

Weddings



AT

ST. STEPHEN'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
2025

WEDDINGS AT ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH

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WEDDINGS AT ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH

Thank you for your interest in having your wedding at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. We are eager to give you the information and help you need.

Holy Matrimony is the sacramental rite in which two people enter into a lifelong union, making their vows before God and the community, and receiving the grace and blessing of God to help them fulfill their vows. The congregation at a wedding supports the couple with their presence and prayers. The congregation also takes a special pledge to support and uphold the couple in their marriage.

In the words of the Episcopal liturgy,

The union of two people 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 gift of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

Our staff is eager to assist you in having a joyful experience leading up to and culminating in your wedding. However, we truly believe that the *marriage* is more important than the *wedding*. For that reason, we will ask you to consider carefully your marriage through counseling and to live your married life in the community of faith. We think it is important to be welcoming, and we believe it is equally important to share with you our expectations.

Let us start by letting you know who may marry here. Weddings and all sacramental rites in this parish are open to all regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation. Divorced persons may be remarried in the Episcopal Church with the permission of the diocesan bishop (see pages 5 and 6).

In addition, at St. Stephen's at least one member of the couple should be

- a contributing member of St. Stephen's Church with sustained giving for the most recent three years, OR
- the child, grandchild or sibling of a contributing member of St. Stephen's with sustained giving for the most recent three years, OR
- in the process of joining St. Stephen's Church via our inquirers class with the intention of becoming contributing members of this parish.

If none of these three criteria are applicable, it may be possible for you to be married at St. Stephen's if you have a meaningful current or prior connection to St. Stephen's and/or its ministries.

Examples would be:

- A teacher at our preschool
- A St. Stephen's staff member
- A core vendor at our farmers market
- A staff singer in St. Stephen's Choir or a former member of the Virginia Girls Choir.

On the wedding request form, you'll see a place to describe your relationship to St. Stephen's Church.

We believe the marriage relationship benefits from active involvement in a faith community, and our usual expectation is that couples will live out their married lives in the community where it sacramentally begins. In the case of couples who will be living away from Richmond, we look forward to commending them to the parish church they will be attending. **We expect everyone to engage in the marriage preparation program we have adopted, to use the rites of the Episcopal Church, and to have one of our parish clergy preside at the service.**

WHERE TO BEGIN?

After reading this information packet, if you wish to celebrate your wedding here, contact our office by completing the form at ststephensRVA.org/wedding-request. A member of our staff will contact you within 10 business days to discuss the request, gather more detailed information, and answer any initial questions you may have. Since weddings are scheduled at St. Stephen's only after specific steps have been completed, we encourage couples to contact our staff **before** committing to other arrangements such as a reception venue.

CELEBRATING A MARRIAGE

The Episcopal Church has several requirements, including the following:

- One of the parties must be a baptized Christian.
- The couple must sign a Declaration of Intention, which is a solemn vow regarding their beliefs about marriage.
- There must be at least two witnesses to the marriage ceremony besides the officiant.

If one or both persons to be married has/have been divorced, the priest who will preside must secure the diocesan bishop's permission to officiate at the marriage. The bishop wishes you to understand that **until this process is complete, you should consider all the other plans regarding the wedding as tentative.**

When a person has been divorced two or more times, the guidelines require additional professional consultation to assist the couple in beginning their new marriage on a firm foundation and to assist the member of the clergy in pre-marital counseling.

