

# GHTC

## Wedding Guidelines

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Grace & Holy Trinity Church

*an Episcopal parish on Monroe Park*



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# I. Introduction

The Grace & Holy Trinity Church (GHTC) family congratulates you on your engagement to be married! The staff and members of the Church look forward to supporting you as you take this important step. Your wedding will be a highlight of your life together and we wish to assist you not only in making sure that the ceremony is a reflection of true Christian joy but also in establishing a firm foundation on which you can live life together after your wedding day.

These guidelines will answer many questions you might have concerning your wedding. However, before we move on to a discussion of pre-marital counseling and other important elements in wedding preparation and planning, it is good to reflect a moment on marriage itself. A wedding ceremony takes place on just one day, while a marriage is meant to last a lifetime.

The marriage ceremony itself helps us to understand and express what a Christian marriage is intended to be. The marriage service begins on page 423 of *The Book of Common Prayer*. You can read it online at this link: <https://www.bcponline.org/>

**The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2 is also authorized for use in the Diocese of Virginia and is inclusive of same gender/all couples.** You can read this service at this link: [https://www.churchpublishing.org/contentassets/104caa0c8b8741819c171f642de395a3/the\\_celebration\\_and\\_blessing\\_of\\_a\\_marriage\\_2.pdf](https://www.churchpublishing.org/contentassets/104caa0c8b8741819c171f642de395a3/the_celebration_and_blessing_of_a_marriage_2.pdf)

Please read through the appropriate service as a couple and discuss its meaning. The words at the exchange of the vows and the exchange of rings merit particular attention.

# II. Practical Considerations

The following guidelines have been prepared to answer many basic questions concerning weddings at GHTC. Some are merely procedural while others reflect the canonical requirements of the Episcopal Church. As you plan your wedding ceremony, please bear in mind that a wedding places considerable demands upon this parish, its staff and its volunteer laypersons. We have developed these guidelines so that all involved may be treated fairly.

**A. Who May be Married at GHTC:** It is the general policy of this Church that only active and current members of the parish (and their children) may be married here.

If you do not have a church home and are thinking about getting married, we would love to talk with you. We recommend that you come and take part in Sunday worship and in the life of this community for several months to determine if this is where you would like to live out your faith following your wedding. You may go to [ghtc.org](http://ghtc.org) to learn about becoming a member.

The clergy would be happy to talk with you about membership. They may be reached at the church office (804) 359-5628.

For pastoral reasons, the facilities of GHTC might be made available to members of other congregations. All exceptions will be reviewed by the Rector in conjunction with the Junior and Senior Wardens of the Vestry.

**B. Holy Baptism:** In order to be married in the Episcopal Church, at least one of the parties must be a baptized Christian. The Episcopal Church recognizes all baptisms which have been done with water and in the name of the Holy Trinity.

**C. The Declaration of Intention:** The purpose of Christian marriage is stated in the “Declaration of Intention” from the canons of the Episcopal Church. This Declaration states “we 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 that the union of husband and wife, in heart, body, and mind, is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and when it is God’s will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the Lord. 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.” There is also a Declaration of Intention authorized in the Diocese of Virginia which is appropriate for same gender couples. It reads, “We... understand the teaching of the church that God’s purpose for our marriage is for our mutual joy, for the help and comfort we will give to each other in prosperity and adversity, and, when it is God’s will, for the gift and heritage of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of God. We also understand that our marriage is to be unconditional, mutual, exclusive, faithful, and lifelong; and we engage to make the utmost effort to accept these gifts and fulfill these duties, with the help of God and the support of our community.”

Both parties must affirm and sign a Declaration of Intent, no less than 30 days prior to the wedding. The canons of the Episcopal Church state that “It shall be within the discretion of any Minister of this Church to decline to solemnize any marriage.” Such action may be taken if the priest thinks that the couple does not intend to build a Christian marriage. For this reason, counseling sessions must be completed and the celebrant should have given consent to perform the ceremony prior to any invitations being mailed.

