Marriage at St. Peter's Church Lewes, Delaware

St. Peter's is a sacred and holy place. For generations, faithful people have gathered in our sanctuary to mark significant moments in their lives and to deepen their commitment to Christ and to one another.

St. Peter's is a church, not a wedding venue. We do not rent our sacred space for weddings or other private events, and we are unable to respond to requests from outside wedding coordinators or those seeking to use the church as a day-rental venue.

In the Christian faith, marriage is a covenant between two consenting adults (of any gender), entered into before God and within the community of the Church. It is therefore not understood as a private event. A Christian marriage takes place in the presence of God, Christian witnesses, family, and invited guests gathered in the church.

The *Book of Common Prayer* teaches that Holy Matrimony is intended by God for the couple's mutual joy, for the help and comfort they give one another in times of adversity, and for the procreation and care of children. We recognize that, for many reasons, not all couples are able to conceive or raise children. We nevertheless believe that every marriage is called to be grounded in mutual love and that the love shared between two people can be generative—building up love in the world and bearing witness to gracious, sacrificial, and faithful love.

Marriage is a lifelong covenant in which two people promise to love, honor, and cherish one another, seeking to live together in faithfulness and in the love of God.

Requirements for Marriage at St. Peter's

At least one person in the couple must be a baptized Christian and should be a regular worshipper and active contributing member of St. Peter's Church, or the child or grandchild of an active member of St. Peter's. A member is a person who is registered with the parish, has provided the requested personal information (including date of birth and baptism), and affirms St. Peter's as their primary faith community. The Episcopal Church defines a member in good standing as one who, **for the previous year**, has been faithful in corporate worship and in "working, praying, and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God." Both parties must be willing to make and live into the promises and vows of Christian marriage. They must be prepared to fulfill the responsibilities of marriage as understood by the Church and must participate in a minimum of three premarital counseling sessions with a member of the clergy.

Previously Married

A person who has previously been married and divorced must receive written permission to marry from the Bishop of the Diocese of Delaware, (this does not mean you need to meet with the Bishop). The Bishop's consent is granted upon the recommendation of the Rector and the Rector's attestation that the couple intends to make the Episcopal Church the religious center of their lives. This intention is normally demonstrated through participation in the life of the Church, including

regular attendance at worship, participation in the Sacraments, and financial support (pledge) of the ministry and mission of St. Peter's and the wider Church. Those who live in the Lewes area are expected to be active members of this parish. We believe that sharing a life of faith strengthens a marriage and, through the couple's example, can strengthen the lives of others.

Marriage License

A Delaware marriage license must be obtained from a Delaware County Court facility in Georgetown, Wilmington, or Dover. The license must be obtained **no more than 30 days before the wedding and at least 48 hours before the liturgy**. Once obtained, the marriage license must be delivered to the parish office during the week preceding the wedding.

Premarital Planning

A request for a wedding date begins with contacting one of the clergy of St. Peter's. **No wedding date may be reserved until after the couple's initial meeting with a priest. The priest should be contacted no less then six months before the wedding date.** The initial meeting provides an opportunity to determine whether the requirements of Episcopal canon law and the policies of St. Peter's can be met. The couple will receive materials to assist in preparing for marriage, including the *Prepare/Enrich* premarital assessment, which currently costs $35. Following the initial meeting, the wedding date and time may be entered on the church calendar and planning for the ceremony may begin. The clergy are required to ensure that "both parties have been instructed as to the nature, meaning and purpose of Holy Matrimony." At St. Peter's, this preparation normally takes place through conversations between the couple and the priest who will preside at the wedding. Three hours of premarital preparation are normally required, generally in three one-hour sessions. These conversations may include the Church's theology of marriage, communication and conflict, expectations for married life, and specific arrangements for the wedding liturgy. They also provide an opportunity for the priest and couple to get to know one another and for the priest to assess the couple's readiness to enter into a lifelong covenant. This preparation requires a measure of openness and self-disclosure from the couple, together with fairness, confidentiality, and discretion from the priest. In some cases, the clergy may refer the couple to a therapist for couple's counseling at the couple's expense. The clergy retain the right, in their pastoral judgment and discretion, to decline to officiate at a particular marriage.

