matrimony with respect to theological and social implications and responsibilities.

The Clergy shall ascertain that the man and woman, parties to the marriage, have a valid marriage license.

As marriage is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman in which the two become one flesh, it is both an ordinance of Creation, affirmed as such by our Lord, and commended by Saint Paul as a sign of the mystical union between Christ and His Church (Matthew 19:3-9; Ephesians 5:22-32). Therefore, the failure of a marriage is always a tragedy. Scripture acknowledges our fallen nature and does provide guidance to know when a marriage may be declared a nullity or dissolved and allows the possibility of a subsequent marriage in certain circumstances (Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7).

When a divorced person seeks permission to remarry, the Clergy must ascertain the pertinent facts concerning a declaration of nullity or termination of marriage; and in the absence of a declaration of nullity, if either party has been married previously and the marriage ended in divorce, a copy of the *final divorce decree* and a *Petition To The Bishop For Consent To Solemnize A Marriage* (see appendix A) must be submitted to the bishop for approval of the new marriage at least three months prior to the proposed wedding date. If either party is divorced, Church canons require that the divorce has been final for a minimum of one year prior to the application for marriage.

No Clergy knowingly, after due inquiry, shall solemnize any marriage if they have unresolved concerns regarding the following impediments:

- (a) Consanguinity and affinity as defined in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer;
- (b) Mistaken identity;
- (c) Absence of the capacity for free and intelligent choice;
- (d) Bigamy, evidence of sexual perversion or conviction of a sexually related crime;
- (e) Fraud, coercion, abuse or duress.

Any declarations of nullity may only be granted by a Bishop with jurisdiction and shall be based upon Scriptural principles including the foregoing impediments to marriage.

The Clergy shall require the parties to sign the following declaration:

“We, A. B. and C. D., desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer. We believe it is for the purpose of the procreation (if it may be) of children, and their spiritual and physical nurture, for mutual fellowship, encouragement, and understanding, and for the safeguarding and benefit of society, and we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God’s help thereto. (See appendix B, Marriage Declaration of Intention)

In all cases marriages shall be solemnized according to the forms contained in an authorized Book of Common Prayer, or other rite authorized by the Bishop.

The Clergy shall record in the Parish register the name, age, and residence of each party. Such record shall be signed by the member of the Clergy, the married parties, and at least two witnesses.

If the Bishop’s permission to solemnize the marriage was required, in addition to recording the marriage in the Parish register as described above, record the marriage using the form provided for that eventuality and send it to the Bishop. *(See appendix C, Record of Marriage when the Bishop’s Consent is required)*