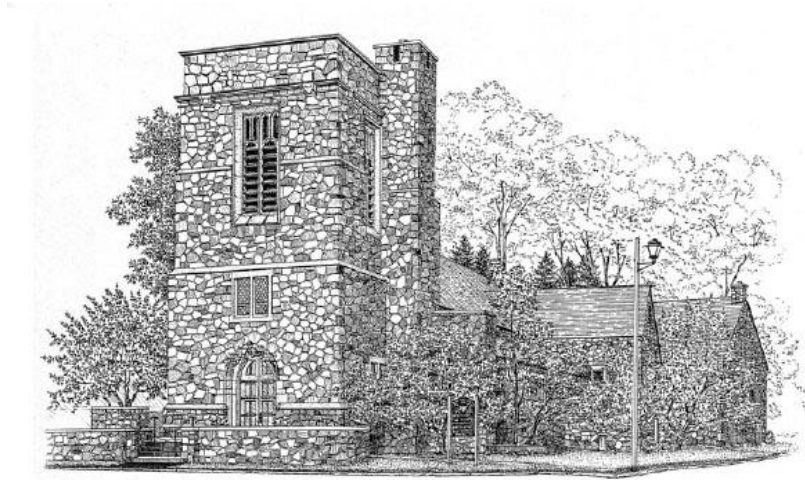


Guidelines for the Celebration and Blessing of Marriages (revised 2026)



St. James Episcopal Church
Woodstock, Vermont

Congratulations on your engagement! We are delighted that you are considering holding your wedding service at St. James.

This document outlines the basic guidelines and expectations for couples wishing to be married here. These guidelines are in accordance with the canons of The Episcopal Church and the policies of the Diocese of Vermont.

Please contact us if you have questions about any of these guidelines.

Section I: Marriage in the Episcopal Church

The *Book of Common Prayer* notes that Christian marriage is, “a solemn and public covenant...[made] in the presence of God.” In this sacramental rite, the couple formally enters into a relationship like that between God and God’s people – one which is characterized by, “fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God.”

The Episcopal Church’s marriage canons apply equally to heterosexual and same-sex couples. St. James welcomes all who wish to make this lifelong commitment in a Christian context.

The basic requirements are:

1. Both parties must have the right to marry according to the laws of the State and consent to do so freely, without fraud, coercion, mistake as to the identity of either, or mental reservation.
2. At least one of the persons must be a baptized Christian, involved in the life of the Church.
3. Thorough preparation ahead of time. (See Section II below for details.)
4. A Declaration of Intention, signed by both parties, is required. The Declaration is to be kept in the files of the local congregation where the marriage is registered. Through use of this Declaration, couples will be reminded that the Church expects that “such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God.” (Resolution D039, General Convention 2000)
5. Couples must have a valid marriage license. Please bring the license with you to the rehearsal. The officiating clergy will complete and submit it to the jurisdiction in which it was obtained on your behalf.

6. Under no circumstances will a marriage be solemnized without at least thirty (30) days' notice prior to the proposed date of the service for a first marriage, and sixty (60) days' notice if it is a second marriage for one or both parties.

7. The marriage service itself will follow the rite for The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage contained in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Other forms authorized by the Bishop of Vermont may also be used at the rector's discretion.

Section II: Pre-Marital Preparation

The Episcopal Church requires that couples planning to enter the covenant of marriage participate in a process of preparation before the wedding date. This preparation normally takes the form of several meetings with the officiating clergy, or, if the couple chooses, a licensed mental health professional. Topics for these conversations include the Christian understanding of marriage; money; communication; relationship roles; sexual relations; family of origin; any minor children, and, finally, to plan the liturgy itself.

Re-marriage after a divorce: Permission to proceed with a re-marriage for one or both parties must be obtained from the Bishop of Vermont. The officiating clergy will submit significant documentation to the Bishop on your behalf, including a physical copy of the divorce decree(s). This must be completed no later than 60 days prior to the wedding date, so scheduling of pre-marital conversations will take this timeline into account.

You can also expect to spend significant time discussing the reasons for the failure of the first marriage, what you have learned from that experience, and what is different in your current relationship.

Per diocesan policy, consent will not be normally granted for third or subsequent marriages, except for the most extenuating circumstances and then only with evidence of substantial counseling from a therapist, psychiatrist, or psychologist who will provide a letter to the bishop stating that the person has worked through personal issues surrounding broken relationships. In such circumstances, the following items are to be included in the application:

- a. The letter from the therapist, psychiatrist, or psychologist;
- b. Copy of the divorce or dissolution decrees;
- c. Specifics of care of minor children (visitation, financial arrangements, and blended family incorporation issues).

The rector will contact you to arrange an initial meeting once your deposit has been received in the parish office. You can expect this initial meeting to take place 6-9 months prior to your wedding date, depending on what your specific circumstances require.

Section III: Planning the Wedding Service

Couples wishing to be married at St. James need to give at least several months' notice to the church in order for pre-marital preparation and adequate planning to take place. It is recommended that you secure a date for the service prior to contracting with the venue and vendors for your reception.

