

Preparing for Christian Marriage

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PREPARING FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

“Married Christians, in virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, signify and share in the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and his church; they help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children; and they have their own special gift among the people of God.”

- Rite of Marriage

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on your proposed marriage! This is a significant and special time for you, and for us as a community of faith. As a Church, we are happy for you and committed to assist you as you prepare for the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage. We believe that the Sacrament of Marriage is a time when God's grace is present and active in a unique manner.

As couples prepare for marriage today, they face a situation that is complex and at times uncertain. To be sure, there are a great many expectations which are generated by our society and culture. Some of these are valid, others are not. From a Church perspective, there are also many issues involved when a couple chooses to celebrate marriage as a sacrament.

For this reason, in recent years, greater emphasis has been placed on preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage. We believe that marriage is not a brief celebration that takes place only at a certain time on a certain day. We believe, instead, that marriage is a lifelong commitment of a man and woman rooted in God's plan that the two shall become one flesh. Two people becoming one in the Sacrament of Marriage is a lifetime's work that requires special training and preparation. To this end, certain policies and guidelines have been developed to facilitate the preparation process.

PROCESS OF PREPARATION

Every couple is asked to take a premarital counseling instrument called "Prepare." This instrument is not a test to determine a couple's readiness for marriage. It is instead a tool designed to give you a picture of your relationship with both its strengths and weaknesses. A fee for the premarital counseling instrument is included in the overall church fee.

A group of married couples in the parish have been professionally trained to review the results of the Prepare instrument with engaged couples and act as a sponsor couple. Thus, there will be a need to schedule an undetermined number of meetings with your sponsor couple. Additional meetings with the priest or deacon will be scheduled as needed or desired, to discuss specific areas or topics concerning your relationship and impending marriage.

Couples also are asked to attend a pre-marriage seminar. Information about the pre-marriage seminar will be given to you at your initial meeting with the priest or deacon.

At least six weeks prior to your wedding date, engaged couples should meet with the Director of Music. It is at this meeting that you will choose your wedding music. More will be said about music later in these Guidelines.

Prior to your wedding date, engaged couples will meet with the wedding coordinator. It is at this meeting that you will discuss the particular details of your wedding ceremony with the exception of music. More will be said about the role of the wedding coordinator later in these guidelines.

DOCUMENTS

At some point prior to your wedding date, the priest or deacon will meet with you to answer a Pre-Nuptial Questionnaire. For that questionnaire, each Catholic party is required to present a recent Certificate of Baptism. A recent Certificate of Baptism is one issued within the last six months. A person who is not Catholic is required to present any copy of their Certificate of Baptism.

In the event of a previous marriage, specific documents are required. The priest or deacon will inform you of these documents.

Finally, a marriage license valid in the State of Minnesota is required. The marriage license should be brought to the priest or deacon at least one week prior to the wedding date.

INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

Marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics require that both parties spend time growing in their understanding and appreciation for each other's faith. A dispensation by the Archbishop for the marriage needs to be requested by the Catholic party. The Catholic party, during the answering of the Pre-Nuptial Questionnaire, will be asked to reaffirm his/her intent to practice their faith in the Catholic Church and to commit himself/herself to share that faith with their children. The priest or deacon will assist you in the dispensation process. Ministers of other Christian churches are welcome to assist at an interfaith marriage.

Marriages in other Christian churches, such as Lutheran, Methodist, etc., are permitted in cases where a dispensation from the Catholic form of marriage has been obtained from the Archbishop. In such cases, the presence of a priest or deacon is not required at the ceremony.

SETTING THE DATE

Because so much is involved in preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage, all couples are required to begin the process of preparation at least six months prior to their desired wedding date. Many couples set their wedding dates over a year in advance, so it is advisable to contact the Church as soon as possible. Dates will not be firmly set until there is an agreement on the process of preparation for marriage.

It should be stated that the priest or deacon as representative of the Church, may postpone or cancel a wedding date if he cannot, in good conscience, witness the marriage. The priest or deacon, however, will be required to give cause to the couple should he be unable to witness the marriage.

Weddings are scheduled for Friday evenings, and Saturday at either noon or 2:00 P.M. There are no Saturday evening weddings. There may be more than one wedding scheduled on a Saturday. Normally, weddings are not scheduled during the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent. Couples should be aware of the seasons of the Church year, and the decorations accompanying them. Neither these decorations, nor any church furniture, may be moved.

