

**Weddings
and
Blessings Of Civil Unions
at the Parish of
Trinity Episcopal Church**

Effective June 2007

**God is love, and those who abide in love
abide in God, and God abides in them.
1 John 4:16**

Weddings & Blessings of Civil Unions at the Parish of Trinity Church, Hartford, Connecticut

The marriage and blessing of two people is a holy union; a lifelong, spiritual commitment. It begins with your desire to form a lasting, life-long partnership with another in God's love, and continues throughout your lives as a process of intentional living and growing together. In this holy union, each of you as an individual, and together as a couple, gradually transform and mature in God's presence and image.

Weddings and Blessings are rites of passage, a sacred ritual that celebrates your desire to enter into a life-long relationship. It symbolizes the ending of former ways of life and other future possibilities, and establishes a particular pathway into the future – one that you promise to travel together.

By uniting within the context of a faith community, you recognize that God is active in the love you feel for one another, and you place your relationship in God's care. Your individual stories – and your story as a couple – are celebrated in the context of the story of God and God's ways with the human community, as understood within a particular community of faith.

Within this faith community, your personal stories are seen in the light of God's action in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ's unfolding pattern in our lives is one of dying to self and rising to Christ, of transformation, and of self-offering. A Christian relationship is the living out of a self-giving way of being in a community with one another, in the larger context of the Christian community.

Through this sacramental rite, you as a couple enter into a life-long commitment. You make your vows before God and the gathered community of family, friends and the Church, and receive the grace and blessing of God to help you fulfill your vows. The exchange of your vows and holy union is a sacrament – an outward and visible expression of God's grace in bringing you together and nurturing your love.

About Trinity and the Episcopal Church

Trinity Episcopal Church is a wonderfully diverse community of people from all walks of life. We offer God's Radical Love and Hospitality. Our message to anyone who comes to our church is that whoever you are, and wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here. And that welcome extends "from the Steps to the Table." People at every stage of their spiritual journey find themselves at home at Trinity.

Trinity Episcopal Church was founded in 1859 by twelve families living in the Asylum Hill neighborhood of Hartford. At that time, the common practice of churches was to raise funds for their operation by the rental of pews. Trinity was a pioneer in Hartford in making the decision in 1869 to be a "free church." The reason was expressed by Colonel Jacob S. Greene, who said, "Here no one is to be higher in right or privilege than another, this common and equal right being based on the common and equal need which each one has of divine help."

This fundamental belief in the intrinsic value of every person makes Trinity a body of diverse individuals from richly varied backgrounds, each contributing in his or her own way to the life of the parish. We embrace St. Paul's notion that we are the Body of Christ, and that no one part of the body can do without another, and that no part of the body is exalted over another. This spirit is reflected in our mission statement: *The mission of Trinity Episcopal Church is to do God's work of transforming human lives from the ordinary to the holy. We seek to be a sanctuary of welcome, hope and healing for all. We take seriously Jesus' command to love one another as God first loved us, and we welcome all without regard to human divisions of ethnicity, status, gender or other earthly distinction.* Trinity presents an eclectic, dynamic fabric of God's people from various racial, socio-economic, educational and cultural backgrounds.

The Episcopal Church in the United States of America is affiliated with the worldwide Anglican Communion, which grew out of the unique historical circumstances of the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England. The second-largest church body in the world with some 70 million members, the Anglican Communion represents a tremendous diversity of theological understandings and liturgical traditions.

Grounded in the convergence between scripture, tradition and reason, the Episcopal Church views the mind as a gift of God that allows us to respond more fully to God's desire for the human community. The Episcopal Church takes

seriously the idea of the community of faith as a context within which people from different backgrounds and varying perspectives can openly share their experiences of God, can attend to one another in a spirit of love, and can thereby help every member of the community to grow into “the full stature of Christ.” (Ephesians 8:13).

Trinity is home to a vibrant, active community of faith. As preparations proceed for your ceremony, anxiety and tension inevitably mount. By choosing to have your union celebrated and blessed in this church, you are supported by the ongoing prayers and support of this community. We are honored and delighted that you are considering – or have already chosen – our Church as the setting for one of your life’s most significant events.