St. Stephen's has a few customary practices, including the following:

- The couple completes a wedding request form at least six months prior to the service (preferably earlier).
- The couple has several meetings with the officiant. The primary focus is to discuss the dynamics of your relationship, your spiritual lives, and why Holy Matrimony is important for you. You will also discuss specific aspects of the service, such as Scripture readings and music.
- The ceremony uses the liturgy from the Book of Common Prayer (1979 edition) or the inclusive-language liturgy originally developed for same-gender couples but which may be used by any couple. These are beautiful services, crafted over time, and with great care. You will have the option of having Holy Communion as part of the service.
- We ask that you worship here, or in a faith community where you live, on a regular basis, before and after the wedding. By choosing to have your ceremony in the church, we assume that you intend to live out your marriage in the church. If either of you is not an Episcopalian, we invite you to attend our [inquirers classes](#) so you may learn more about the Episcopal Church generally and St. Stephen's specifically.
- Each couple must undergo a program of premarital counseling, outlined and conducted by the priest officiating the marriage. In addition to these sessions, St. Stephen's clergy often invite a couple to attend a pre-marriage workshop conducted by the Virginia Institute of Pastoral Care (VIPCare). More information can be found here: <https://www.vipcare.org/pre-marriage-retreats>

[The Commonwealth of Virginia requires a marriage license](#) for which there is a fee. Your marriage license needs to be given to the officiant at least two weeks before the wedding.

WHO MAY PRESIDE AT A WEDDING?

All weddings are officiated by a member of St. Stephen's clergy. It is sometimes possible to have other clergy participate in the service, assisting our clergy. If you believe you should be allowed an exception, please consult with a member of our clergy as soon as possible and prior to issuing any invitation to a minister not on St. Stephen's staff. Our clergy team shares responsibilities for conducting weddings (including the preparation involved). While you may request a particular St. Stephen's priest for the ceremony, please be aware that it may not be possible to fulfill your request.

WHEN WEDDINGS MAY BE SCHEDULED

Weddings are not scheduled during Lent or Advent. Since Lent is a penitential season, celebrations are inappropriate. Advent is a time when pastoral care concerns and preparations for Christmas dominate the time and energy of staff and clergy.

THE CEREMONY

[The Book of Common Prayer contains the order of service for the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage beginning on page 423.](#) In your conversation with the officiating clergy person, you will be asked to choose the Scriptures you would like to use. Some of the readings which are customarily used for weddings are included at the end of this booklet, but you are not limited to the readings on this list.

Some couples choose to have Holy Communion as a part of their marriage ceremony. We believe this is especially appropriate and a wonderful way to ground the sacramental rite of Holy Matrimony in the loving presence of God. If you choose to have Holy Communion as part of your service, please know that our custom is to offer the sacrament to all who are present. Those in the congregation who would rather not receive are welcome to join by coming forward for a blessing. Our clergy make every effort to ensure that all wedding guests feel welcome and at home during the service, regardless of their religious affiliation. It is not our custom, however, to offer Communion to only a select few or the wedding party alone.

The wedding party may arrive at the church two hours prior to the service. The Lounge and the Library are available for preparation and dressing for the service. It is not possible to reserve these spaces for longer periods of time prior to the service.

THE REHEARSAL

The rehearsal is an opportunity, usually the evening before the wedding, for the entire wedding party, clergy, and parish wedding coordinator, to review the details of the wedding service itself. The rehearsal is typically scheduled to begin between the hours of 4:00 and 5:00 p.m.

The rehearsal is an essential part of the preparation. It lasts an hour to one and a half hours. All participants (including the wedding party, readers, flower girl, ring bearer, parents, and any others who will be part of the processional) are asked to be on time for the rehearsal.

The rehearsal normally precedes the rehearsal dinner. The officiant does not usually attend the rehearsal dinner. This is a special time for close family and friends to enjoy the couple without any felt need to entertain the clergy.

WEDDING COORDINATOR

An outside wedding coordinator or wedding planner will not be necessary at either the rehearsal or the wedding. Such assistance is provided by St. Stephen's wedding guild. Please complete the form on our website concerning your wedding arrangements, and a member of our wedding guild will contact you.

MUSIC FOR YOUR WEDDING

[St. Stephen's music staff](#) arranges for the music and a member of our music staff plays the organ for weddings in St. Stephen's Church. Other musicians may be invited to play **with prior approval of our music staff**.

