

Remarriages at Grace Church

The policies of the Diocese of Virginia for solemnization of marriage after divorce, consistent with the Canons of the Episcopal Church, are based on two Christian truths: that marriage is a lifelong union of a man and a woman, instituted of God, signifying the union between Christ and his Church; and that God, in his infinite mercy and redeeming love, creates new life in death, gives hope where there is despair, and forgives our sins.

So the Church maintains its belief in the will of God for lifelong marriages that are signs of his steadfast love and at the same time, with no dilution of that belief, the Church may bless the unions of those whose prior marriages have died, and who, in faith, while accepting the consequences of their prior commitments, covenant with one another in a mature Christian marriage.

These guidelines seek to assist persons in building strong marriages after the deaths of their prior marriages. The Church's experience has taught that time is necessary for healing, for learning and for forgiveness. So the norm is that at least one year will have lapsed between the final decree of divorce and the date of petitioning to the Bishop for a remarriage. (If one year has not elapsed, at least 18 months of uninterrupted separation must occur before consent is granted.)

The intent of these guidelines is also to seek to assist persons in resolving issues left from a prior marriage and in accepting responsibility for commitments, such as child support, that continue from the prior marriage.

Guidelines for Petitioning for Consent to Solemnize Marriages after Divorce or Annulment

1. The Rector seeks the Bishop's consent to solemnize such a marriage. No date for marriage should be firmly set and none announced until consent has been received. No petition will be considered unless all final decrees of divorce have been issued.
2. At least one of the couple has been baptized.
3. Each party has signed the customary Declaration of Intention about the meaning of Christian marriage.
4. All matters of custody and property have been settled.
5. The Rector has seen the decree of divorce the confirm dates. The norm is that at least one year will have lapsed between the final decree of divorce and the date of the petition to the Bishop. If one year has not elapsed, at least 18 months of uninterrupted separation must occur before consent may be considered.

6. The couple will be expected to consult with a licensed professional counselor or a certified pastoral counselor (e.g., a licensed psychiatrist, psychologist, or a pastoral counselor accredited by a professional association) satisfactory to the Rector, at the expense of the couple.

7. After such consultation and counseling as the professional counselor may require, the Rector should receive a written statement from the counselor, together with a release from the couple authorizing release of the statement. The counselor's statement should express his or her opinion that whatever issues were involved in the dissolution of the former marriages appear to be sufficiently resolved and that, in the counselor's opinion, the couple has a reasonable chance to establish a lifetime union of mature intimacy. In situations where the person had already received professional counseling at the time of or subsequent to the dissolution of the former marriages, a statement from that counselor to the effect that the person involved has adequately resolved the issues related to the former marriages and is prepared for a lifelong commitment may be sufficient.

8. Holy Matrimony is entered into within the community of faith and the liturgy for the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage emphasizes the congregation's responsibility in upholding the couple in their marriage. It is a reasonable expectation, therefore, that the couple, or at least one party with the support of the other, intends to live out their marriage in the community of faith as members of some congregation. If that congregation is not Grace Church then the Rector will seek the consent of the couple's pastor.