**D. Premarital Counseling:** Counseling by the priest who will solemnize the marriage (or by someone approved by that priest) is required by canon and has been proven to be of great assistance to couples. Generally premarital counseling involves two to three sessions. There may be more sessions should the couple desire them or the counselor require them. In addition to discussing the purpose of Christian marriage and the role of faith in a couple’s relationship, these sessions will help clarify what you expect from one another and give you the opportunity to express feelings, values and opinions. Areas of strength in the relationship will be identified and discussed. Also, the sessions will focus on issues identified as growth areas.

At GHTC the Prepare inventory (or Prepare MC for previously married couples and those with children, or Prepare CC for cohabitating couples) is taken online. Prepare is not a test but simply a series of questions designed to help you describe your relationship more completely. The questions cover 13 areas: Communication, religious orientation, family and friends, leisure activities, conflict resolution, financial management, realistic expectations, personality issues, children and parenting, sexual relationship, equalitarian roles, family adaptability, and family cohesion.

The inventory is tabulated by computer and this costs \$35. You pay this fee online in order to take the inventory. You will receive an e-mail invitation from the priest you are working with, with details on how to log in and take the inventory.

At the first face to face session, the discussion will focus on the first eleven categories listed above. In the next session, issues concerning the degree of closeness in and the adaptability of your family of origin will be considered. More sessions may be scheduled as necessary or desired.

It is best for these sessions to be as close together as possible. This is the ideal but may not always be possible.

Usually couples find that counseling helps their marriage get off on the right foot and they enjoy learning more about their strengths and growth areas.

The priest who does your premarital counseling typically will be the celebrant at your wedding. There are times, however, when it is best for another priest of this Church or professional counselor to undertake the premarital counseling. The clergy of Grace & Holy Trinity will help you find someone to be your counselor. And at the end of the counseling sessions a letter should be sent from your counselor to the priest who will solemnize your wedding. The wedding cannot take place without this certification.

**E. Marriage of Divorced Persons:** The Episcopal Church does allow remarriage of divorced persons, but strict guidelines must be followed. This process takes time and divorced persons contemplating marriage must take this into account in making their plans. The counseling should be undertaken first and then a date for the wedding should be set.

It is necessary that the Bishop give consent to the remarriage and diocesan guidelines state that no date for marriage should be firmly set and none announced until consent has been received from the Bishop. The priest who will solemnize your marriage will write the Bishop and will inform you of the Bishop's decision. The letter to the Bishop must be mailed at least thirty days prior to the proposed date of the wedding. For obvious reasons, it is better to write the Bishop much sooner than thirty days prior to the proposed wedding date. In order to do this you must begin the premarital counseling process in a timely fashion.

You should bring your copy of the final divorce decree to the first counseling session, along with a copy for the Church's files. In addition to the premarital counseling process described above, the canons require that adequate continuing concern be shown for the previous spouse(s) and any children. Diocesan guidelines state that it is reasonable that at least one calendar year has elapsed since the date(s) of the final decree/s and the submission of the Petition. Exceptions are possible, but only if a minimum of 18 months' uninterrupted separation has occurred.

If any other minister of the Episcopal Church has declined to solemnize the proposed marriage this must be made known to the priest of this parish who is considering your marriage. It is required that the minister who is contemplating your marriage consult with the one who declined to solemnize it.

In the case where either party has had a second divorce the application for the Bishop's consent shall not be made (a) unless one year has passed since the final divorce decree, (b) unless both parties to the proposed marriage have sought and received professional marriage counseling, and (c) until the counselor has reported to the minister the belief that the two persons asking for permission to marry are, in the opinion of the counselor, adequately prepared for a lifelong union.

This professional counseling shall be in addition to the counseling described above and performed by a priest of this parish (or someone appointed by a priest of this parish).