Weddings may be scheduled at any time of the year except during the seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Lent. Some flexibility may be possible if circumstances warrant. Such a request will be considered in consultation with the rector, and on a case-by-case basis.

We expect that St. James' clergy will preside at your wedding.

If you plan to ask a priest or pastor from outside of St. James to participate in the service, you must obtain the rector's permission to do so. If the rector approves the request, she will then make the appropriate invitation, and will discuss with that individual what their role in the service may encompass.

In the very rare instance where a Member of the Clergy from outside of St. James may be given permission to officiate, those who are not canonically resident or licensed to officiate in the Diocese of Vermont are required to obtain BOTH the permission of the Bishop to officiate, and the necessary civil authorization from the State. The marriage must also be recorded in the parish register, per Canon 18.5.

As noted above, weddings at St. James follow the liturgy found in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Scripture readings for the service will be chosen from the list included in the Prayer Book and in the other liturgical resources authorized by the Bishop. "Secular" literature, i.e., anything that comes from a source outside of the Bible, is not permitted. You will be provided with a copy of the available choices to study and discuss with the officiating priest.

We expect that the couple themselves, rather than a relative or friend, will work with the rector, church wedding coordinator, and organist on these details. This ensures that the day itself goes smoothly AND in accordance with the couple's own wishes and preferences.

Altar and Flowers: The St. James Altar Guild will prepare the altar with the appropriate linens and hangings (which are white). Flowers around the altar may only be placed on the wood reredos behind the altar, and not on the altar itself. There are no other restrictions on flowers inside or at the entrance of the church.

We appreciate having floral arrangements donated for use on the Sunday following your wedding, and will acknowledge such donations in the service leaflets. Please let the wedding coordinator know of your plans in advance so we can make the proper arrangements.

We are also happy to suggest local florists should you need a recommendation.

Photography: No flash photography or artificial lights may be used during the service as they pose a major distraction to both the couple and the officiant. This applies to professional photographers as well as guests who may be taking pictures with cell phones or other devices.

Wedding Coordinator: Julie Groppe, St. James' wedding coordinator, will work with you throughout your planning process. Julie has extensive knowledge of local wedding providers (photographers, florists, etc.) that she is happy to share. She will also be assisting the wedding party and clergy with logistics during the rehearsal and the service.

Section IIIa: Use of Music

Any music to be incorporated into your wedding service must be planned in consultation with St. James' Director of Music, Dr. Jim Lorenz. He normally will provide organ music for the service, and will meet with you several weeks before the wedding date to finalize your choices from a list of standard classical repertory which will be provided to you.

You may choose to include music which is not on this list. However, it may incur extra costs to secure copies of the score(s) and any additional musicians that may be required.

"Secular" or "popular" music is not allowed, as it is inappropriate for a church setting.

Part of the Director of Music's responsibility, and service to you, is to hire and coordinate with any additional soloists or instrumental players. This includes members of your own family who may be trained musicians. Any requests for additional musicians must be discussed with him as early as possible so as to allow sufficient time for setting those contracts into place, communicating any cost and payment details with you, and scheduling necessary rehearsals.

You should **NOT** attempt to hire additional musicians for the church service on your own, and/or without express permission from the Director of Music. Our experience in cases where that has happened has not been positive, particularly when it comes to ensuring the wedding rehearsal and service both go smoothly and as planned. Just as importantly, it is a violation of good etiquette and best practices not to make such arrangements through *any* church's resident musician. They know best what will, and will not, work within the constraints of the liturgy, the physical space, and the available musicians in the area, and always appreciate couples taking advantage of their particular expertise.

The Director of Music's fee is included in the wedding fees outlined below. This fee cannot be waived. If he is for some reason unable to play, he will find a substitute to

whom that fee will be paid. It is also expected you will compensate any additional musicians appropriately, including for any time they perform beyond their contract(s).

PLEASE NOTE: St. James Church is an ADA-compliant building. We can seat a maximum of 175 in the church, including the wedding party.

Section IV: Fees

Wedding fees at St. James are as follows:

Active St. James parishioners: \$750

Non-members: \$2,000

The fee includes:

- compensation for the extra work time required for the staff, to include the organist, wedding coordinator, and sexton
- the fee for the clergy, which is paid into the parish Discretionary Fund
- the use of the church building

A deposit of \$500 is required upon submission of the marriage form to the wedding coordinator and parish office to hold your proposed date on the calendar. Checks can be made out to St. James, with “wedding deposit for [your names]” on the memo line.

The balance must be paid no later than the date of the rehearsal.

Please note the following:

1. There may be additional fees for pre-marital counseling, especially if you choose, or are required, to consult with a licensed mental health practitioner.

2. Musicians, including St. James’ organist, will expect additional compensation for playing beyond their contracted time. This includes music performed while waiting for a late arrival.

3. In the rare circumstance where a non-member is given permission for outside clergy to officiate, the fee may be reduced by \$500. However, the officiant may expect to be compensated for their time, and you should communicate with them directly about this issue.

4. If there is financial hardship which precludes your ability to pay, please discuss this with the rector during your initial meeting.

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