



## **Policy on Christian Marriage and Remarriage**

### **Christian Marriage**

The Anglican Church in North America and the Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic affirm “our Lord’s teaching that the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is in its nature a union permanent and lifelong of one man and one woman...As marriage is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman in which the two become one flesh, it is both an ordinance of Creation, affirmed as such by our Lord, and commended by Saint Paul as a sign of the mystical union between Christ and His Church (Matthew 19:3-9; Ephesians 5:22-32)” (Anglican Church in North America, Canon II.7).

In asking that the Church solemnize their marriage, the bride and groom declare their desire to enter a covenant relationship before God and in the presence of His people. They commit themselves to each other for the rest of their lives and invite Jesus Christ to be at the center of their marriage. In their intention to live their married life within the fellowship of the Church, they ask a priest to bless their commitment and the congregation to uphold them in prayer. They enter a Christian marriage, hallowed by our Lord Jesus Christ, whose grace can sustain them to live together in love, joy and faithfulness.

### **Marriage in the Anglican Church**

In order to be married in the Anglican Church in the Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic, a member of the clergy, canonically resident or licensed in the Diocese\*, must preside at the wedding. This officiant is the agent of both the State and the Church and is bound by the laws of the State\*\* as well as *The Book of Common Prayer* and the Canons of the Church. These obligations require the officiant to ascertain the couple’s ability and readiness rightly to enter into marriage. The officiant must ensure that they understand the nature, meaning and purpose of Holy Matrimony and that they are aware that they are entering into a lifelong covenant of physical and spiritual union.

### **Eligibility to Be Married in the Church**

It shall be within the discretion of any member of the clergy to decline to solemnize any marriage (Canon II.7.2). A member of the clergy must decline to preside at any marriage that he or she believes should not take place.

\* An Anglican priest who is neither canonically resident nor already licensed in the Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic should contact the Bishop’s office to obtain permission to officiate at a wedding in a church of the Diocese.

\*\* The officiant must conform to the licensing requirements of the State in which the wedding takes place. See Appendix 3, “Laws Concerning Marriage Officiants, by State.”

Both bride and groom must be baptized. Any exception to this requires the officiant to obtain the permission of the Bishop.

The officiant shall provide counsel to both parties on Holy Matrimony with respect to theological and social implications and responsibilities. Clergy are strongly urged to utilize trained lay couples who can assist in preparing couples for marriage. In the Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic it is expected that this period of preparation shall be at least four months in length, following which, with the permission of the member of the clergy, invitations to the wedding and other public announcements may be sent. If the officiant waives this requirement for weighty reasons, the Bishop shall be notified immediately and in writing.

The officiant shall require the parties to sign the following declaration:

*“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. We believe it is for the purpose of the procreation (if it may be) of children, and their spiritual and physical nurture, for mutual fellowship, encouragement, and understanding, and for the safeguarding and benefit of society, 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.”*

The officiant shall ascertain that the bride and groom have a valid marriage license.

In all cases, marriages shall be solemnized according to the forms contained in an authorized Book of Common Prayer, or other rite authorized by the Bishop.

The Clergy shall record in the church’s register the name, age, and residence of each party. Such record shall be signed by the member of the Clergy, the married parties, and at least two adult witnesses.

No Clergy knowingly, after due inquiry, shall solemnize any marriage if they have unresolved concerns regarding the following impediments:

- (a) Consanguinity and affinity as defined in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer;
- (b) Mistaken identity or surgically altered sex;
- (c) Absence of the capacity for free and intelligent choice;
- (d) Bigamy, evidence of sexual perversion or conviction of a sexually related crime;
- (e) Fraud, coercion, abuse or duress.

### **Remarriage After Divorce**

The failure of a marriage is always a tragedy, reflective of human brokenness and sin. Scripture acknowledges our fallen nature and does provide guidance to know when a marriage may be declared a nullity or dissolved and allows the possibility of a subsequent marriage in certain circumstances, such as adultery or abandonment by the former spouse (see Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7; Canon II.7.4).

When a divorced person seeks permission to remarry, the officiant must ascertain the pertinent facts concerning a declaration of nullity or termination of marriage; and in the absence of a declaration of nullity, if either party has been married previously and the marriage ended in divorce, the officiant must submit to the bishop for approval of the new marriage at least 45 days prior to the proposed wedding date a completed *Petition to the Bishop for Consent to Solemnize a Marriage after Divorce* (Canon II.7.4).

