

Weddings at the Church of the Ascension

Christian marriage is a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God. In the Episcopal Church it is required that one, at least, of the parties must be a baptized Christian; that the ceremony be attested by at least two witnesses; and that the marriage conform to the laws of the State and the canons of this Church.

(from the Book of Common Prayer)

Weddings are wonderful celebrations of God's great love for us shown in the love and commitment of the bride and groom as they make vows and exchange rings. Wedding traditions and customs span cultures, languages, and even time. Engaged couples and their families often have expectations and ideas about the celebration before they come to the Church. While the reception and other wedding events can be primarily focused on personal expression, the church service is more about the groundedness of a particular couple's relationship in the universal love of God in Christ. So the Church has its own requirements and customs, and within those constraints, Ascension tries to accommodate couples' particular ideas for the wedding.

The Ascension clergy team's greatest priority in working with engaged couples is to build a solid spiritual and relational foundation for marriage. Second, they strive to celebrate weddings in a way that best enables God to touch the lives of everyone present and that creates a joyful celebration of God's love as manifested in faithful marriage.

Preparation and Planning

- The church needs at least 90 days' notice for any wedding. It's better for couples to begin working with the church first in the process, as soon as possible after becoming engaged.
- Couples will want to meet with the Rector or other presiding priest before contracting for other services (such as flowers or photography), as there are some specific requirements that need to be understood and communicated with those service providers.
- It is expected that persons wishing to be married at the Church of the Ascension be in regular attendance either at Ascension or at another church. If attending another church, couples need to discuss with their Priest/Pastor their intention to be married at Ascension. The Rector or presiding priest may wish to speak with that pastor.
- In addition to the requirements stated above, the couple must sign a Declaration of Intention stating that they intend the marriage to be life-long and grounded in their relationship with God.
- Any priest in good standing in the Diocese of Colorado may preside at a wedding at the Church of the Ascension, provided they agree to follow Ascension's guidelines. Priests from outside the Diocese may preside with prior approval from the Bishop's office and the Rector. Clergy from other denominations may assist as approved and directed by the Rector.
- In the event that either the bride or groom has been divorced, an application must be submitted to the Bishop of Colorado at least thirty days prior to the proposed wedding date. This is a rule

of the Church and applies to any marriage which ended in divorce. This document is confidential and is designed to allow the couple to convey to the Bishop what has been learned from previous relationships and what is different with this one. The intent is to ensure that the Church is doing everything possible to help each marriage off to a healthy, godly start.

- Pre-marital counseling is a prerequisite for weddings at Ascension. Normally, the priest officiating at the wedding does this counseling, but other arrangements can be made in special circumstances. Couples wishing someone else to do the counseling will need to consult with the presiding priest before making those arrangements. The number of meetings varies for each couple based on their unique needs and issues. The presiding priest will outline the scope and content of pre-marital preparation at the first meeting. Ascension's clergy use a tool called Prepare/Enrich to provide an inviting framework to discuss all major facets of married life. During these pre-marital meetings, the priest and couple will also work on details and plans for the wedding service.
- The President of the Altar Guild plays an important role in wedding preparations. The couple should contact her as soon as possible to consider and decide on many of the particulars of the wedding day, including: flowers, decorations, and plans for dressing and pre/post-wedding pictures.
- Many families hire wedding consultants/coordinators to assist with the details that go into planning these big events. Ascension does not permit wedding coordinators to be involved in any activities at the church. The presiding priest and altar guild will coordinate the rehearsal and service.

The Rehearsal

- A rehearsal is necessary to enable the participants to know in advance where they are to be and what they are to do. The entire wedding party, including the parents of the bride and groom, attendants, ushers, musicians, and those reading Scriptures and leading prayers must attend.
- The Rector (if he is presiding) requires a pre-rehearsal with only the couple one hour before the rehearsal. This gives the couple a chance to rehearse and prepare without the (wonderful) distraction of family and friends.
- The rehearsal will start at the scheduled time. It requires one to one-and-a-half hours. The presiding priest is in charge of the rehearsal, assisted by members of the Altar Guild.
- At the time of the rehearsal, the wedding party will be shown where to dress for the service, and last minute questions surrounding the wedding will be answered.

Flowers and Decoration

- Ascension's nave is a beautiful, historic worship space. Because of the rich beauty of the space on its own, a "less is more" approach to decorations is best.
- Two flower arrangements will need to be placed on the retable (a small "shelf" that sits behind the altar). Florists need to see and plan for the proportions that will fit in these tight spaces and in Ascension's brass vases. These flowers by their use in the sanctuary during worship are consecrated and are left in the church for the following Sunday. The service leaflets that Sunday will indicate that the flowers are given in celebration of the new couple's marriage.

- Ascension also has two flower stands that may be placed with flower arrangements on them in the sanctuary at the direction of the Altar Guild. (These flowers must be taken following the service.)
- Small bows or flower arrangements may be hung on the pew ends. (These must be taken following the service.)
- No decorations may be attached in any way using glue, tape, nails, screws, or any other type of fastener or adhesive.
- A new set of service candles, including the two altar lights and the six office lights will be purchased and used for the first time at each wedding. These remain following the wedding for use by the parish. For safety reasons, no other candles are used.
- Ascension does not permit the use of white runners down the aisle.
- No other decorations are permitted or needed in the church.

