



Preparing for Your Marriage

A pastoral guide, information form, and liturgy planning workbook



St. Mary's Episcopal Church
9425 Third Avenue • Stone Harbor, NJ 08247
609-368-5922 • SaintMarysStoneHarbor@gmail.com
www.stmarysstoneharbor.org

"Walk in love, as Christ loved us." Ephesians 5:2

Welcome to St. Mary's

We are grateful that you are considering St. Mary's as the place where your marriage will be celebrated and blessed. A wedding here is more than an event held in a beautiful church. It is an act of worship, a public covenant made before God and the community of faith, and a beginning that the Church surrounds with prayer, Scripture, blessing, and hope.

The purpose of this packet is to make planning easier and more meaningful. Some questions are practical, some are liturgical, and some invite deeper conversation. Please bring this form to your meetings with the Rector. You do not need to have every answer before your first conversation.

Holy Matrimony

The Church teaches that Christian marriage is a lifelong covenant in which two people give themselves to one another, make their vows before God and the Church, and receive God's grace and blessing to help them live those vows faithfully.

What the Church asks of you

- At least one member of the couple must be baptized.
- The couple ordinarily gives the priest at least 30 days' notice of the intention to marry. At St. Mary's, we strongly encourage beginning 4 to 6 months ahead so there is room for prayer, preparation, scheduling, and thoughtful planning.
- Both people must be legally free to marry and must consent freely, without coercion, fraud, mistaken identity, or mental reservation.
- Both people receive preparation in the nature, purpose, meaning, rights, duties, and responsibilities of Christian marriage.
- Before the marriage, both people sign the canonical Declaration of Intention.
- At least two witnesses must be present and sign the parish register.
- When a previous marriage has ended and a former spouse is still living, additional diocesan documentation and the Bishop's consent are required before the priest may solemnize the new marriage.

A pastoral word: prior marriage, blended families, grief, complicated family relationships, faith differences, recovery, military life, and other realities are part of many faithful marriages. Please speak openly. These conversations are held with care and discretion so that your preparation can be honest, humane, and spiritually grounded.

Marriage preparation at St. Mary's

The Rector normally meets with the couple at least three times, spread across several months. These conversations may include communication, conflict and repair, finances, family systems, expectations, faith and spiritual life, intimacy, shared decision-making, vocation and work, children, household life, and the vows you will make. When travel makes in-person meetings difficult, some meetings may be arranged by video, and appropriate preparation completed elsewhere may be considered in consultation with the Rector.

Publishing the Banns

St. Mary's ordinarily publishes the Banns of Marriage as a prayerful parish custom. The Book of Common Prayer provides a form for the Banns when they are used. They may be published one, two, or three times before the wedding, according to parish practice and pastoral judgment.

Part I. About You

Please use the names and language by which you wish to be known. Legal names are requested where needed for the marriage license and parish register.

Date form completed: _____

Requested wedding date: _____

Requested wedding time: _____

Requested rehearsal date/time: _____

Ceremony location: _____

Person 1

Full legal name: _____

Name used in worship / preferred name: _____

Pronouns (optional): _____

Date of birth: _____

Age on wedding date: _____

Home address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Baptized? ☐ Yes ☐ No Tradition/church of baptism: _____

Confirmed / received in the Episcopal Church? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Current congregation or faith community, if any: _____

Parent/guardian names as they should appear in parish records:

Person 2

Full legal name: _____

Name used in worship / preferred name: _____

Pronouns (optional): _____

Date of birth: _____

Age on wedding date: _____

Home address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Baptized? ☐ Yes ☐ No Tradition/church of baptism: _____

Confirmed / received in the Episcopal Church? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Current congregation or faith community, if any: _____

Parent/guardian names as they should appear in parish records:

Part II. Your Story and Canonical Information

Your relationship

How long have you known one another? _____

How long have you been in a committed relationship? _____

Current shared address, if applicable: _____

Address after marriage, if changing: _____

Emergency contact during wedding weekend: _____

Emergency contact phone: _____

What gives you joy in your relationship? What strengths do you recognize in one another?

What do you hope the Church will help you prepare for, beyond the wedding day itself?

Previous marriages or civil unions

Please complete this section for each person. A previous marriage does not disqualify anyone from marriage in the Episcopal Church. It does mean that the priest must complete the Church's required pastoral and canonical process.

Person 1: Previous marriage/civil union? ☐ No ☐ Yes

Former spouse/partner name: _____

Date and place of marriage/civil union: _____

Date final divorce, dissolution, or annulment entered: _____

Children of the prior marriage/relationship, names and ages:

Are there continuing legal, financial, parenting, or pastoral responsibilities the Rector should know about?