**F. The Marriage License:** Virginia law requires that you obtain a marriage license from the City of Richmond, 800 E. Marshal Street (John Marshall Bldg. Room 101), or from any other county clerk's office in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The office in Richmond is open Monday through Fridays from 8:45 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. Regardless of where you reside, the license must be purchased in Virginia. Licenses are issued immediately and are valid for 60 days. No blood test is required but both parties must be present. You will need your parents' full names, your Social Security numbers and \$30 in cash. If this is a second marriage you will need the date of your final decree. More information may be obtained by calling the clerk's office at (804) 646-2942. This license may be delivered to the Church one week prior to the wedding, but no later than at the rehearsal.

**G. Costs:** GHTC does not profit from weddings. However, fees are required to help offset expenses. The clergy do not charge a fee, although a thank-offering is customarily given to the officiant. This is traditionally offered by the groom on behalf of the couple. When an offering is made it may be given directly to the priest. Couples often ask what amount is appropriate and this is a matter of discretion. An amount between \$150-\$400 is appropriate, taking into account whether the person performing the wedding has also done your premarital counseling.

Please see the current listing of fees on page 10, section V, or at the bottom of the wedding day questionnaire on page 12. If any of the fees present a legitimate hardship, please speak to the officiant so that other arrangements can be discussed. When exceptions are made to these guidelines to permit, for pastoral reasons, the weddings of people who are not currently members or children of members the fee is typically double that of the one for members and children.

## III. Planning for the Ceremony & the Reception



After the counseling is finished the wedding ceremony itself may be planned. Typically, time is set aside to discuss this at the last counseling session. To avoid a stressful schedule during the month leading up to your wedding it is best that counseling be completed eight weeks prior to the ceremony. As noted, counseling should be completed prior to the mailing of invitations. By canon the celebrant is not able to give consent to perform the ceremony until the counseling is complete.

**A. Basic Questions:** Here are some basic questions to help you make choices about a number of aspects of the ceremony.

1. Which lessons would you like to use (*refer to the Book of Common Prayer for suggested readings or to Appendix A*). Choose an Old Testament lesson, a New Testament Lesson and a Gospel reading. You may also choose a psalm.
2. Would you like a homily? If so, who should offer it?
3. Will the service include Holy Communion? This is recommended at weddings but not required.
4. Do you want hymns or only instrumental music?
5. Who you would like to read lessons and offer the prayers after the exchange of vows? (It is recommended that you choose people to do these things and not have the celebrant do them.)
6. Who you would like to serve as an acolyte?
7. Who would you like to serve as chalice bearers if there is communion?

After you have discussed these things with the celebrant for your wedding, you can make an appointment with our organist and choirmaster to finalize decisions about the music. You will need to meet at least four to eight weeks prior to the wedding, so please take this into account when you are scheduling counseling sessions.

**B. Music:** After the completion of pre-marital counseling, the couple is to set an appointment with the organist of GHTC to discuss music for the service. Music at a wedding follows the standards for music in the public worship of The Episcopal Church. Final approval of the music rests with the Rector (or with the Officiant of the service as approved by the Rector) following consultation with the organist. When the couple wishes to have a choir sing at the wedding, they may request that a choir from GHTC participate. If available, this will be arranged by the choirmaster. Other instrumentalists and soloists may be used, provided our organist agrees and assists in the planning. All instrumentalists and soloists must be approved by our organist/choirmaster. There is an additional fee if other musicians are used for the service and will be accompanied by our organist/choirmaster. (*Please see the fees section on page 10 or at the bottom of the Wedding Day Questionnaire on page 12 in Appendix B.*)

It is expected that the current organist of this parish will provide music for all services, including weddings. If there are extenuating circumstances where the choice of an organist is concerned, this issue may be raised with the Rector (or other priest on staff) and with the organist. Anyone who plays the organ in this church must be approved by the organist. If an organist other than the organist of Grace & Holy Trinity is approved and used, the organist of GHTC will still be offered the fee by the party engaging the outside organist. (This is in compliance with the Code of Ethics of the American Guild of Organists.) If our organist is not available, she will secure a substitute. Regardless of who offers the music at the service, final approval of the music rests with the Rector following consultation with the Church's organist. The organist at GHTC functions as the liaison with outside musicians and a list of the music for the service should be submitted for approval to the Church through our organist/choirmaster.