The Wedding Liturgy

The wedding liturgy must conform to the standards of The Episcopal Church and the *Book of Common Prayer*. Episcopal canon law requires the clergy to follow the rubrics of the marriage rite. Couples may write and incorporate personal vows into the liturgy with the approval of the officiating priest. Such vows may supplement but may not replace the essential vows contained in the *Book of Common Prayer*. A celebration of Holy Communion as part of the Marriage Rite is a full and graceful expression of the Church's understanding of Holy Matrimony. When Holy Communion is celebrated, all God's children are welcome to receive the Sacrament. Holy Communion is not required for a wedding at St. Peter's. One of the clergy of St. Peter's will preside

at the service. Guest clergy may assist at the discretion of the Rector. Only the Rector extends invitations to guest clergy to participate in the liturgy.

Dates and Scheduling

Marriages do not take place during Lent or on Sundays. The first Saturday of July and the first Saturday of December are unavailable because of parish-wide events that encompass the entirety of St. Peter's Square. Only **one wedding may be scheduled per weekend—no exceptions.** Saturday weddings may not conflict with the parish's 5:00 p.m. worship service. This means that the Sanctuary is not available between 4pm and 6pm.

Arrangements for the Ceremony

The church sanctuary can accommodate approximately 150 guests. The clergy will be present at both the rehearsal and the wedding and are responsible for the arrangements of the wedding liturgy. Because the ceremony is a Christian liturgy under the direction of the clergy, outside wedding coordinators may not direct or manage the ceremony in any way.

Music

All musical arrangements must be approved by the St. Peter's Minister of Music. The use of prerecorded music is prohibited. Normally, the Minister of Music will play the organ, assist the couple in selecting appropriate music, and coordinate the hiring of additional musicians if the couple wishes to include a soloist, or other instrumentalists. Additional fees will apply. The Minister of Music does not typically attend the wedding rehearsal. Because the wedding is a Christian liturgy, **only sacred music appropriate to Christian worship may be used during the wedding service.** Secular music should be reserved for the reception.

Flowers

Flowers may be placed on the retable behind the altar, provided they do not extend higher than the brass cross. Two wooden pedestals are also available for floral arrangements. If flowers are left at the church after the wedding, they will be given to homebound or hospitalized parishioners. The Episcopal Marriage Rite does not include the lighting of a unity candle or the mixing of sand or other substances, and these rituals may not be added to the liturgy. If they are desired, they are best practiced at the reception. Any other decorations within the church must be approved by the clergy.

Photography and Videography

Photography, videography, and audio recording are permitted, subject to the following policies:

- Flash photography and high-intensity lighting may not be used during the ceremony.
- Videographers may set up before the service but should remain stationary during the liturgy.
- Photographers may not move beyond the front row of pews during the ceremony nor may they rearrange any furniture or fixtures.

- Photo sessions before or after the wedding, receiving lines, and other activities associated with the wedding must be approved by the clergy before being scheduled.

Printed Programs

Printed wedding programs are the responsibility of the church and will be designed and printed in-house. The bride and groom should submit (via email) all members of the wedding party they wish to include in the bulletin one month before the wedding date.

Church Property

Rice, confetti, flower petals, and other projectiles may not be thrown on church property. The couple is responsible for designating one or two people to oversee all personal property belonging to the wedding party, including clothing, purses, cameras, and makeup cases. These persons should be introduced to the clergy before the ceremony begins. The couple should also plan to have ushers to oversee the seating and to remove any approved decorations at the conclusion of the service.

Alcohol and Controlled Substances

Alcohol, cannabis or other edibles, and controlled substances are not permitted in the church or on church grounds. If any member of the wedding party is determined by the priest to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, the priest may decline to proceed with the ceremony. The state of Delaware does not allow intoxicated people to be married while they are inebriated. St. Peter's is a smoke-free campus. This includes cigarettes as well as vaping.

Fees

In addition to the fees listed below, a contribution in thanksgiving for the use of the church is always welcomed.

Item	Fee
Church Fee — includes organist, sexton, and service bulletin design and printing	**$1,000**
Optional contribution to the Clergy Discretionary Fund — a thank offering for clergy assistance; used by clergy for outreach and education	**$500–$1,000**
Additional musicians — including soloists and other instrumentalists	**Varies**
Organist rehearsal fee — optional; the organist does not routinely attend rehearsals	**$100**
Aisle candles for evening services — optional	**$100**
Livestream of the service — optional	**$200**

Please note: the couple will provide an on-time start security deposit of $750. This should be written as a separate check and will be returned to the couple if the wedding begins on time. A 10 minute grace period will be provided.

We are grateful for the opportunity to celebrate with couples as they enter into the covenant of marriage. Our hope is that the preparation, worship, and celebration surrounding your wedding will help you begin your married life grounded in the love of God, the promises you make to one another, and the support of the Christian community.