After your initial meeting with the officiant, you must make an appointment with the music staff to discuss the music for your wedding, **and this should occur at least three months before the ceremony**.

The amount of time spent planning the music for your wedding is entirely up to you. The organist playing for your wedding will be happy to meet with you and play selections from which you may choose, and many couples find this helpful. On the other hand, some couples whose time is limited, or who live some distance from Richmond, have made the necessary arrangements over the telephone.

St. Stephen's is fortunate to have many outstanding musicians who perform regularly at services and weddings. Several of Richmond's finest singers are in our choir, and local brass musicians play at many of our festival services. If you desire singers or instrumentalists in addition to the organ, we request that you discuss this with the organist as soon as you are certain of your plans and needs. We will then be glad to arrange for the additional musicians you want and will advise you of the cost. We ask that you avail yourself of those who perform here regularly.

READERS AND GREETERS

It is customary for one or two family members or friends to read the Scripture passages during the service; you may also invite someone to read the prayers, or ask the officiant to read the prayers. Readers are expected to attend the rehearsal and will practice reading aloud in the actual space where the wedding will take place.

Several greeters are usually needed to direct guests from the parking lot to the church. The couple is responsible for recruiting family or friends to fill this role. The parish wedding coordinator working with you can advise you further.

CHALICE BEARERS

When the service includes Holy Communion, it will be necessary to have one or more chalice bearers to assist. We will arrange this unless you have friends or family who are experienced in these roles, in which case we will be pleased to work with them.

RING BEARERS

Ring bearers do not actually carry the rings. The rings should be given to the Best Man and/or Maid or Matron of Honor prior to the ceremony, and they will give the rings to the clergy at the proper time during the service.

FLOWERS AND CANDELABRA

All arrangements for flowers on the altar, chancel decorations and candelabra are to be made through the chair of St. Stephen's Flower Guild, [who may be reached via email](#). Our flower guild will create arrangements using flowers in your wedding and what works best for St. Stephen's altar. Your florist may deliver bouquets, boutonnieres, pew markers, etc. beginning the morning of the wedding. Please provide the wedding coordinator an estimated time for their arrival.

Neither flowers nor flower petals may be tossed inside or outside the church.

BULLETINS

It is the responsibility of the couple to arrange for a bulletin for the service. We will produce and print a full service bulletin for you with sufficient notice (see fees, Appendix 1), and **if your wedding is taking place in the church**. If you choose to have your bulletin produced by St. Stephen's, please submit a bulletin information form at least **eight weeks** prior to your wedding. The sheet must include ALL information for the bulletin, and must be submitted electronically. Incomplete information will lead to a delay in beginning work on your bulletin.

If you prefer to provide your own bulletins, please adhere to the guidelines for bulletins which we will provide. **It is very important that the bulletin be approved by the parish communications director and the officiant prior to printing.** The first proof must be submitted no later than three weeks before the wedding. Please include in the bulletin the notation that cell phones should be silenced, and that taking photographs during the service is not permitted; this includes the use of mobile devices.

Regardless of who produces them, bulletins will follow the liturgy (either the one in the Book of Common Prayer or the inclusive language liturgy authorized by the Episcopal Church). Cover art may be a black and white illustration of the church, or a cross (both provided by St. Stephen's). Since hymnals are available in the pew racks in the church, it will not be necessary to print the words and music for the hymns in the bulletin.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY

If you have a professional photographer at the wedding, she or he will appreciate your asking family and guests not to take photos since that can impede the professional photographer and cause posed photos to take longer. Many couples are now requesting in their bulletin that people not post photos from the day on social media.

Please remind your guests that **NO** pictures may be taken in the church. At times guests bring cameras but their use is not appropriate during the service. **This includes smart phones and other mobile devices.**

During the service: **Please inform your photographer well in advance that NO pictures may be taken inside the church during the service.**

A photographer may be positioned in the narthex (the vestibule) to take pictures, provided that he or she has a silent shutter and no flash is used, but she or he may not enter the nave (the main body of the church) nor the chapels. These guidelines pertain to the entire service, including the procession in and the procession out.