Permission can be expected from the Bishop when the following criteria are met:

- there has been no more than one divorce (or annulment) for either the bride or the groom;
- the marriage did not end because of adultery committed by a person now seeking permission to remarry;
- there has been sufficient time since the end of the previous marriage(s) to allow for healing; this normally means that one year will have elapsed between the date of the final divorce decree(s) and the date of application to the Bishop.
- care for any children and, if appropriate, the ex-spouse have been provided;
- there is demonstrated repentance for the individual's role in the break-up of the previous marriage (even if the person did not commit adultery, there are always ways in which the person sinfully contributed to the break-up);
- there is an understanding of the biblical teaching about marriage and divorce (including the appropriateness of divorce only on biblical grounds) and a commitment to live under biblical principles in this marriage;
- it would not cause scandal or offense within the congregation;
- the previous spouse is not still in the same congregation;
- the other normal provisions for first marriages would be met (there has been adequate preparation, there is emotional and spiritual readiness to enter into the marriage, etc.).
- both bride and groom are baptized, committed to Christ and are active members of a church.

If there have been two divorces for either or both parties, the norm in the Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic is for a civil marriage to be held in another location apart from the church's regular worship space. After a year of testing of the fruit of the marriage, a blessing of the civil marriage (without all the trappings of a typical wedding) could be held in the church with the permission of the Bishop, using the form, *Petition to the Bishop for Consent to Bless a Civil Marriage after Divorce*. In extraordinary circumstances, the officiant may petition the Bishop to waive this and permit a third marriage in the church; in such a situation, the officiant is advised to consult with the Bishop well in advance, since the Bishop may require additional steps, such as an assessment by a professional counselor, which will need to be completed prior to the Bishop making his determination.

## Appendix 1

### *Excerpts from The Canons of the Anglican Church in North America*

#### *Title II, Canon 7 Of Christian Marriage*

##### **Section 1 -**

The Anglican Church in North America affirms our Lord's teaching that the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is in its nature a union permanent and lifelong of one man and one woman.

##### **Section 2 -**

It shall be within the discretion of any member of the Clergy to decline to solemnize any marriage.

##### **Section 3 -**

Members of the Clergy of this Church shall conform to the Canons of this Church governing the solemnization of Holy Matrimony.

1. Both parties shall be baptized. Any exception to this requires the permission of the Bishop;
2. There shall be thirty (30) days notice of intention to marry unless waived for weighty reasons, in which case the Bishop shall be notified immediately and in writing;
3. The Clergy shall provide counsel to both parties on Holy Matrimony with respect to theological and social implications and responsibilities;
4. The Clergy shall ascertain that the man and woman, parties to the marriage, have a valid marriage license.

##### **Section 4 -**

As marriage is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman in which the two become one flesh, it is both an ordinance of Creation, affirmed as such by our Lord, and commended by Saint Paul as a sign of the mystical union between Christ and His Church (Matthew 19:3-9; Ephesians 5:22-32). Therefore, the failure of a marriage is always a tragedy. Scripture acknowledges our fallen nature and does provide guidance to know when a marriage may be declared a nullity or dissolved and allows the possibility of a subsequent marriage in certain circumstances (Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7).

1. Couples who request to be married by a member of the Clergy of this Church must have approval from their Bishop if either party has ever been divorced;
2. When a divorced person seeks permission to remarry, the Clergy must ascertain the pertinent facts concerning a declaration of nullity or termination of marriage; and in the absence of a declaration of nullity, forward such information to the Bishop in writing for his godly advice and consent;
3. The Diocese is responsible to create a process by which this discernment may be made with reasonable promptness.

##### **Section 5 -**

1. No Clergy knowingly, after due inquiry, shall solemnize any marriage if they have unresolved concerns regarding the following impediments:

- (a) Consanguinity and affinity as defined in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer;
- (b) Mistaken identity;
- (c) Absence of the capacity for free and intelligent choice;
- (d) Bigamy, evidence of sexual perversion or conviction of a sexually related crime;
- (e) Fraud, coercion, abuse or duress.

2. Any declarations of nullity may only be granted by a Bishop with jurisdiction and shall be based upon Scriptural principles including the foregoing impediments to marriage.

**Section 6 -**

The Clergy shall require the parties to sign the following declaration:

*“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. We believe it is for the purpose of the procreation (if it may be) of children, and their spiritual and physical nurture, for mutual fellowship, encouragement, and understanding, and for the safeguarding and benefit of society, 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.”*

**Section 7 -**

In all cases marriages shall be solemnized according to the forms contained in an authorized Book of Common Prayer, or other rite authorized by the Bishop.