Weddings and Blessings in the Episcopal Church

A wedding of heterosexual couples in the Episcopal Church is governed by The Book of Common Prayer, Canon Law and the laws of the State. *The Book of Common Prayer* is the foundation for all Episcopal worship services – referred to as liturgies in the Episcopal Church – and provides the liturgical framework by which a wedding is celebrated. While the Episcopal Church has not yet developed a liturgy for same-sex marriages/blessings, the Church recognizes that in many of its dioceses, such celebrations are a usual part of the life of the community. For these liturgies, Trinity uses an adaptation of the Office of the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage found in The Book of Common Prayer. Depending upon your situation, the appropriate rite will be provided for you as you plan your service.

To bless a marriage or civil union in the Episcopal Church, it is required that:

- at least one of the couple be a baptized Christian,
- the ceremony be attested to by at least two witnesses, and
- for a man and a woman, the marriage must conform to the laws of the State and the Canons of the Church.
- for a same-sex couple, The State of Connecticut recognizes Civil Unions. Clergy of Trinity Episcopal Church are authorized by the Diocese to bless Civil Unions.

Laws of the State of Connecticut

Couples being married in Connecticut, and couples entering into a Civil Union, need to obtain a license from the State of Connecticut. This license can be obtained from the Town Clerk in any municipality of the State. Please be assured that while priests in the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut are not presently authorized to officiate at Civil Unions, the clergy at Trinity Church will be most willing to coordinate with a justice of the peace or other authorized official to meet the needs of homosexual couples.

1. Couples seeking marriage should bring your license, the duplicate copy and the mailing envelope to the parish office at least seven days before the rehearsal during normal parish office hours (Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.) It is the legal authorization to perform the marriage.
2. We will mail the signed license to the appropriate county office after the service for you.

Prior Marriage or Civil Union

Please inform the Clergy you meet with in the event that either member of the couple has previously been married or joined in Civil Union or its legal equivalent. In such instances, the officiating priest should meet with you *at least six months prior to the wedding date* to discuss the previous relationship. For heterosexual couples, Canon law requires written consent of the Bishop of the Diocese for a new marriage to be celebrated. For same sex couples, it is the practice of Trinity Church to follow a similar procedure. In making such decisions, the Bishop will consider:

- the depth of understanding of the individual as to why the previous relationship did not endure,
- the continuing care of and consideration for the former spouse or partner and for any children involved in the relationship, and
- faithfulness to the dissolution of the previous union: evidence that the prior union has been annulled or dissolved by a final judgment or decree of a civil court of competent jurisdiction

Scheduling and Expectations

The date for your ceremony will be chosen after your initial meeting with the officiating priest and once you have signed the acknowledgement that you have read, and will conform to the policy of Trinity regarding weddings and blessings. These liturgies are scheduled on weekdays, Saturdays, or on Sundays but are not customarily scheduled during Lent, Holy Week, Advent or on any major holiday weekend.

We encourage you to schedule your ceremony date at least six months in advance. This allows plenty of time to plan for your liturgy, and complete the required counseling sessions with the officiating priest during the course of your preparation and – if you are not already a member – to become familiar with the Trinity community. We ask that you worship regularly with us at Trinity. We believe that your union is not just a ceremony in our building; it is part of the community of seekers and believers here. Your individual spiritual journeys and your journey as a couple will be enriched by your participation. Many opportunities exist for involvement, expression, reflection and growth.

While Trinity does not require that you become part of our community before your ceremony, we do hope that you will carefully consider us as a potential church home during the time that you prepare for your ceremony.

