

MARRIAGE
AND
REMARRIAGE
IN
THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE
OF MASSACHUSETTS

Guidelines & Forms

Revised Eastertide 2025



**The Episcopal Diocese
of Massachusetts**



Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

138 Tremont Street Boston, Massachusetts 02111 • 617-482-5800 • www.diomass.org

Easter tide, 2025

Dear Clergy,

The joy of officiating at the marriage of two individuals making a life-long covenant with each other in the name of God is one of the greatest pastoral privileges entrusted to us. By both tradition and practice, The Episcopal Church regards the solemnization of marriage as a sacred covenant between two persons, in the presence of God and witnessed by the community of faith. This is why the Canons of our church provide that particular requirements must be met by clergy seeking to solemnize *any* marriage: exploring the couple's readiness to enter into marriage, confirming the baptismal status of at least one member of the couple, the completion of pre-marital instruction, and the signing of the Declaration of Intention (Title I, Canon 18).

The church also regards remarriage following the dissolution of a marriage as a sacred matter requiring both careful discernment and pastoral care. When a remarriage is sought following divorce or annulment, and any former spouse is still alive, our Canons prescribe additional requirements to be completed before a clergy person may solemnize a subsequent marriage. This includes receiving Episcopal permission to do so (Title I, Canon 19).

Accompanying this letter are all the revised and relevant materials you need to carry out this aspect of your ministry. I hope that you closely read the attached material.

Please note that fully completed applications for permission to solemnize a remarriage must be received in my office, at least 45 days prior to the intended wedding date. To fill out the application and upload documents electronically, please use [this form](#). If you need further clarification, please call or e-mail David Ames (dames@diomass.org) in the Bishop's Office.

Please be assured of my continuing prayers for you in this, as in so many other aspects of your pastoral ministry.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Luke E. Whitworth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "L" and "W".

XVII Bishop of Massachusetts

The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

Guidelines for Marriage

and for Remarriage of a Divorced Person in the Episcopal Church

Section A:

Requirements for All Marriages in the Diocese of Massachusetts

In the Episcopal Church, marriage is a sacramental rite—an outward and visible sign of God’s grace. While an occasion of great joy and blessing, marriage is also “not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God” (BCP 423). Therefore, all marriages performed by Episcopal clergy must meet certain requirements.

It is the canonical duty of the solemnizing Member of the Clergy to ensure that:

- Both parties to the marriage 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 each other, or mental reservation.
- At least one member of the couple is a baptized Christian.
- The ceremony is attested to by at least two witnesses.
- The marriage is recorded, with the names of the couple, the names of the witness, and other information in a church register.
- If the parties have not declared their intention to marry to the Member of the Clergy at least 30 days prior to the wedding, and the Member of the Clergy still chooses to proceed with the ceremony, the Member of the Clergy immediately informs the Bishop in writing of their reasons.
- Both parties have been instructed by the Member of the Clergy, or a person known by the Member of the Clergy to be competent and responsible, in the nature, purpose and meaning, as well as the rights, duties and responsibilities of marriage.
- Both parties sign the Declaration of Intention, as printed in Canon I.18 (see p. 11).
- Deacons may assist at the celebration and blessing of marriages solemnized by priest or bishops, but, according to the rubrics of the Prayer Book, are not normally solemnizers of marriages except in the exceptional circumstance where a priest or bishop is unavailable. In such a circumstance, the deacon omits the nuptial blessing.

Further Diocesan expectations for solemnizing marriages:

- Clergy are entrusted to determine the nature, length, and content of the pre-marital preparation that is pastorally appropriate to each couple. Consideration of topics should include: each member of the couple's spiritual outlook, respect for the Baptismal vocation and plan for a spiritual community, understanding of the nature of a Christian marriage as expressed in the declaration of intention, communication skills, conflict resolution, intimacy and sexual fidelity, expectations of familial relationships, and financial commitments.
- The liturgical rites used for the ceremonies solemnized by clergy must be those [authorized by The Episcopal Church](#) (including those in the Book of Common Prayer as well as The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage II, the Blessing of a Civil Marriage II, and An Order for Marriage II, as authorized for trial use by the General Convention in 2024). Eucharistic prayers at weddings may use any form in current authorization for use by The Episcopal Church or another Church of the Anglican Communion.
- The solemnizing member of the clergy must follow the laws of the secular authorities in the jurisdiction in which they are solemnizing. However, as part of living into our ordination vows and our public witness as ordained Christian ministers, the Bishop expects that clergy will only solemnize marriages in their capacity as ordained Episcopal clergy.
- Clergy who are participating in marriage rites being solemnized by clerics of other religious traditions or secular officiants are warmly invited to offer blessings, messages, and prayers that reflect The Episcopal Church's teachings on marriage.
- Clergy solemnizing a marriage in another diocese are to seek permission of the Bishop of that diocese prior to performing the ceremony.
- Where an exceptionally significant pastoral relationship exists between a deacon and a couple to be married, a deacon may request written permission to officiate and solemnize the marriage from Bishop Whitworth before agreeing to the couple's request. If the deacon is assigned to a congregation, they should consult first with the Rector or Priest-in-Charge. (If a deacon seeks to officiate at a marriage taking place in another diocese, the permission of the bishop of that diocese must also be obtained, after speaking with Bishop Whitworth.)

Bishop Whitworth trusts that clergy who are solemnizing marriages will ensure these canonical and diocesan requirements are met. Unless a member of the couple to be married has previously been married and there is a surviving spouse, there is no need for Episcopal permission to solemnize once these requirements are met.

Section B: Requirements for Remarriages Following Divorce

Each request for remarriage is unique and should be treated with care and concern by clergy working with couples preparing for remarriage following divorce. In addition to the teachings of the church as provided in *The Book of Common Prayer* and the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, Title I Canon 19, what follows are the guidelines and procedures for remarriage in the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts.

Please keep the following canonical and diocesan expectations in mind:

- All requirements for a first marriage must be followed, as specified in section A.
- The Canons of this church require that a member of the clergy receive permission to officiate from the diocesan bishop where the clergy person is canonically resident or licensed before solemnizing the remarriage of a divorced person. This canonical requirement applies ONLY if a former spouse is living. **If all people formerly married to the individuals seeking remarriage are deceased, permission from the Bishop is NOT required.** (I.19.3.c)
- If the proposed remarriage is to take place outside the Diocese of Massachusetts, the consent to solemnize the marriage given by Bishop Whitworth must be affirmed by the Bishop of that jurisdiction. (I.19.3.d)
- The Member of the Clergy must be satisfied by appropriate evidence that the prior marriage has been annulled or dissolved by a final judgement or decree of a civil court of competent jurisdiction. (I.19.3.a)
- The Member of the Clergy shall instruct the parties that continuing concern must be shown for the well-being of the former spouse, and of any children of the prior marriage. (I.19.3.b)
- The Bishop expects that at that at least six months will elapse after the date a final decree of divorce by the state or civil authority becomes effective, before a remarriage is solemnized.
- The Bishop expects that the sacramental rite of Holy Matrimony is not to be used as a means for social acceptability, or as means to avoid the discipline of another church.
- The Bishop trusts solemnizing clergy to determine the depth and extent of pre-marital preparation, including whether referral to a mental health care provider is warranted.
- **Fully completed applications for remarriage, with all required documentation, must be received in the Bishop's office at least 45 days prior to the date of the proposed marriage.** Documents should be submitted via an online form available from the Bishop's Office, or, if needed, emailed to dames@diomass.org. Please submit all documents in a single application.

Process for obtaining permission to solemnize a remarriage

At least 45 days prior to the proposed marriage, the cleric must send to the Bishop's Office the Application by Episcopal Clergy to Solemnize a Remarriage, along with:

1. A letter from the clergyperson
2. A joint letter from the couple of the proposed marriage
3. A copy of the final divorce decree of the civil court. If both parties have previously been divorced, both decrees are required.
4. The Declaration of Intention, signed by both parties (see page 12)

The application serves as a permanent record. Therefore, complete and accurate information on both parties is important. Below are specifics concerning each portion of the application.