**Section 8 -**

The Clergy shall record in the Parish register the name, age, and residence of each party. Such record shall be signed by the member of the Clergy, the married parties, and at least two witnesses.

***Title II, Canon 8  
Of Standards of Sexual Morality and Ethics***

**Section 1 -**

Clergy and lay leaders of this Church are called to be exemplary in all spheres of morality as a condition of being appointed or remaining in office.

**Section 2 -**

In view of the teaching of Holy Scripture, the Lambeth Conference of 1998 and the Jerusalem Declaration, this Church upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage, and cannot legitimize or bless same sex unions or ordain persons who engage in homosexual behavior. Sexual intercourse should take place only between a man and a woman who are married to each other.

**Section 3 -**

God, and not man, is the creator of human life. The unjustified taking of life is sinful. Therefore, all members and clergy are called to promote and respect the sanctity of every human life from conception to natural death.

**Section 4 -**

The Church is called upon to show Christ-like compassion to those who have fallen into sin, encouraging them to repent and receive forgiveness, and offering the ministry of healing to all who suffer physically or emotionally as a result of such sin.

## Appendix 2

### ***The 1662 Book of Common Prayer Table of Kindred and Affinity, Wherein Whosoever Are Related Are Forbidden to Marry Together***

<i>A Man may not marry his</i>	<i>A Woman may not marry her</i>
mother	father
daughter	son
adopted daughter	adopted son
father's mother	father's father
mother's mother	mother's father
son's daughter	son's son
daughter's daughter	daughter's son
sister	brother
wife's mother	husband's father
wife's daughter	husband's son
father's wife	mother's husband
son's wife	daughter's husband
father's father's wife	father's mother's husband
mother's father's wife	mother's mother's husband
wife's father's mother	husband's father's father
wife's mother's mother	husband's mother's father
wife's daughter's daughter	husband's son's son
wife's son's daughter	husband's daughter's son
son's son's wife	son's daughter's husband
daughter's son's wife	daughter's daughter's husband
father's sister	father's brother
mother's sister	mother's brother
brother's daughter	brother's son
sister's daughter	sister's son

*In this Table the term 'brother' includes a brother of the half-blood, and the term 'sister' includes a sister of the half-blood.*

## Appendix 3

### Laws Concerning Marriage Officiants, by State

#### District of Columbia

D.C. Marriage Bureau:  
Mondays-Fridays: 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.  
Moultrie Courthouse  
500 Indiana Avenue, N.W., Room 4485  
Washington, D.C. 20001  
202-879-4840

The Marriage Bureau Section of the Family Court issues marriage licenses and minister authorizations for marriages performed in the District of Columbia. The Bureau also maintains a list of officiants who perform civil marriages within the Court. Religious celebrants and judges other than those of the D.C. Courts must be authorized by the Court and registered by the Marriage Bureau in order to perform legal marriages in the District of Columbia.

Link to Application for Authorization to Celebrate Marriages in the District of Columbia:  
<http://www.dccourts.gov/dccourts/docs/family/marriage.pdf>

#### Maryland

Any official of a religious order or body authorized by the rules and customs of that order or body may perform a marriage ceremony. The clergy person must complete the marriage license and marriage certificate and give one certificate to the couple. Another certificate and the license must be returned to the clerk of the Court of Common Pleas within five days after the marriage

#### North Carolina

Any ordained minister of any faith who is authorized to perform marriages by his church may do so. Clergy must complete the marriage license and return it to the register of deeds who issued it. The couple is responsible for delivering the license to the clergy person who solemnizes the marriage. The officiant must complete the bottom portion of **both copies** then return **both copies** to the Register of Deeds office. An envelope is provided to return the license. The license must be returned within ten (10) days after the ceremony (NCGS 51.7). One copy is retained in the Register of Deeds office, and the other copy is sent to the NC Vital Records Division in Raleigh. The license may be used in any county in North Carolina. The license **must** be returned to the County in which it was issued.

#### Virginia

A minister of any religious denomination must be authorized by a circuit court to celebrate the rites of matrimony. To obtain such authorization, the minister must produce proof to the clerk of the circuit court of his ordination and regular communion with the religious society of which he is a reputed member.

Find more information at this link: [http://www.vdh.state.va.us/vital\\_records/marry.htm](http://www.vdh.state.va.us/vital_records/marry.htm)