Person 2: Previous marriage/civil union? ☐ No ☐ Yes

Former spouse/partner name: _____

Date and place of marriage/civil union: _____

Date final divorce, dissolution, or annulment entered: _____

Children of the prior marriage/relationship, names and ages:

Are there continuing legal, financial, parenting, or pastoral responsibilities the Rector should know about?

If either person has been previously married and the former spouse is living, please provide a copy of the final civil decree. The Rector will guide you through the diocesan consent process and the Church's expectation of continuing concern for former spouses and children.

Part III. Civil and Parish Requirements

New Jersey marriage license

If either applicant lives in New Jersey, apply for the marriage license in the New Jersey municipality where either applicant resides; the license may then be used anywhere in New Jersey. If neither applicant is a New Jersey resident, apply in the municipality where the ceremony will take place; the license is valid in that issuing municipality. Please confirm current requirements with the local registrar before applying.

☐ We have reviewed New Jersey marriage-license requirements.

Municipality where we plan to apply: _____

Expected date license will be obtained: _____

Bring the marriage license and all required accompanying documents to the church no later than the rehearsal, unless the parish office gives different instructions.

Witnesses

The Episcopal canons require at least two witnesses to be present at the solemnization. They will sign the parish register and may also have civil-license responsibilities.

Witness 1 full legal name: _____

Address: _____

Witness 2 full legal name: _____

Address: _____

Scheduling and rehearsal

Please confirm the church and rehearsal dates with the Rector and parish office before finalizing reception contracts or printing invitations. A rehearsal is normally scheduled the day before the wedding and generally lasts about one hour.

Estimated number of guests: _____

Estimated number in wedding party, including attendants and children:

Accessibility needs for couple, wedding party, or guests:

Fees and honoraria

Current St. Mary's policy provides use of the church without a facility fee for families of confirmed communicants in good standing, with a thank-offering welcomed. The current parish honorarium for non-members is **\$1,000**. The current clergy honorarium is **\$500** and includes preparation, liturgy planning, rehearsal, and the marriage liturgy. Fees are due at least 14 days before the ceremony unless other arrangements are made. Please confirm current amounts with the parish office before payment.

Part IV. Planning the Liturgy

The marriage rite belongs to the worship of the Church. Within the authorized liturgies there are meaningful choices, and we will make them together. The Rector has final responsibility for the liturgy celebrated at St. Mary's.

Which authorized rite?

- ☐ The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage, Book of Common Prayer 1979
- ☐ The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage, authorized trial-use inclusive-language form
- ☐ The Blessing of a Civil Marriage, for a couple already legally married
- ☐ An Order for Marriage, when a simpler authorized form is pastorally appropriate
- ☐ We would like the Rector to recommend the most appropriate rite.

Holy Eucharist

Marriage may be celebrated with or without Holy Communion. When Eucharist follows the marriage rite, a Gospel reading concludes the readings, the service continues with the Offertory, and the newly married couple may present the bread and wine. The couple appropriately receives Communion first after the ministers.

Celebrate Holy Eucharist? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undecided

If Eucharist is celebrated, who will present the bread and wine?

Entrance and presentation

At the entrance, a hymn, psalm, anthem, or instrumental music may be used. The Book of Common Prayer also permits a presentation or giving in marriage after the Declaration of Consent. This is optional, and the authorized form may present both people to one another rather than treating one person as being transferred to the other.

Presentation/giving? ☐ None ☐ Present both persons ☐ Traditional presentation ☐ Discuss with Rector

Person(s) presenting, if used: _____

Names in the liturgy

Full names to be declared at the beginning of the rite: _____

First/preferred names used thereafter in the liturgy: _____

Part V. Scripture and Proclamation

One or more appointed passages of Scripture are read. When Holy Communion is celebrated, a Gospel reading always concludes the readings. A psalm, hymn, or anthem may come between readings. Lay persons are especially appropriate readers for the Old Testament and Epistle readings.

First and second readings

- ☐ Genesis 1:26-28, humanity created in the image of God
- ☐ Genesis 2:4-9, 15-24, companionship and one flesh
- ☐ Song of Solomon 2:10-13; 8:6-7, love strong as death, many waters cannot quench love
- ☐ Tobit 8:5b-8, prayer for a life together
- ☐ 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, love is patient and kind
- ☐ Ephesians 3:14-19, rooted and grounded in love
- ☐ Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33, walk in love
- ☐ Colossians 3:12-17, compassion, forgiveness, and love
- ☐ 1 John 4:7-16, let us love one another

Reader for first reading: _____

Reader for second reading, if used: _____

Psalm, hymn, or anthem between readings

- ☐ Psalm 67
- ☐ Psalm 127
- ☐ Psalm 128
- ☐ A hymn or anthem instead of a psalm
- ☐ None / discuss with Rector

Reader or musician, if applicable: _____

Gospel

- ☐ Matthew 5:1-10, the Beatitudes
- ☐ Matthew 5:13-16, salt and light
- ☐ Matthew 7:21, 24-29, a house built on rock
- ☐ Mark 10:6-9, 13-16, covenant and blessing
- ☐ John 15:9-12, abide in my love

The Gospel is read by a deacon, priest, or other minister appointed according to the rite. Additional Scripture may sometimes be considered when authorized and pastorally appropriate; please discuss any request with the Rector rather than printing a program first.

