

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF CONNECTICUT

INFORMATION REGARDING MARRIAGES SEPTEMBER 2009

Christian marriage is an extraordinary gift of God, in which a couple are called to live in the saving grace of Christ, enriched, guided and sustained by the Holy Spirit, in communion with the community of the Church.

The occasion when couples approach the Church with the intention of being married, or seeking blessing of their civil marriage, gives opportunity for inviting them deeper into the life of Christ, and for offering clear teaching and support for their marriage.

In that spirit, the following information is meant to be a review of our canonical requirements and diocesan policies, all of which are offered by the Church not as tests or hurdles, but as pastoral support for those seeking Christian marriage.

A transcript of the Church's marriage canon is attached.

SECTION ONE: ALL MARRIAGES

1. Episcopal Priests and Bishops, including clergy from outside the state in good standing in their judicatories, are automatically licensed to perform marriages in the State of Connecticut.
2. It is imperative for any cleric who intends to perform a marriage in a parish in which she/he is not settled, that he or she secure in writing the permission of the Priest in charge of that parish beforehand, and, if officiating in a diocese other than that in which she or he is resident or licensed, to write to ask the bishop's permission also.
3. In Connecticut the marriage license must be obtained in the same town or city in which the ceremony is to take place or the city or town in which either of the parties to be married resides; and the record of said ceremony, signed by the officiating cleric, must be returned by the cleric to the office from which it was issued.
4. Deacons are not permitted by the ordinal or the statutes of the State of Connecticut to officiate at weddings.
5. A canonical requirement is that a Priest or Bishop must have received thirty days' notice from a couple intending to marry; and if for any reason the cleric waives this requirement, the Bishop will be notified in writing immediately.
6. The Declaration of Intention must be signed by both parties to be married, and the cleric shall furnish them with a copy of that document.
7. Any Priest or Bishop may decline to officiate at a marriage.
8. Intentional premarital Christian counseling, whether by the officiating cleric or another person designated by her/him, is a canonical requirement.

9. Any member of the clergy seeking to officiate over a marriage outside the Diocese should refer to "*Guidelines for Connecticut Clergy Performing Marriages Outside the Diocese of Connecticut.*"

10. Any member of the clergy from outside the diocese seeking to officiate over a marriage in the Diocese of Connecticut should refer to "*Guidelines for Marriages to be Performed in Connecticut by Clergy from Outside the Diocese of Connecticut.*"

SECTION TWO: REMARRIAGE AFTER DIVORCE

1. All the regulations stated above also apply in such instances.
2. Application for permission to marry must be made by the officiating cleric to the Bishop of the diocese, or to another Bishop if the Diocesan so directs. Application packets are available from the Bishop's office or on our website.
3. A letter from the cleric who intends to officiate must accompany the application, and must address the concerns outlined on the "Summary of Contents" contained therein. If another cleric is preparing the couple, it is appropriate for that person to address those concerns. At all times it is inappropriate to ask the persons intending to marry to write to the Bishop.
4. The officiating cleric must satisfy him/herself that the former marriage(s) have been dissolved legally, most often by seeing the certificate(s) of divorce. Do not send these, or copies of them, with the application.
5. Christian marriage is lived within a community of faith. In all cases, our expectation is that the couple will be in good standing with a parish Church. Under no circumstances should the Episcopal Church be a "place of convenience" for a couple to avoid the marriage standards, requirements or prohibitions of their own denomination.
6. Where for either party seeking marriage there has been more than one marriage dissolved by civil decree, our diocese requires that additional testimony from a professional marriage counselor/therapist be submitted with the application. (See "*Third Marriages*," issued by Bishop Coleridge, 10/1991.)
7. Because of the Bishop's work or travel or vacation schedule, at least thirty days must be allowed for the Bishop to review the application. Add to that the courtesy to the couple planning marriage of allowing sufficient time for them to mail invitations, the application should be submitted at least sixty days before the planned wedding date, except for weighty cause.
8. The Bishop reviewing the application may contact the Priest if there is information missing or if there are questions. When the Bishop gives consent, that consent will be in writing.
9. Canon law also requires the cleric to advise the Bishop as soon as the permitted marriage has been performed. A return form will be provided with the Bishop's letter.