VISITING PRESIDERS

We consider it important that an engaged couple be familiar with the priest or deacon who will witness their marriage vows. In most cases, the priest or deacon involved in your preparation will preside at your wedding liturgy. It is possible, however, for another priest or deacon to perform a wedding at St. John the Baptist. In that event, this individual should also take part in your preparation, planning, and rehearsal. If a couple requests that someone not from the parish witness the marriage, a date will not be firmly set until that individual can make a commitment to his involvement by contacting the parish office. It is presumed that any visiting presider would follow the marriage guidelines of the parish.

COUPLES NOT PRACTICING THEIR RELIGION

If an engaged couple cannot in conscience accept the responsibilities of membership in the Catholic Church, there is a serious question as to whether or not they are called to marriage in the Catholic Church. There is nothing magical about the Sacrament of Marriage any more than any of the other sacraments. A living faith is a prerequisite. It is unfair for couples to ask a priest or deacon to witness their marriage, a public proclamation of their faith, when in their hearts they have no intention of living out that faith.

The Sacrament of Marriage presumes that a couple believes in the message of Jesus Christ, and that this belief shapes their values, influences their attitudes, and motivates their behavior. It is difficult to imagine a couple wanting to get married in the Catholic Church when this is not the case. This is especially true with couples who have chosen to live together prior to marriage. Such behavior suggests an underlying attitude that either has ignored or misunderstood the teaching of the Catholic Church. Couples living together prior to marriage must be prepared to talk about this aspect of their relationship. In keeping with Church teaching, a couple living together may also be asked to live apart during the time of their preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage.

SHOULD THE LITURGY INCLUDE MASS?

Often the question is asked whether the wedding liturgy should be within the context of Mass. The Eucharist is the church's supreme sign of love and unity. When two Catholics marry, and a priest is available, it is strongly encouraged that the wedding liturgy be within the context of Mass.

When a Catholic marries someone of another faith it is recommended that the wedding liturgy be celebrated outside the context of Mass. The strongest reason for this recommendation surrounds communion. At present, intercommunion is not permitted in the Catholic Church. A wedding liturgy celebrated outside of Mass does not include communion.

THE WEDDING LITURGY

For Christians, marriage is more than an exchange of promises by two people in a public setting. Rather these vows are set in the context of a worship service of a particular Christian community, exemplified by the coming together of relatives, friends and neighbors to support and pray for a couple on their wedding day. As a sacrament, marriage is a public sign of God's presence and grace, which is witnessed and celebrated by the Christian community. It is more than a couple's expression of their personal sentiments for each other. Each part of your wedding day has its own setting, its own character and context. The Church setting is to be sacred. Everything having to do with the wedding liturgy should manifest this sacred character.

Marriage is an act of worship in which a couple brings something which is intensely personal (their commitment to one another), to the larger community of faith, and invites their witness, support and most importantly, their prayer. It is this context of prayer which is what the marriage of Christians is all about. The overriding spirit of the wedding liturgy is prayer. The words, readings, gestures and music are simple but profound ways of expressing your faith in God and in each other.

This prayerful time in Church is the moment to express your faith in God and your love for each other, and to celebrate this commitment before God and a community of faith. It is no time to be superficial or showy. Rather, you want to be most sincere and honest in what you say and in what you do. The music you select should contribute to a mood of participation, prayer and reflection. The careful selection of prayers and readings should articulate your sincere hope and sound faith to which the people around you can say "Amen." For this reason, you and your wedding party should expect to participate in the sung and spoken prayers with those who will be attending your wedding liturgy.

LITURGICAL MINISTERS

Just like Sunday liturgy, there are many people involved in various ministries for your wedding. Although you have people invited to be your guests, from the perspective of worship they are not so much guests as they are a community of Christian witnesses come together to join you in prayer. This assembly is the voice of the Church which speaks its word of faith and prays with you for your future life. Thus they are not spectators but active participants in prayer.

You may desire to choose people from the assembly to read the scriptures or the general intercessions, to present the bread and wine, or to be a server, Eucharistic Minister, or usher. In doing so, it is important that they not be chosen simply because they are a friend or relative. Rather, they should be chosen because they are capable of fulfilling this role with skill and with respect for its liturgical significance.