**C. Altar Guild:** The Altar Guild will arrange the flowers, set the pew markers and mark the Bible for the readings. Six pew markers are available for use. The Altar Guild is informed of all weddings by the Administrative Assistant, and advised of the duties they will need to perform. In order to insure good communication, the Office & Facilities Manager will email a copy of "Appendix B" to the Altar Guild as soon as he receives it (*see page 9*).

**D. Wedding Coordinator:** Many couples use a coordinator to help on the day of the wedding. This person is often a friend, family member or a member of GHTC. While the clergy person officiating at the wedding is the “director” of the service and of the rehearsal, many couples find a coordinator helpful. A wedding coordinator can make sure the corsages are delivered and handed out. A coordinator can help with the seating of family members and assist the ushers. It is up to the couple to designate a wedding coordinator and if you chose to do this, please be sure to inform the Officiant. The Officiant will also be happy to confer with the coordinator prior to the wedding and the rehearsal to answer any questions.

**E. A word about Visiting Clergy, Flowers, Candles, Photographs, etc.:** An Episcopal wedding is a service of public worship and follows the liturgy of the church. The marriage services authorized by the Episcopal Church are straightforward, and the details of the ceremony are arranged to reflect those qualities.

All weddings in this parish will be conducted by the Rector (or other priest on staff) or by someone approved by the Rector. The rehearsal will be conducted by the priest who will solemnize your marriage. A member of the staff, a friend or a Church volunteer may serve as wedding coordinator. Ministers of other parishes and of different denominations may participate and assist when requested by the couple and when invited by the Rector.

Flowers will be placed in two vases to the right and to the left of the altar. These are ordered by the Administrative Assistant and arranged by the Altar Guild. You may consult by telephone (804) 359-5628 with the Office & Facilities Manager, on the colors of flowers. No other flowers are used in the Church, except those bouquets carried by the actual bridal party and simple pew markers (no more than six). The church’s requirements keep costs down for the bride and the bridegroom, and maintain the simple dignity of the Church. Flowers for the bride, ushers, etc. are your responsibility and are not handled by the Altar Guild.

The only candles necessary are office lights (each holding seven candles), the Paschal Candle and the Eucharistic candles.

No photographs, with or without a flash, are allowed prior to or during the ceremony by members of the congregation. A photographer may be stationed in the balcony and take photographs during the ceremony, provided no flash is used. Usually photographs are taken after the service and it is suggested that the couple have a list drawn up of each picture that needs to be taken so that the session may be expedited. A video recorder, without lights, may be stationed in the balcony to capture the ceremony.

**F. Wedding Day Form to be sent to arrange for opening of building, using the Parish Hall for a Reception, Security concerns etc.:** After plans have been finalized, please contact our Office & Facilities Manager, Lauren Frazier, either in person, by telephone (804) 359-5628 x23 or via email ([lfrazier@ghtc.org](mailto:lfrazier@ghtc.org)) to arrange for building use, the services of our sexton and other services. The necessary form (*attached as appendix B*) should be filled out and returned to the office & facilities manager. If desired, an appointment may be made to enlist help in filling out the forms and to answer questions.

Also, please note, that we do not provide “security” to direct parking or to keep an eye on belongings during the wedding. All valuables should be removed from the building and locked in the trunk of your car during the ceremony.



We encourage the use of our facilities for the reception, provided it does not conflict with other parish functions. An extra fee does apply and please speak with Judy Bowman about this. As a general rule, no alcoholic refreshments are to be served at the Church. Exceptions to this policy for wedding receptions must conform to the parish guidelines. Please speak with the Officiant of your wedding about this. Rice, which is hazardous to the birds if ingested, may not be used. Bird seed is suggested as a substitute.