If a photographer violates any portion of this policy, he or she will be escorted from the church and required to wait outside until the ceremony has concluded, and may be prevented from photographing weddings at St. Stephen's in the future.

Before and after the service: The photographer may take pictures of the wedding party in the Lounge, the Library, or the courtyard (not the church) beginning an hour and 15 minutes before the service. These photos must conclude at least 45 minutes prior to the service.

Photographs may be taken after the service in the church and/or courtyard. When taking pictures after the service, interior photos may not take longer than **20 minutes**.

Videography of the ceremony, if any, is done by St. Stephen's Church staff using equipment that is installed in the church and operated remotely from a control room. (See fee explanation in the Appendices.) No other videography is permitted in the church. If you wish to have videography and/or livestreaming, **please make your request using an online form we will provide at least 8 weeks in advance of the wedding date.**

THE USE OF ALCOHOL AND/OR DRUGS BY THE WEDDING PARTY

Weddings are festive occasions, and we acknowledge the excitement of the day. It is the policy of St. Stephen's Church that consumption of alcoholic beverages or other drugs by members of the wedding party prior to the rehearsal and during the several hours prior to the ceremony is prohibited.

Should the officiant discover that any member of the wedding party has violated this policy, they will be barred from participating. The wedding is a sacred service in the presence of God and calls for our reverent attention. It is also a legal ceremony, and one cannot give consent if they are impaired.

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Now that you have read this booklet, you may have lingering questions or concerns. Feel free to [contact our wedding guild](#) to discuss them. Perhaps you have decided not to marry at St. Stephen's Church. If that is the case, please accept our best wishes as you resume the search for a place for your wedding. Please know that we remain ready to talk with you should you wish to reconsider at a later time.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: DECLARATION OF INTENTION

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



DECLARATION OF INTENTION FOR MARRIAGE

We,

and

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

Signature

Date

Officiant

Canon I.18.4 of the Canons of the Episcopal Church requires couples to sign this Declaration of Intention prior to the solemnization of their marriage. This declaration is intended to be signed in the presence of the priest preparing the couple for marriage.

APPENDIX 2: FEES AND OFFERINGS

Discussing money in the church is awkward for some. The reality is that having the church open and climate controlled, having staff to set up the church and clean up after a service, etc., is expensive. However, we are never willing to have money stand in the way of your being married in the church. Some couples do not have the means to cover these expenses. If you are unable to pay the fees, please speak with the officiant.

The comprehensive fee is determined by several factors, including the size and scope of the ceremony and the couple's relationship to the church, and will be communicated in consultation with relevant staff once we have the [completed wedding request form](#). In order to fix a date on the calendar, a non-refundable deposit of \$500 towards the total cost will be due.

The comprehensive fee for a wedding at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church includes

- Use of the church
- Premarital sessions with the clergy*
- Rehearsal and wedding with the officiant
- Services of the St. Stephen's Wedding Guild
- Sexton services for set-up and clean-up
- Altar Guild services and expenses
- Flower Guild services and altar flowers
- Consultation with organist to select music
- Organist to play at rehearsal and at the wedding

*These are separate from the sessions with VIPCare or other counselor (see page 6).

Optional items available at additional cost

- Large free-standing pair of candelabra
- Pillar/ column candles
- Choir
- Instrumentalist(s) (other than organist)
- Bulletins (design, production, printing)
- Livestreaming and/or videography

All fees are due no later than one month prior to the wedding.

Some people ask if there is a fee for the service of the officiant. There is no fee for the officiant, though a gift to the officiant's discretionary fund is appreciated. There is no specified amount, though such a gift is often in the \$300-\$500 range.