MUSIC

Of special importance for your wedding is the ministry of music. Music is appropriate for worship when the words clearly express Christian faith and serve to deepen prayer. At the same time, music should possess good artistic qualities. Music which is purely secular in nature and does not speak to the Christian symbol of married love is not suitable for inclusion in the wedding liturgy. The choice of music for weddings involves an understanding of the sacramental nature of the event.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States, in their document *Music in Catholic Worship*, have said in regard to weddings: "Great care should be taken, especially at marriages, that all the people are involved at the important moments of the celebration, that the same general principles of planning worship and judging music are employed as at other liturgies, and above all, that the liturgy is a prayer for all present, not a theatrical production."

In order to help with music selection, St. John's offers a CD and music planning booklet published by the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis which will help in the planning process. Booklets and CD's are on loan and must be returned to the Director of Music and Liturgy during your meeting at least one month prior to your wedding.

All music for weddings is coordinated through the Director of Music and Liturgy. The parish organist and/or Director of Music and Liturgy will serve as the primary musician(s) for all weddings. The fee for parish musicians is included in the overall church fee. Fees for other soloists or additional instruments, such as a trumpet, are the responsibility of the couple in collaboration with the Director of Music and Liturgy.

All couples must meet with the Director of Music at least one month prior to the wedding date. Please bring your Wedding Liturgy Planning Guide and the Music Booklet and CD to this meeting.

CANTOR

A parish cantor must be present at all weddings. There is a great difference between a cantor and a vocalist. A vocalist or soloist is one who alone sings. In comparison, the cantor leads the entire assembly in song. All of the assembly have an active role in the wedding liturgy. The cantor leads those gathered in song in a way that is reflective of the sacred character of the sacrament. A fee for the cantor is included in the overall church fee.

WEDDING COORDINATOR

All weddings will have a wedding coordinator assigned to them. The role of the wedding coordinator is centered on the ceremony of your wedding day. Besides meeting with couples prior to their wedding, the wedding coordinator will preside at the rehearsal and be present to open the church the day of the wedding and be sure everything runs smoothly. The wedding coordinator will also assist the florist with questions regarding placement of flowers, the photographer with questions regarding pictures and placement of photographers and videographers during the wedding liturgy.

ORDER OF THE PROCESSION

Many couples assume the traditional wedding procession to include only the bride being marched down the aisle with her father. The groom waits for the bride at the altar. In reality, this sort of wedding procession is a remnant from a time in history when marriages were arranged by the parents of the bride and groom. Today's wedding liturgy recognizes the fact that the wedding day is special day for both the bride and groom as well as the larger church. Moreover, the wedding liturgy emphasizes that marriage is something which occurs between equals. Man and woman are both created in God's image and likeness. The Sacrament of Marriage must reflect a mutual love and respect among the bride and groom.

The wedding procession can take one of the following four arrangements. In all cases, the procession begins with the presider from the vestibule of the church.

Arrangement One: Following the presider are the bridesmaids and grooms men in pairs. The last of the bridesmaids and groomsmen are the maid of honor and best man. Next are any children. Last in the procession is the groom accompanied by one or both parents and the bride accompanied by one or both parents.

Arrangement Two: Following the presider is the groom with one or both parents. Next are the bridesmaids and grooms men in pairs, with the last of this group being the maid of honor and best man. Then in the procession comes any children. Last in the procession is the bride accompanied by one or both parents.

Arrangement Three: With the presider is the groom. Following the presider and groom are the bridesmaids and grooms men in pairs. The last of the bridesmaids and groomsmen are the maid of honor and best man. Next are any children. Last in the procession is the bride accompanied by one or both parents.

Arrangement Four: Following the presider are the bridesmaids and grooms men in pairs. The last of the bridesmaids and groomsmen are the maid of honor and best man. Next are any children. Last in the procession is the bride and groom as a pair. Parents are seated five minutes prior to the beginning of the wedding liturgy.

DECORATIONS

Flowers and candles are the traditional ways used to help create the mood of worship and joyful celebration. The church building was deliberately designed to be simple so that it would come alive with people. You as a wedding couple and those who gather for the liturgy will fill the church with color and movement. While there may be differing tastes in decorating, simplicity and dignity should be the guiding principles.

No nails, thumbtacks, or wire, may be used on furniture or walls. If you choose to use bows on the pews, it is required that they be tied rather than taped to them.

The church does not provide any other candles or candelabras. Pew torches (attach to the pew with a clamp and have a globe surrounding the entire candle), and candelabras (a branched candlestick or lamp with several candles, which would be placed near the altar), are permitted. Arrangements for candelabras or pew torches should be made directly with your florist.