It is important that you work out all the details of building use with the Facilities Manager. We expect that you treat the facilities of the church as you would your own home. While our sexton will be engaged to clean up, groomsmen and bridesmaids should pick up after themselves. Food and all trash should be disposed of properly.

**G. Bulletin:** Grace & Holy Trinity will be glad to provide a bulletin for the service. We only ask that you do the proof reading. All materials for the bulletin should be sent to the Administrative Assistant no later than 3 weeks before the service. Please see the attached sample bulletin (*Appendix C*) for a guide to format.

## IV. Timeline

After the counseling is finished the wedding ceremony itself may be planned. Typically, time is set aside to discuss this at the last counseling session. To avoid a stressful schedule during the month leading up to your wedding it is best that counseling be completed eight weeks prior to the ceremony. As noted, counseling should be completed prior to the mailing of invitations. By canon the celebrant is not able to give consent to perform the ceremony until the counseling is complete.

- **12 to 9 Months from Desired Wedding Date:** Contact the Rector and the Administrative Assistant. Set a date for ceremony and for premarital counseling. Where there is a divorce, more time may be necessary at this phase.
- **9 to 2 Months Prior to the Ceremony:** Counseling undertaken.
- **2 Months Prior to Ceremony:** Counseling should be completed; obtain marriage license; plan ceremony with counselor/celebrant and then meet with organist/choir master.
- **1 Month Prior to Ceremony:** File finalized plans for ceremony with Church. Return all forms to Office & Facilities Manager - Attn: Lauren Frazier (She will make a copy of appendix B for the Altar Guild) and send all fees to the Financial Secretary - Attn: Judy Bowman.

## V. Fees

**Church:** \$1,200 (\$2,400 for members of different congregations)

- **Organist:** \$400 (\$50 for each extra musician, separate not included in the extant total)
- **Sexton Services:** \$150
- **Altar Guild/Flowers:** \$400
- **Building:** \$250 (power etc.)

• **Chapel:** \$900 (\$1,800 for members of different congregations)

- **Organist:** \$400 (\$50 for each extra musician, separate not included in the extant total)
- **Sexton Services:** \$150
- **Altar Guild/Flowers:** \$200
- **Building:** \$150 (power etc.)

• **Premarital Counseling Prepare Inventory Fee:** #35 (online fee, *see page 5, section d*)

## VI. Contact Information

**The Rev. Brent A. Melton**, *Priest-in-Charge* - [bmelton@ghc.org](mailto:bmelton@ghc.org)

**The Clergy** - [clergy@ghc.org](mailto:clergy@ghc.org)

**Lauren Frazier**, *Parish Administrator* - (804) 359-5628 x23 or [lfrazier@ghc.org](mailto:lfrazier@ghc.org)

- Check with her to see if your desired wedding date is available on the church calendar. Also check with her for building use, the services of our sexton, and other services.

**Dr. Elizabeth Melcher Davis**, *Organist & Choirmaster* - (804) 359-5628 x18 or [emelcherdavis@ghc.org](mailto:emelcherdavis@ghc.org)

- Check with her to discuss music for the service.

# Appendix A: Suggested Readings

## **The Lesson:**

Genesis 1:26-28 (Male and female he created them)

Genesis 2:4-9, 15-24 (A man cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh)

Song of Solomon 2:10-13; 8:6-7 (Many waters cannot quench love)

Tobit 8:5b-8 (*New English Bible*) (That she and I may grow old together)

*Between the Readings, a Psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate Psalms are 67, 127, and 128.*

## **The Epistle:**

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (Love is patient and kind)

Ephesians 3:14-19 (The Father from whom every family is named)

Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33 (Walk in love, as Christ loved us)

Colossians 3:12-17 (Love which binds everything together in harmony)

1 John 4:7-16 (Let us love one another for love is of God)

*If there is to be a Communion, a passage from the Gospel always concludes the Readings.*