Homily and Creed

Homily / sermon: ☐ Yes ☐ Discuss with Rector

The Book of Common Prayer permits the Apostles' Creed after the readings or homily when desired.

Apostles' Creed: ☐ Include ☐ Omit ☐ Discuss

Part VI. Vows, Rings, Prayers, and Blessing

The vows

The marriage vows are the heart of the rite. They are public promises made before God and the Church. Personal statements of gratitude or affection may be lovely in another setting, such as the rehearsal dinner or reception, while the vows within the liturgy follow the authorized form.

☐ We understand that the authorized marriage vows will be used.

Rings or another symbol

The Prayer Book provides for the blessing and exchange of a ring or rings. Its Additional Directions also allow another suitable symbol of the vows when desired and approved by the Rector.

Symbol of the vows: ☐ Two rings ☐ One ring ☐ Other suitable symbol ☐ Discuss

If another symbol is requested, describe it: _____

Who will hold the rings/symbol before the exchange? _____

The prayers

The marriage prayers ask God for wisdom, devotion, forgiveness, peace, mutual affection, compassion for others, and a life that becomes a sign of Christ's reconciling love. One petition speaks of the gift and heritage of children "if it is your will." Please tell the Rector when pregnancy, infertility, pregnancy loss, adoption, chosen family, blended-family realities, or a decision to remain child-free make this petition pastorally tender. The liturgy can be planned with care while remaining faithful to the authorized rite.

Pastoral considerations we would like the Rector to know:

The Lord's Prayer

The marriage rite provides both traditional and contemporary forms of the Lord's Prayer. When Holy Communion follows, the Lord's Prayer may be omitted at this point and prayed later in the Eucharist.

Preference: ☐ Traditional language ☐ Contemporary language ☐ As part of Eucharist ☐ Discuss

The nuptial blessing and the Peace

A priest or bishop pronounces the nuptial blessing. The Peace may then be exchanged. When Communion does not follow, the wedding party leaves after the blessing and Peace, with music as desired.

Exchange the Peace with the congregation? ☐ Yes ☐ Briefly ☐ Discuss

Part VII. Music

Music at a marriage is prayer offered through sound. Instrumental music, hymns, psalms, and anthems should serve the worship of God and the dignity of the marriage rite. Couples are responsible for securing musicians, and all selections must be reviewed with the officiant before the program is finalized.

Musician / organist: _____

Email / phone: _____

Soloist(s) or ensemble: _____

Other instruments: _____

Proposed selections

Prelude music: _____

Entrance / processional: _____

After Declaration of Consent, if desired: _____

Between readings / psalm or anthem: _____

Offertory, if Eucharist: _____

Communion music: _____

Recessional: _____

Other: _____

Secular songs that carry special personal meaning often work beautifully at the reception. Music within the church should be appropriate to Christian worship. Please consult the Rector before contracting a soloist for a specific song.

Guest clergy and other ministers

Guest clergy you would like invited to participate: _____

Their denomination / diocese / congregation: _____

The Rector will determine the appropriate liturgical role for visiting clergy and will handle any permissions or licensing that may be required.

Acolytes, crucifer, Eucharistic ministers, or other parish ministers requested:

Part VIII. Flowers, Décor, Photography, and Hospitality

Flowers and décor

The church is a sacred worship space, so decorations should enhance rather than obscure the altar, font, cross, windows, and liturgical furnishings. Plans for flowers, aisle decorations, candles, arches, or special installations must be reviewed with the parish before they are ordered or installed.

Florist / decorator: _____

Phone / email: _____

Planned altar flowers: _____

Other décor requested: _____

☐ We will ask before using adhesives, aisle runners, petals, confetti, rice, birdseed, open flame, or installations attached to church furnishings.

Photography and video

Photography may take place before the service when scheduled with the parish office. During worship, photographers and videographers are expected to remain unobtrusive. Flash and spotlights are not used during the liturgy. Because the altar area is small and sacred, photographers and videographers may not enter the altar area during the service. Drones are not permitted inside the church.

Photographer: _____

Phone / email: _____

Videographer / livestream provider: _____

Phone / email: _____

☐ We will ask our photographer/videographer to contact the parish before the wedding.