Liturgical Considerations

- Wedding services follow the form called “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage” in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* (p. 423).
- Holy Scripture is always read as part of any sacramental celebration. The presiding priest or Rector will assist in selecting suitable readings from the Bible. Normally, these are selected from the suggestions in the Marriage service in the Book of Common Prayer, but other passages may be considered. Ascension uses the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible in worship. Readings from other sources are not part of the service, and, if desired, can be shared at the reception or another venue. This web site provides all the suggested readings in the proper translation.
- The presiding priest or another member of the clergy always preaches a homily. Clergy from other denominations may preach with prior approval of the Rector.
- Normally, Holy Communion is part of the wedding celebration, and it is Ascension’s practice to celebrate Communion at weddings. Exceptions to this practice may be made in consultation with the Rector or presiding priest. All baptized Christians will be explicitly invited to share in Communion.
- It is helpful for the couple to arrange for two to four people to serve as ushers for the service, in addition to having other attendants.
- It is also most appropriate for friends or relatives to read the lessons and lead the psalms and prayers if comfortable doing so. The presiding priest will help make these decisions.

Music

- Music for all worship services will be from the Christian tradition and performed live (no pre-recorded music or accompaniment). The Rector and Director of Music Ministries will determine the appropriateness of any music in question. The Director of Music Ministries or his designee will direct and arrange for all music.

- The Director of Music Ministries at Church of the Ascension is available as organist and/or pianist for weddings. If musicians other than the Director of Music Ministries are employed, his fee is still required.
- The Director of Music Ministries' basic fee includes a consultation to select music suitable for the service; playing for the rehearsal; and playing at the wedding. The consultation should be completed at least 1 month prior to the wedding service.
- Vocal or instrumental soloists and congregational hymns are both most appropriate at weddings. The presiding priest and Director of Music Ministries can help guide these choices. The Director of Music Ministries can assist in retaining competent soloists if desired.
- If using a vocal or instrumental soloist, there must be a rehearsal with the Director of Music Ministries at the church. There can be no exceptions to this requirement, because there are so many variables to live performances. If for any reason the soloist misses a scheduled rehearsal, the Music Director will have sole discretion as to whether the piece is performed at the service. Soloists must have music in the proper key and in suitable form. All copyright laws will be obeyed.
- Music for weddings is intended to be imaginative and tailored to the distinctive circumstances of each couple. There is a vast repertoire of music available for the celebration of marriage. The once common Wagner and Mendelssohn wedding marches are now regarded as passé—even awkward to walk to—and are no longer used at Ascension.

Photography/Videography

- Weddings are primarily a service of worship to God. All activities during the service must either directly contribute to that worship or at least not be a distraction from it. Photographs become a particular challenge at weddings, but they, too, must not detract from the primary focus of the event.
- The Parish has written guidelines for photographers/videographers. Only “available light” photographs from the back of the church are permitted during the service (a flash may be used for the processions in and out only).
- Ascension's staff is happy to make arrangements for posed photography before or after the service or on another day.
- Video cameras must be mounted in an unobtrusive location before the service and with prior approval of the Rector or other officiating Priest.
- Appointments and furnishings in the church absolutely must not be moved by anyone other than the Rector or Altar Guild.
- Photographers/videographers must sign an acknowledgement that they have read and will abide by Ascension's written guidelines before they will be permitted to work in the church.
- Couples should double-check with Ascension before contracting for these services, as there is a small number of photographers who are not permitted to work here.
- The Rector reserves the right to dismiss from the premises immediately any photographer, videographer, or other service-provider not complying with Ascension's guidelines.

Other Considerations

- The Altar Guild members will be at the church to assist at the rehearsal and wedding. The president of the altar guild will arrange for the church building to be open no more than ninety minutes before the service. This provides ample time for the wedding party to get dressed on-site if desired and to take photographs.
- Because of the difficulty of cleaning and environmental concerns, Ascension does not permit throwing anything in the building or on the grounds of the Parish, including flower petals, rice, or birdseed (bubbles are a great alternative).
- Ascension does not have a custodian to assist with cleaning up after weddings. Therefore, couples are to leave everything as it was prior to arriving on the wedding day. This includes ensuring that everything is removed/thrown away in dressing rooms, and that all decorations (except the altar flowers) are removed.
- The building must be vacated and cleaned up no more than one hour following the service.
- It is important that everyone participating in the wedding celebration have their full faculties about them. The Rector and presiding priest reserve the right to dismiss from the premises anyone they deem to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- The wedding license and separate checks for the various fees (see below) should be delivered to the church office no later than four days prior to the rehearsal. The license is obtained through any county Clerk and Recorder's office in the state of Colorado. The parish administrator will send the completed license back to the proper office after the wedding.

Fees and Other Costs

- It is the policy of the Church of the Ascension that no regularly contributing member in good standing be charged for the use of the church. However, certain fees, i.e., for the Altar Guild and Organist, are paid by everyone, as they represent direct costs of the service.
- Member status is determined at the time a couple first notifies the church of their desire to get married at Ascension.
- There is a fee for non-members for the priest who works with the couple in pre-marital preparation. In addition, the couple should give the priest presiding at the service an honorarium. For members, this honorarium is at the couple’s discretion. For non-members, it is \$200.

- The fees for all weddings are as follows:

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| ▪ Altar Guild | \$160.00 | Payable to Church of the Ascension |
| Candles | \$90.00 | and marked “Altar Guild” |
| ▪ Organist | \$325.00 | Payable to the organist |
| ▪ Cleaning Fee | \$125.00 | Payable to Church of the Ascension |
| ▪ Honorarium for Priest | \$200.00 | Payable to the priest presiding at the service |
| ▪ Soloists | Varies | Payable to the soloist |
| ▪ Flowers | Varies | Payable to HMK or other florist |

- The additional fees for non-members are as follows:

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| ▪ Pre-marital Preparation | \$350.00 | Payable to the priest doing the counseling |
| ▪ Use of the Church | \$1000.00 | Payable to Church of the Ascension |
| | <i>or</i> | |
| ▪ Use of the Chapel | \$500.00 | Payable to Church of the Ascension |