## **The Gospel:**

Matthew 5:1-10 (The Beatitudes)

Matthew 5:13-16 (You are the light . . . Let your light so shine)

Matthew 7:21, 24-29 (Like a wise man who built his house upon the rock)

Mark 10:6-9, 13-16 (They are no longer two but one)

John 15:9-12 (Love one another as I have loved you)

# Appendix B: Wedding Information Form \_\_\_\_\_

File one copy with Office & Facilities Manager Lauren Frazier. You can email [lfrazier@ghtc.org](mailto:lfrazier@ghtc.org) or mail the church office at 8 N. Laurel Street, Richmond, VA 23220. She will make a copy for the Altar Guild.

Wedding of (full names): \_\_\_\_\_  
and \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Service:  Church  Chapel  Chancel

Date of Rehearsal: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Ceremony:** \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information: Cell Ph: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Ph: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ After Wedding: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Parents' Names -Bride: \_\_\_\_\_

-Groom: \_\_\_\_\_

Clergy: \_\_\_\_\_ Organist: \_\_\_\_\_

Communion:  Yes  No If yes, how many people are coming to the wedding: \_\_\_\_\_

Crucifer:  Yes  No If yes – name: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Pews marked off for wedding party: (NOTE: A maximum of 6 pew markers are available. The pews hold 6-8 comfortably on each side.) \_\_\_\_\_

Bride's bouquet and boutonnieres from: \_\_\_\_\_ and delivered at (time) \_\_\_\_\_

The Church will be unlocked two hours before the ceremony. If this does not fit with your plans, please speak with the celebrant of your wedding to see if other arrangements can be made. This may involve a larger fee if the sexton must come early. Is two hours adequate:  Yes  No

Bride and/or bridesmaids dressing here:  Yes  No How many? \_\_\_\_\_

Groom and/or groomsmen dressing here:  Yes  No How many? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like the Church to do your bulletin?  Yes  No (If yes, please complete Appendix C)

**FEES below include altar flowers, set up of the church, sexton and organist and are to be paid in full 3 weeks prior to wedding.** - These fees are subject to change and may vary depending on your requests.

CHURCH: \$1,200 (\$2,400 for members of other congregations)

CHAPEL or CHANCEL \$900 (\$1,800 for members of other congregations)

*There is a further charge of \$50 for each additional musician.*

# Appendix C: Suggested Readings

Please fill out only if GHTC is doing your bulletin. Info must be received at least 2 weeks before wedding and Bride and/or Groom must proof at least 1 week before wedding.

Prelude: \_\_\_\_\_

Processional: \_\_\_\_\_

Old Testament Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Gradual Hymn: \_\_\_\_\_

New Testament Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Hymn: \_\_\_\_\_

The Gospel Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Wedding Homily: (yes or no) \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, clergy? \_\_\_\_\_

Recessional: \_\_\_\_\_

## THE FOLLOWING IS ONLY DONE IF YOU ARE HAVING COMMUNION

Hymn during altar preparation: \_\_\_\_\_

Communion Hymn: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like the altar flowers to be given in memory of any family?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Would you like Reception directions to be included on the back?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

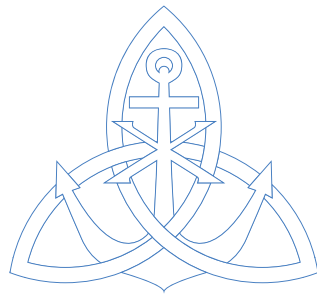
Would you like the couple's new address listed on the back?

\_\_\_\_\_

The Organist, Dr. Elizabeth Melcher Davis can assist you in picking out hymns and other music. If you are interested in having other musicians participate, you should speak with Dr. Melcher Davis. Additional fees are charged when other musicians are used.

**Please include a list of the Wedding Party here.**





Grace & Holy Trinity Church  
8 North Laurel Street • Richmond, VA 23220  
(804) 359-5628  
[ghtc.org](http://ghtc.org)