SECTION THREE: THE BLESSING OF A CIVIL MARRIAGE

1. Paragraphs 2 and 4 - 8 of Section One also apply for couples who have been married in a civil ceremony and who ask that the Church bless their marriage.
2. In addition, where there has been a former marriage dissolved by court decree, paragraphs 2 - 7 of Section Two also apply.

9/2009

Title I Canon 18: Of the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony

Sec. 1. Every Member of the Clergy of this Church shall conform to the laws of the State governing the creation of the civil status of marriage, and also to the laws of this Church governing the solemnization of Holy Matrimony.

Sec. 2. Before solemnizing a marriage the Member of the Clergy shall have ascertained:

- (a) That both parties have the right to contract a marriage according to the laws of the State.
- (b) That both parties understand that Holy Matrimony 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.
- (c) That both parties freely and knowingly consent to such marriage, without fraud, coercion, mistake as to identity of a partner, or mental reservation.
- (d) That at least one of the parties has received Holy Baptism.
- (e) That both parties have been instructed as to the nature, meaning, and purpose of Holy Matrimony by the Member of the Clergy, or that they have both received such instruction from persons known by the Member of the Clergy to be competent and responsible.

Sec. 3. No Member of the Clergy of this Church shall solemnize any marriage unless the following procedures are complied with:

- (a) The intention of the parties to contract marriage shall have been signified to the Member of the Clergy at least thirty days before the service of solemnization; *Provided*, that for weighty cause, this requirement may be dispensed with if one of the parties is a member of the Congregation of the Member of the Clergy, or can furnish satisfactory evidence of responsibility. In case the thirty days' notice is waived, the Member of the Clergy shall report such action in writing to the Bishop immediately.
- (b) There shall be present at least two witnesses to the solemnization of marriage.
- (c) The Member of the Clergy shall record in the proper register the date and place of the marriage, the names of the parties and their parents, the age of the parties, their residences, and their Church status; the witnesses and the Member of the Clergy shall sign the record.
- (d) The Member of the Clergy shall have required that the parties sign the following declaration:
 - (e) "We, A.B. and C.D., desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.
 - (f) "We believe that the union of husband and wife, 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 procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.
 - (g) "And we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help thereto."

Sec. 4. It shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to solemnize any marriage.

Title I Canon 19: Of Regulations Respecting Holy Matrimony: Concerning Preservation of Marriage, Dissolution of Marriage, and Remarriage

Sec. 1. When marital unity is imperiled by dissension, it shall be the duty, if possible, of either or both parties, before taking legal action, to lay the matter before a Member of the Clergy; it shall be the duty of such Member of the Clergy to act first to protect and promote the physical and emotional safety of those involved and only then, if it be possible, to labor that the parties may be reconciled.

Sec. 2 (a) Any member of this Church whose marriage has been annulled or dissolved by a civil court may apply to the Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese in which such person is legally or canonically resident for a judgment as to his or her marital status in the eyes of the Church. Such judgment may be a recognition of the nullity, or of the termination of the said marriage; *Provided*, that no such judgment shall be construed as affecting in any way the legitimacy of children or the civil validity of the former relationship.

(b) Every judgment rendered under this Section shall be in writing and shall be made a matter of permanent record in the Archives of the Diocese.

Sec. 3. No Member of the Clergy of this Church shall solemnize the marriage of any person who has been the husband or wife of any other person then living, nor shall any member of this Church enter into a marriage when either of the contracting parties has been the husband or the wife of any other person then living, except as hereinafter provided:

(a) The Member of the Clergy shall be satisfied by appropriate evidence that the prior marriage has been annulled or dissolved by a final judgment or decree of a civil court of competent jurisdiction.

(b) The Member of the Clergy shall have instructed the parties that continuing concern must be shown for the well-being of the former spouse, and of any children of the prior marriage.

(c) The Member of the Clergy shall consult with and obtain the consent of the Bishop of the Diocese wherein the Member of the Clergy is canonically resident or the Bishop of the Diocese in which the Member of the Clergy is licensed to officiate prior to, and shall report to that Bishop, the solemnization of any marriage under this Section.

(d) If the proposed marriage is to be solemnized in a jurisdiction other than the one in which the consent has been given, the consent shall be affirmed by the Bishop of that jurisdiction.

Sec. 4. All provisions of Canon I.18 shall, in all cases, apply.