

The Sacrament of Marriage at St. Luke's – Denison, TX

A man and a woman who desire to be married at St. Luke's Episcopal Church – Denison, Texas, will show their sincerity of commitment to St. Luke's by regular attendance at services of worship, financial support of the Church, prayer, and involvement in the life of the congregation.

This commitment includes completion of *The Alpha Course* and *The Marriage Course*. It is strongly recommended that a couple complete *Financial Peace University*, either at St. Luke's or another church. Please see the Rector for more information.

Fees for use of St. Luke's facilities, as well as recommended honoraria for the Altar Guild, can be obtained from the Rector. The Church Organist is the resident musician for weddings at St. Luke's. Wedding Planners/Coordinators, if needed, are appointed at the discretion of the Rector.

Marriage rites at St. Luke's will be done in accordance with the Customary of the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas. Copies of the Customary can be obtained from the rector. Portions of the Customary are presented below.

Customary of the Diocese of Dallas **Section III B – Of Marriage**

1. Marriage

- a. It is the teaching of this Church that marriage is a “physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman, entered into within the community of faith, by mutual consent of heart, mind, and will, and with intent that it be lifelong.” (Title I, Canon 18, Sec. 2)
- b. No priest may solemnize the vows of marriage of any couple unless they have first obtained a license to be married provided by civil authority.
- c. No priest may solemnize the vows of marriage of any couple unless he/she has first counseled with the couple on the nature, meaning and purpose of Christian marriage.
- d. Priest of this Church should officiate at the rite on Holy Matrimony only when there is a significant pastoral relationship between the priest and at least one party to the marriage.
 - i. Deacons are not authorized or licensed to officiate at the rite of Holy Matrimony.
 - ii. Deacons may assist in the service, including the preaching of the homily.
 - iii. Priests are responsible for the pastoral counsel and teaching required for couples to be married according to the rite of this Church.
- e. All persons to be married in this Church must sign a declaration of intention in the presence of the priest who will officiate at the wedding, and solemnize the vows of the man and woman, which declaration is to be held on file as a part of the records of the congregation.
- f. At least one party to the marriage must be a baptized person (Title I, Canon 18, Sec. 2(d)). Both parties to the marriage must signify their free and informed desire to receive the ministration of Holy Matrimony as provided by this Church, without coercion, fraud, or mental reservation.

- g. Marriages are expected to be celebrated in the church as services of worship and not as private affairs or social spectacles.
 - i. In their discretion, priests may officiate at service of Holy Matrimony at sites other than the church structure.
 - ii. Normally weddings are not celebrated during Advent or Lent, except for pastoral reasons.
- h. Clergy may not solemnize the vows of marriage until at least thirty days have passed between the time when the parties first signify their intention to the priest, and the date of the service. This period may be waived, provided that the cause for waiving the thirty days' requirement is weighty, *and* the member of the clergy concerned reports this action to the Bishop in writing. (Title I, Canon 18, Sec. 3 (a)).
- i. No priest may bless sexual unions or relationships in this Diocese which do not meet the criteria for Holy Matrimony set forth in the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Canons of this Church, or cause persons who are parties to such unions or relationships to believe that they have the blessing of God or of the Church.

2. Marriage in Distress (see rector for text)

3. Marriage Dissolution: Ecclesiastical Judgment (see rector for text)

4. Remarriage of Persons Divorced Once

- a. The remarriage of divorced persons in the Church poses a difficult dilemma. On the one hand, marriage is viewed by the Church as a Sacrament – a solemn undertaking blessed by God – and indissoluble. On the other hand, divorce is a reality that grows out of our fallen condition as human beings and all too easily reinforced as an option in our society. How we may hold up the sanctity of marriage and at the same time minister the redeeming, reconciling love of God to those who have endured the pain of divorce is the question that confronts us as a Church.
- b. Persons who have been previously married, and who have been divorced, may seek permission to be newly married in this Church. However, certain conditions must be satisfied before permission is granted by the ecclesiastical authority.
- c. A petition is made to the Bishop by a priest of this Diocese, acting on behalf of the parties desiring to marry. (A petition is required only when either one or both parties have been previously married and *when the former spouse(s) is (are) still living.*) [See APPENDIX E: PETITION TO REMARRY (1), page 42, for the petition form to be completed by the priest.]
- d. The most important and least easily definable condition for granting permission to remarry is that there be a *significant pastoral relationship* between the priest who will officiate at the marriage and the parties to the marriage. Priests in this Diocese must exercise profound discretion in this matter on behalf of the Bishop and the whole Church. As a part of the application for permission to solemnize the marriage of a couple where one party (or both) has been previously married, the priest concerned must certify that such a significant pastoral relationship exists. This must be done advisedly and honestly.
- e. Thorough counseling and teaching on the part of the priest are expected. As a minimum, the priest must:
 - i. Determine that one party (at least) to the marriage is a member of this Church;
 - ii. Determine that the divorced party (or parties) has a certified copy of the decree of divorce;
 - iii. Determine that at least one year has elapsed between the date of the final decree and the date the petition is submitted;

- iv. Determine that the divorced party (or parties) have been and will continue to be faithful to the terms of the decree, providing regular support where stipulated;
 - v. Determine that the divorced party (or parties) have been and will continue to be diligent in the care of children born to the previous marriage (if any);
 - vi. Determine that both parties have an understanding of the conditions which led to the divorce, and have good reason for believing that the same will not impair the new marriage;
 - vii. Have offered to the party (or parties) who is a member of this Church the Sacrament of Reconciliation;
 - viii. Have taught the nature of Christian marriage as presented in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and have stressed the lifelong nature of the union;
 - ix. Have witnessed the signing of the declaration of intention to that effect.
- f. When the petition is completed, certifying that the conditions outlined above have been satisfied, it should be submitted to the Bishop's office at least thirty days (30) in advance of the date of the marriage service. The priest will notify the Bishop immediately when the marriage has been solemnized.
- g. Petition Forms for any of the actions above are included in the appendices of this Customary and are available from the Bishop's Office. The forms are required to be completed and submitted *before* permission will be granted for action to be taken. Forms should be submitted in ample time (usually not less than thirty days) in order to allow for mailing, processing and interviews (should such seem necessary).
- h. Petitions for permission to bless marriages of those who have been divorced once, but who have been married by civil authority may be submitted to the Bishop by priests of this Diocese.
- i. A letter, summarizing the circumstances of the marriage, and stating that the couple has been instructed on the Church's teaching on marriage, must be submitted by the priest who will bless the marriage.
 - ii. A one year period of discipline is required, during which the couple is expected to show their sincerity of commitment by regular attendance at services of worship, financial support of the Church, prayer, and involvement in the life of the congregation. This rector/vicar will determine when the period of discipline has been met.
 - iii. The Standing Committee, acting as the Council of Advice, is available to and may be sought out for help by the clergy in this area of ministry.

5. Remarriage of Persons Divorced More Than Once

- a. Persons who have been divorced more than once and who seek to be remarried in the Church may expect a broader, more protracted process before the possible granting of permission. This process is not intended to be punitive, but to assure that the pastoral concerns of the Church and the needs of the couple are attended to.
- b. The priest who intends to officiate at the wedding must satisfy the conditions set forth in the previous section (G. Marriage of Persons Divorced Once). In addition, the priest must:
 - i. Determine that the parties to the proposed marriage have undergone a serious course of counseling;
 - ii. Provide a narrative relating the pertinent circumstances which support and ecclesiastical wedding in this case;