The Letter from the Cleric to the Bishop:

The cleric should send a letter to the Bishop of one or two pages, requesting permission to solemnize the marriage. It should include sufficient information to allow the Bishop to make a judgment as follows:

1. The length of time the cleric has known the couple and their relationship with the Church
2. Pastoral and personal knowledge of their situation
3. Length of separation prior to divorce proceeding
4. Assurance that the cleric has discussed the dissolution with both parties of the couple
5. If there are children from a previous marriage, the provisions made for the emotional and financial support of the children
6. The length and content of pre-marital preparation, including whether referral to a mental health professional was warranted.
7. Any other data that supports the remarriage request

This letter is the most important document the cleric provides. Judgment and permission are given to the solemnizing cleric, not the couple, in response to the request.

The Letter from the Couple:

A joint letter of request from and signed by both parties to the bishop must accompany the application for remarriage, and address the following:

1. Reasons for the dissolution of the former marriage(s)
2. Nature of the relationship the intended spouse has established with the children of the former marriage
3. Their hopes and expectations of the intended relationship
4. Their understanding of Christian marriage
5. Their reasons for wishing to have the marriage solemnized by a clergyperson of The Episcopal Church

Evidence of Divorce Decree Granted by the State/Civil Authority:

The divorced party or parties shall provide the solemnizing cleric with evidence that the prior marriage has been dissolved by a final decree of a civil court. Different states/governments have different forms for the final decree. A photocopy of the Divorce Absolute is required for divorces in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. A copy of the final decree must accompany the application (please do not send the original). Note: *The Judgment of Divorce Nisi from Massachusetts is not adequate.*

Reporting requirements following a remarriage

Once permission to solemnize a remarriage is given by the bishop, a signed document will be sent to the cleric, along with a Clergyperson's Marriage Report Form. The Clergyperson is then required to:

- A) Record the marriage in a parish register.
- B) Email to David Ames (dames@diomass.org) confirming the marriage took place.

To perform a remarriage in another diocese

A canonically resident cleric of this diocese who wishes to officiate at the remarriage of a divorced person in another diocese must first follow the steps above to seek permission from Bishop Whitworth. A cleric licensed in the Diocese of Massachusetts but canonically resident in another diocese may seek permission as above from Bishop Whitworth or from the bishop in the diocese in which they are resident.

Following this, the cleric must make an application to the bishop of the diocese in which the intended remarriage is to take place for permission to officiate in that diocese. The cleric must comply with the policies of the bishop of the diocese where the marriage is to take place.

The ceremony should be recorded either in a parish register in this diocese or the diocese where the marriage was performed. In either case, the cleric shall inform Bishop Whitworth's office via email that the marriage has taken place within two weeks of the ceremony.

Section C: Other Requirements Related to Remarriage

Episcopal Clergy from outside the Diocese seeking permission for a remarriage:

- Any cleric who is not canonically resident or licensed in this diocese must first receive permission to officiate the remarriage from the bishop where they are canonically resident or licensed.
- The cleric then must request permission from Bishop Whitworth to perform the remarriage in this diocese, by sending the following:
 1. The Diocese of Massachusetts Application to Solemnize a Remarriage and all the aforementioned material and civil document(s) in Section B.
 2. A letter from the cleric's canonical bishop stating that they are a priest in good standing in The Episcopal Church and have been granted permission to solemnize the remarriage.
- A non-resident cleric must also apply to the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for temporary authorization to perform (solemnize) a marriage, at <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/divisions/commissions/download/nonresclergyapp.pdf>.
- The ceremony should be recorded either in a parish register in this diocese or the priest's diocese, and the priest shall notify Bishop Whitworth's office that the marriage has taken place within two weeks of the ceremony.

Remarriage in Other Denominations

Clergy often receive requests to solemnize a remarriage from people of other denominations or faiths. While recognizing that each situation is unique and should be treated pastorally with care and concern, the bishop will not grant permission when that request is clearly a means of avoiding the discipline and doctrine of another church or faith. The bishop expects that those persons who are being married in The Episcopal Church have, or intend to have, an ongoing relationship with the church in which they are married.