Planning the Service

- The clergy look forward to working with you to shape the service. We find that the time spent in planning is a wonderful way to keep a focus on the heart of the service.
- The service will follow the “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage” from *The Book of Common Prayer*. A similar format will also be followed for the Blessing of a Same-Sex Union with the appropriate changes for the liturgy. Although the service will follow this content and format, there is plenty of room to put your own personal touch on the service. We will work with you to strike a balance that reflects both your relationship and our tradition. For marriages, the Episcopal Church does require the use of the traditional wedding vows in **The Book of Common Prayer**.
- Give some thought to the Biblical readings suggested for the service. We encourage the participation of friends and family members in the reading of lessons and offering of prayers.
- A celebration of the Eucharist is a wonderful way to start your life together and to celebrate the blessing of your relationship. Our custom is to include all persons, of whatever denominational background, in the invitation to receive Holy Communion and to be very clear about our welcome to everyone.
- Clergy of other parishes or traditions are welcome to assist in the service, but the invitation comes from, and after consultation with, the Rector.
- There are no fixed traditions on such matters as the style of the wedding procession (or even whether there must be one) or the composition of the wedding party. We want to hear your preferences, and our clergy will offer

clear guidance on these matters, based on what we have discovered works best in our Church building.

Ceremony Coordinator

Distinct from the role of a secular planner, the Trinity Ceremony Coordinator is responsible for our church's wedding/blessing ministry as part of the sacramental life of the Church. The coordinator is present at the rehearsal and service to assist both parties and their families, and to help with the logistics of the ceremony itself.

Music

The Director of Music Ministry will work with you to discuss musical options and to begin planning. Once you and the officiating priest have agreed to go forward with the ceremony, we will ask you to schedule this appointment by calling Bert Landman, the Director of Music Ministry (860-527-8133, ext. 205). You will be provided with expert assistance to ensure that music is appropriately planned and fitting for you as a couple.

While we at Trinity appreciate all forms of musical expression as a gift from God, you are encouraged to consider the broad array of sacred music available to be included in your ceremony. However, some secular music may occasionally be considered if a particular piece is appropriate to a sacred service, enhances the service and is especially meaningful to you. The music of the service is ultimately at the discretion of the officiating priest (in consultation with the rector, if the rector is not the officiant).

In accordance with the requirements of the American Guild of Organists and the Association of Anglican Musicians, music at your celebration must be provided by Trinity's Director of Music Ministry. He must be consulted and give consent if other musicians are to be invited to participate.

Flowers and Other Decorations

To facilitate deep engagement with the worship service itself, flowers are positioned on the flower stands in the chancel of the church for Sunday worship. As a result, placement of flowers is reserved to the same locations for your ceremony.

In the chancel, two large flower arrangements will be placed on the flower stands to the right and left of the low altar. In addition, a floral arrangement may be centered on the high altar and in front of the low altar.

Floral arrangements and other forms of decoration are the responsibility of the couple in consultation with the officiating clergy. The two chancel flower arrangements remain in the church in thanksgiving for your union. An acknowledgement of your ceremony (and your gift of the flowers) is acknowledged in the Sunday service leaflet.

Your personal flowers, such as bouquets and corsages, should be ordered from the florist of your choice.

Anything attached to a pew, door, or column must be removed at the conclusion of the ceremony. Under no circumstances may you use nails, tacks, pushpins, tape or any other means of securing decorations that might result in damage.

Runners

Trinity owns an aisle runner for the center aisle which is available for a fee of \$35.00.

Candles

Altar candles may be lit for your ceremony if your liturgy includes a celebration of the Eucharist. Additional candles, including Unity candles and the like may be discussed with the officiating clergy.

Your Service Leaflet

Because of the participative nature of the celebration of weddings and blessings in the Episcopal Church, your service leaflet is a very important part of your preparation process. The service leaflet contains information that guides those in attendance at your ceremony through your marriage/blessing liturgy, and helps them actively participate as a community supporting and witnessing your vows.

A draft working form of the appropriate liturgy will be provided to you during the planning process. Production of the final leaflet, the accuracy of which is paramount to a smooth-flowing service and fully-engaged congregation, will be handled by the Trinity office for a nominal charge.

If you wish to supply your own service leaflet, you should be sure to obtain the approval of the officiating clergy *prior* to having the leaflet printed.