Livestream requested? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe

Programs and hospitality

Printed worship program? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Who will prepare it? ☐ Couple/designer ☐ Church, if available ☐ Discuss

Ushers / greeters: _____

Reserved seating needs: _____

Parking, transportation, military honors, or accessibility considerations:

Part IX. The Wedding Party and Procession

There is no single required procession pattern. We will shape the entrance so it is dignified, hospitable, and true to the people involved. Family structure can be honored without forcing anyone into a role that does not fit.

Person 1 attendants: _____

Person 2 attendants: _____

Children in the wedding party, names/ages: _____

Others participating in the entrance: _____

Who will enter with Person 1? _____

Who will enter with Person 2? _____

Any family relationships requiring special sensitivity in seating or procession?

Rehearsal attendance

- ☐ Both members of the couple
- ☐ All attendants
- ☐ Parents/presenters involved in the procession
- ☐ Readers
- ☐ Children participating, when practical
- ☐ Others as requested by the Rector

Special customs or cultural traditions

If there is a family, cultural, military, or religious custom you hope to include, please tell us early. Some customs can be integrated beautifully; others may fit better before or after the liturgy. The Rector will help you discern a place that honors both your story and the Church's worship.

Part X. Pastoral Preparation

These questions are for conversation rather than judgment. You may answer briefly here or simply mark topics you would like to discuss in person.

What does lifelong covenant mean to each of you?

How do you make important decisions together?

How do you usually handle conflict, and what helps repair connection afterward?

How will you approach finances, debt, saving, giving, and major purchases?

What expectations do you each carry from your families of origin?

What role does faith, prayer, worship, or spiritual practice have in your life together?

What hopes or concerns do you have about children, parenting, step-parenting, adoption, or chosen family?

How do work, military service, travel, caregiving, or other vocational demands affect your relationship?

Are grief, trauma, recovery, addiction, mental-health concerns, or family estrangement part of your story in a way you want the Rector to hold pastorally?

What does fidelity mean to you, emotionally, physically, spiritually, and digitally?

Where do you already experience grace in your life together?

Part XI. Declaration of Intention

The Episcopal canons require the couple to sign the Declaration of Intention before the marriage is solemnized. The Rector will normally witness this during marriage preparation. Please read it slowly. It describes the marriage the Church is asking you to undertake.

Canonical Declaration of Intention

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.

Signature, Person 1: _____

Date: _____

Signature, Person 2: _____

Date: _____

Witnessed by clergy: _____

Date: _____

Signing this declaration is a canonical requirement. The vows themselves are made later in the liturgy, before God, the Church, and your witnesses.

Final planning checklist

- ☐ Wedding and rehearsal dates confirmed with Rector and parish office
- ☐ Marriage-preparation meetings completed
- ☐ Declaration of Intention signed
- ☐ Prior-marriage documents and Bishop's consent completed, when applicable
- ☐ New Jersey marriage license obtained and delivered to the church
- ☐ Two witnesses identified
- ☐ Authorized rite chosen
- ☐ Scripture readings and readers confirmed
- ☐ Eucharist decision confirmed
- ☐ Music reviewed and approved
- ☐ Guest clergy roles confirmed
- ☐ Procession and presentation plan confirmed
- ☐ Photographer/videographer has church guidelines
- ☐ Flowers and décor approved
- ☐ Program proof reviewed by Rector before printing
- ☐ Fees/honoraria confirmed and paid by deadline
- ☐ Rehearsal participants know the time and location

For Clergy / Parish Office Use

Initial inquiry received: _____

Date placed on parish calendar: _____

First preparation meeting: _____

Second preparation meeting: _____

Third preparation meeting: _____

Fourth preparation meeting: _____

Additional meeting(s): _____

Baptism verified for at least one party: _____

Freedom to marry verified: _____

Prior marriage decree(s) received: _____

Bishop consent requested: _____

Bishop consent received: _____

Declaration of Intention signed: _____

Banns dates: _____

Marriage license received: _____

Liturgy finalized: _____

Program approved: _____

Musicians confirmed: _____

Photographer contacted: _____

Fees received: _____

Marriage register completed and signed: _____

Civil license completed / returned: _____

Pastoral follow-up planned: _____

Clergy notes

St. Mary's Episcopal Church
9425 Third Avenue, Stone Harbor, NJ 08247
609-368-5922 • SaintMarysStoneHarbor@gmail.com
www.stmarysstoneharbor.org

Rector: The Very Rev. Allison Burns-LaGreca
AllisonLagreca@gmail.com • 551-697-6133

Parish Administrator: Julie Taylor
jultaylor9425@gmail.com

