

Same Gender Covenant Blessings

The clergy of St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Herndon have received approval from our Bishop to conduct same gender covenant ceremonies and pronounce God's blessing on faithful same gender relationships. We believe the ideal for a same gender covenant relationship is life-long love and fidelity. Therefore, every covenant ceremony must be approved by a Priest of the Church; the date for a ceremony must be approved by the Parish Administrator. Ceremonies are conducted in the Church or outdoor Chapel. Fees for time and travel expenses apply for ceremonies at other locations.

At least one of the couple must be a member in good standing of St. Timothy's (a Baptized, Confirmed communicant, regularly attending and pledging) for a minimum of six months prior to the date of the covenant ceremony. We believe that the ceremony is Sacred; it is an event in which the Spirit of God is truly present. Even so, many relationships fail, so we urge both people to become committed members of the Church, to draw upon the grace of God and the support of the Christian community.

All couples must participate in four preparation meetings with one of our clergy or a professional counselor. Arrangements can be made directly with one of the Priests at least four months before the Covenant ceremony.

Donations to our mission and ministry are always welcome, but there are no fees for Covenant blessings in St. Timothy's. However, time (\$50.00/hour of travel) and travel fees (\$0.75/mile) do apply if the rehearsal and ceremony are at another location. Parish staff and volunteers give approximately 50 hours total for each ceremony in the Church. Each ceremony, whether grand or simple, requires a lot of additional time from the Priest, the Music Director, the Parish Administrator, the Altar and Flower Guild, and the Sexton. Donations vary a great deal, but a usual amount is \$500.00 for the priest's discretionary fund and \$500.00 for the Church. All donations are accepted in confidence and contribute to the greater ministry of the Church.

All music is coordinated with and conducted by our Music Director. The fee for our Music Director/Organist is \$250.00 (whether he plays or not), to be paid no later than one week prior to the ceremony. A non-refundable \$50.00 deposit is required in advance. If the Organist must attend the rehearsal, that is an additional \$50.00 per hour. Preparation with an instrumentalist or soloist is an additional \$50.00. If the ceremony starts up to 30 minutes late there is an additional \$25.00 fee. The couple must contact Peter Waggoner at 703-437-3790 (peterw@saint-timothys.org) immediately after arranging the first meeting with the Priest. The Organist has final authority on all music selections. Only sacred music will be used in the ceremony.

The couple must coordinate all decorations with a member of the Altar Guild, and all other aspects of the ceremony with the Priest. Flower arrangements may be similar to what is normally used in the Church on a Sunday; one or two arrangements are customary. Bows and/or flowers may be placed along the center aisle on the pew ends. No other decorations are allowed in the Chancel or on the Communion rail. A Covenant Blessing Coordinator will be assigned to help you with the ceremony.

For reasons of safety and liability we do not permit the use of a "runner" for the center aisle, nor do we allow the use of rice, birdseed, confetti, flower petals, bubble blowers, or any such material. Bells are a nice alternative. We ask people who attend any service in the Church to understand and respect our belief that the Sanctuary is a Sacred space; nothing is to be moved or treated in a casual fashion. The service must be in accordance with the liturgy approved by The General Convention of the Episcopal Church. A Coordinators will be present during the rehearsal and service to assist. You do not need to hire a professional consultant to coordinate the service.

A Rehearsal is required (usually the evening before the ceremony). All who are participating directly in the service must attend the rehearsal. The rehearsal will last approximately one hour. The couple must arrange the time of the rehearsal with the Priest.

We do not allow photographs during the service (except by the designated photographer). The photographer is permitted to take flash photographs during the procession, available-light photographs, and videos during the ceremony from specifically designated places in the Sanctuary. Photographers must meet with the Priest before the ceremony for briefing on our rules. Posed flash photographs are permitted before and after the service. We want to maintain the integrity of the service.

Couples wanting to use our parish hall for a reception must make arrangements with the Parish Administrator in the Church office as soon as possible after the initial contact with the Priest. The Church office number is 703-437-3790 (email is office@saint-timothys.org). There is a fee for the use of this facility. Moderate amounts of alcoholic beverages may be served to adults (beer, wine, or champagne only). However, an equal variety of non-alcoholic beverages must also be offered. Alcoholic punches must be clearly labeled. Intoxication on Church property is strictly forbidden. All cleaning is the responsibility of the couple or those they designate. A fee of \$200.00 is due before the rehearsal to cover the cost of cleaning the room. Any damages or leftover mess are the responsibility of the couple. The building will be inspected after the reception.

We do not have Covenant Blessings on Sundays, during the season of Lent (the fifty days between Ash Wednesday and Easter), in Advent (four weeks before Christmas), or Christmastide (two weeks after Christmas).

Valuables should be locked in our office before the ceremony, or carried by the owner.

We want your Covenant Blessing to be the start of a wonderful and joyful life together. We do our best to preserve the spiritual dignity of all covenant celebrations. We hope these guidelines will assist you in your preparations. If you have any questions, please contact the Rector or Associate Rector.

God bless you!