Still Photography Photos / Videotaping by Professionals

- Because it is important that photos are completed prior to the arrival of guests, photos to be taken at the church prior to the service must be completed and equipment removed at least 30 minutes before the service.
- NO FLASH photographs may be taken once the service begins, that is to say, after the processional.
- A flash may be used for the procession, provided that the equipment and the photographer remain behind the congregation at the end of the church.
- Available light (no flash) photography, with quiet shutter, is permitted during the service provided that the photographer uses the gallery or remains behind the congregation or in the north or south aisles of the nave.
- Videotaping is permitted during the service, with available light only, with the videographer adhering to the same restrictions as above.
- We expect that all professional photographers and videographers will be discreet and remain unobtrusive during the ceremony.

Photos by Guests

Please inform your guests that no flash photography is allowed during your ceremony. To that end, the liturgical portion of your service leaflet will include the following: *Because your wedding/blessing is a holy service of worship and we want you to be fully present with us and to God during this time, we ask that you refrain from taking photos or shooting video during the worship service. Also, please remember to turn off all cell phones and audible pagers. Thank you.*

At the Rehearsal

The purpose of the rehearsal is to help make you and your party – the people you have honored with an important role in your service – more comfortable with their roles in your liturgy.

- Please remember that rehearsals usually take place on the day before the ceremony, in any case, beginning no later than 5:00 p.m. We request that you take responsibility for seeing that both rehearsal and ceremony start on time.

On the Day of the Ceremony

1. Have ushers in place 45 minutes before the service. A good rule of thumb is at least one usher per 50 people in attendance. Due to the fact that Trinity has two main entrances, you should plan on AT LEAST two ushers. Some of the ushers

should be persons other than those in the wedding/blessing procession, to help seat latecomers and help with miscellaneous small crises.

2. Because there are so many things coming together on the day of your ceremony, we have found that it helps to have one person from the wedding/blessing party helping to coordinate and communicate directions. Often one of the witnesses or a family member assumes this role.

Your Ceremony Coordinator will be on hand to assist the ushers with these and other tasks.

Receptions

Your clergy are very appreciative of your thoughtfulness in extending an invitation to your wedding/blessing reception. These festive occasions often occur at a time when clergy are finalizing preparations for Sunday or other worship, or are engaged in other activities related to parish ministry. We ask your understanding if clergy are not able to be present with you at the reception, but know that they are with you in spirit and will do everything to make your special day a memorable one for you both.

Thank Offering and Fees

Christianity, at its best, confronts the great questions of life with candor and love. But you only need look around to realize what a hard time our culture has with such issues as sex, love, death, and money. In fact, it may be that *money* is the last taboo. The truth is that when most of us plan our wedding, we make careful lists of the costs: reception site, food, and drinks; florists and photographers; clothing and limousines. Where is the church on that list? What value do you put on this item?

Trinity gives in abundance, to its members, to those who come here to use and enjoy this sacred space, to the poor who are helped through our ministries, to this city and surrounding communities which benefit from this holy presence in its midst. We ask that you do the same, recognizing that your wedding/blessing gift is an expression of thanksgiving to God for the abundance of your love and life together and helps Trinity to be here for other couples like you, and to help them celebrate their day.

Approximately 30 days before your ceremony, you will receive an invoice listing the suggested fees which are applicable to your service. (See schedule below). While we will not refuse to perform a service for any *member of Trinity Parish* because of the inability to meet the suggested fees, we trust in your faithfulness

and desire to honor God that you will make every effort to do so in response to God's abundant blessings in your life.

Wedding and Blessing Fees at Trinity

Gift to the church	\$1500
Director of Music Ministry	\$200 (includes one consultation and the playing at the service; add \$50 for attendance at the rehearsal and for each extra consultation with the couple or another musician)
Instrumentalists and Soloists	\$150 each
Wedding Service Leaflets	\$25 per 100 leaflets (color additional)
Ceremony Coordinator	\$150
Clergy Honorarium (to Rector's Discretionary Fund)	\$350

Now that You've Read this Material...

Let us also say that if after reading this material and thinking about it you decide that this is not the right community to serve as hosts for your ceremony, we will understand. Perhaps you'll find that you need to worship with us for a while, and sample the active spiritual and social life of Trinity as you search. After reading this booklet you may sense that Trinity is not the best setting for your ceremony. If that is the case, please accept our best wishes as you continue the search for the proper setting for your ceremony. We are open at any time to begin or resume a conversation with you.

Trinity Contacts

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