Judgment of Marital Status

Because the Episcopal Church allows for remarriage, the bishop will not, except in very rare instances, grant annulments. Though not expressly prohibited by the Canons, it is not the practice of this diocese. Rather than an annulment, the canons do allow the granting of "A Judgment of Marital Status in the Eyes of the Church" when requested. A Judgment of Marital Status is a declaration signed by the bishop that the marriage in question is terminated. No such judgment shall be construed as affecting in any way the legitimacy of children or the civil validity of the former relationship. Any questions should be directed to Bishop Whitworth.

The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
Application by Episcopal Clergy to Solemnize a Remarriage

This form is required when a former spouse is living.

To be completed by the cleric who desires to solemnize the marriage

**PLEASE SUBMIT THIS COMPLETED FORM & DOCUMENTS
NO FEWER THAN 45 DAYS BEFORE PROPOSED MARRIAGE**

To fill out the application and upload documents electronically, please use [this form](#).

The following documents MUST accompany this application (see Guidelines for details)

_____ Letter from the clergyperson

_____ Signed Declaration of Intention by the couple

_____ Copy of Divorce Absolute for each party divorced or final Decree (not Divorce Nisi).

_____ Letter from the couple seeking to be married

CLERGY INFORMATION

Name of Clergyperson: _____

Priest or Deacon & Diocese of Canonical Residence: _____

Are you licensed in the Diocese of Massachusetts?:

If not canonically resident or licensed in this diocese, in Section 3 please give your address and the date permission was given by your bishop to perform this remarriage.

PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION FOR EACH PARTY:

Name:

Name:

Address:

Address:

Congregation:

Congregation:

Is the person (please circle all that apply):

Is the person (please circle all that apply):

Baptized Confirmed Communicant

Baptized Confirmed Communicant

Number of children:

Number of children:

Ages of children:

Ages of children:

Date their most recent divorce became final:

Date their most recent divorce became final:

3. If any application for permission to solemnize this remarriage has previously been made in this or any other diocese, please give particulars and result.

4. If you are not canonically resident or licensed in the Diocese of Massachusetts, please record below your address and the date your bishop gave you permission to perform this remarriage. Along with this application you must submit:

- a. Confirmation that your bishop has granted permission to perform the remarriage;
- b. A Letter of Good Standing from your canonical Bishop.

This intended remarriage is to be solemnized in (Town)_____

At (Place) _____ on the _____ day of _____ in the year _____

I hereby certify that in my judgment concerning the previous marriage(s), no marriage bond as it is recognized by the church now exists. Furthermore, I have examined, counseled, and instructed the above parties in the nature, meaning and purpose of Holy Matrimony and in all other ways have conformed with Title I Canon 18 and Canon 19 of the Episcopal Church.

Therefore, being convinced that the parties understand that Holy Matrimony is a physical and spiritual union of two persons, entered into within the community of faith by mutual consent of heart, mind and will, and with intent that it be lifelong, I hereby petition for permission to solemnize the marriage of the above named persons.

Clergyperson_____

Date_____

SEND TO:

The Rt. Rev. Julia E. Whitworth

c/o David Ames (dames@diomass.org)

The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

138 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02111

Action taken: (to be filled out by the bishop)

Date application received in Bishop's Office_____

Permission:

Granted

Denied

The Rt. Rev. _____

Date_____

The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

In the Name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

DECLARATION OF INTENTION

We,

AND

Desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the church, do solemnly declare that we hold Christian marriage to be a lifelong union and a solemn and public covenant between two persons in the presence of God.

We understand the teaching of the church that God's purpose for our marriage is for our mutual joy, for the help and comfort we will give to each other in prosperity and adversity, and, when it is God's will, for the gift and heritage of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of God.

We also understand that our marriage is to be unconditional, mutual, exclusive, faithful, and lifelong; and we engage to make the utmost effort to accept these gifts and fulfill these duties, with the help of God and the support of our community.

Signature: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____