APPENDIX 3: SCRIPTURE READINGS

Scripture is an integral part of the ceremony. The readings selected for your wedding are one of the topics discussed in your sessions with the officiant. Typically an Old Testament lesson and a New Testament lesson, selected from the list below, are read at appropriate places in the celebration. If the service includes Holy Eucharist, a passage from one of the Gospels is used. Following are some customary readings suggested by the Book of Common Prayer, but you are not limited to this list. To see the full texts of these readings, visit [The Lectionary Page online](#).

Old Testament

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)

New Testament

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)

Between the readings, a Psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said.

The Gospel reading may be one of the following and is read by the clergy.

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 4: CONTACTS AND FORMS

Parish staff may be reached at 804.288.2867, or by email.

Keep in mind that some on this list are part-time staff or volunteers and may not be able to respond to you immediately.

Wedding Guild Chairperson

[Email](#) | 804.288.2867 | [Wedding request form](#)

Virginia Institute of Pastoral Care (VIPCare)

[Website](#) | 804.282.8332

Diana Chou, Associate Director of Music

[Email](#)

Flower Guild

[Email](#)

Bulletins: Sarah Bartenstein, Director of Communications

[Email](#)

Videography/Livestream: Sarah Bartenstein, Director of Communications

[Email](#)

Marriage License

[Information about local courthouses](#)

Once your wedding has been scheduled at St. Stephen's, we will send you a list of links to the various forms you will complete such as an information sheet about the couple, the bulletin request form, etc.

APPENDIX 5: TIMELINE/CHECKLIST

Calculate and fill in the dates according to your own wedding date.

At least six months in advance **Date**_____

- ☐ [Complete the wedding request form](#). A member of the wedding guild will respond within 10 business days. Once the wedding guild member and you settle on the date, you may reserve the church, clergy and other staff for that date with a non-refundable \$500 deposit and a completed Holy Matrimony Information Sheet.
- ☐ After these steps are complete, the priest who will officiate at your wedding will contact you to set up an initial meeting.
- ☐ After you meet with the officiant, [contact the Associate Director of Music](#) to learn which member of our music staff will play for your wedding. Contact the organist to schedule an appointment.

At least three months in advance **Date**_____

- ☐ Meet with the organist who will play for your wedding to select music. This may be done in person, by phone, or by video conference.

Eight weeks in advance **Date**_____

- ☐ **Marriage License:** [Schedule an appointment](#) to secure your marriage license. ([Localities are listed here](#).) A Virginia license is valid for 60 days from its issuance.
- ☐ **Flowers:** [Contact St. Stephen's Flower Guild](#) about altar flowers. Flower guild members are volunteers and it is important to schedule their services in advance to ensure that a team is available for your wedding.
- ☐ **Bulletins:** If you wish to have St. Stephen's produce your wedding bulletins, submit the wedding bulletin information sheet electronically to the parish communications director. The information **MUST BE COMPLETE** before you submit this sheet. Production of your bulletin will not begin until all information is submitted electronically using the form.
- ☐ **Livestream and/or video:** If you wish to have your wedding livestreamed and/or videotaped, submit a request to the parish communications director eight weeks in advance. This allows us to ensure that a trained operator will be available at the designated time.

One month in advance **Date**_____

- ☐ If your fees have not already been paid in full, please submit any remaining balance no later than a month before the wedding date.

Two weeks in advance **Date**_____

- ☐ Deliver the marriage license to the officiant, who mails the completed license to the courthouse clerk on the first business day following the wedding.

NOTES/CONTACTS

You may use this space to jot down the names and contact information for the people from St. Stephen's with whom you'll be working to plan your wedding.

Priest

Wedding coordinator

St. Stephen's musician

St. Stephen's flower guild coordinator

Bulletin

Livestream and/or video

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

6000 Grove Avenue

Richmond, Virginia 23226

804.288.2867

ststephensRVA.org