Couples are welcome to bring bouquets of flowers. Flowers may not be placed on the altar at any time. Furthermore, placement of flowers or other decorations should not obstruct the pulpit or president's chair. Flowers may be placed in front of the altar or at either of the side altar. In bringing bouquets of flowers, remember that seasonal arrangements may not be moved.

Aisle runners are not permitted. Aisle runners were originally used for outdoor weddings to keep the wedding party's dress clean. Since weddings are celebrated indoors the aisle runner is not necessary. Furthermore, liability issues prevent the use of an aisle runner.

Rice, confetti, or bird seed may not be thrown on church property. Any of these is hazardous to footing and difficult to remove. Please be sure this information is spread among your relatives, friends, and other members of the wedding party. Bubbles may not be distributed or brought into any part of the building.

UNITY CANDLE

Many couples choose to light a unity candle as a part of their wedding ceremony. Technically, the unity candle is not a part of the wedding ceremony. If a couple does however choose to have a unity candle, the church will provide the stand and side candles. The bride and groom are required to purchase the center candle.

PICTURES

No flash pictures may be taken within the church during the wedding liturgy. A flash picture of the processional and recessional, however, may be taken. The photographer may take a timed exposure of the wedding party in the sanctuary provided it is taken **from behind the last pew. No photographers or photographic equipment is permitted near the sanctuary during the ceremony. All pictures should be taken prior to the liturgy and must be finished 30 minutes before the starting time.** The parish policy for pictures at your wedding ceremony will be reviewed with you when you meet with your wedding coordinator. The wedding coordinator will supply you with guidelines to be given to your photographer, these guidelines will be reviewed with the photographer upon their arrival.

VIDEOGRAPHY

The videotaping of weddings is permitted with the knowledge and approval of the wedding coordinator. As with photographers, the videographers (professional and non-professional) must position themselves outside the sanctuary space in an inconspicuous spot, and are to remain stationary during the entire ceremony. Video equipment placement can be difficult with the layout of the Church, the wedding coordinator must approve placement of all equipment. The parish policy for videography will be reviewed with you when you meet with your wedding coordinator. The wedding coordinator will supply you with the guidelines to be given to your videographer, these guidelines will be reviewed with the videographer upon their arrival.

DRESSING ROOM/PARISH CENTER

A dressing room is located in the church. Though the room is private and may be locked, the security cannot be guaranteed. Personal possessions should be removed before the liturgy. All items of value should be kept in a locked automobile. The parish is not responsible for the loss or theft of valuables. Food and beverages must be confined to the Parish Center at all times, they are not allowed in the church.

PROGRAMS

Many couples like to provide a program for their guests, but it is not required. A sample program may be obtained from the wedding coordinator. If you would like, the wedding coordinator will review your program. St. John's does not provide programs. It is suggested that a request for your guests to turn off cell phones/pagers and refrain from taking flash photos during the ceremony be printed on the program.

REHEARSALS

Rehearsals will be arranged with the wedding coordinator. Normally rehearsals are scheduled at 6:00 P.M. Please be sure everyone in your wedding party is on time. Rehearsals take approximately an hour. The bride and groom should arrive at 5:45, to review procedures with the wedding coordinator.

ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

Smoking is not permitted anywhere on church property. Alcohol is strictly forbidden. Do not drink any alcoholic beverages prior to the rehearsal or the wedding ceremony. Failure to observe this policy may result in the cancellation of the wedding.

CLEAN-UP

Someone must be designated to remove articles from the dressing room, church and parish center after the wedding. Please make sure they remove programs from the pews. Boxes, hangers, etc. from the bride's room should be placed in or near garbage cans. Parish Center tables and floor should be free from all trash, and food items. Failure to do so will result in a \$50.00 clean-up fee.

FINALLY

The process outlined does require some time, but is not wasted time. It is our hope that it will enhance your relationship and help it grow and develop.

We welcome this opportunity to talk with you, pray with you, and serve you during this happy and holy time of your lives. We look forward to this time of preparation as we hope you do.

May God's blessings be with you now and throughout your life together!

SCHEDULE OF FEES

Stole Fee	\$ 200.00
Pre-Marriage Counseling Instrument	50.00
Accompanist	200.00**
Cantor	125.00
Wedding Coordinator	<u>175.00</u>
TOTAL	\$ 750.00*

* The total fee is payable to the “St. John the Baptist” when the couple brings the copy of their marriage license to the priest/deacon. Both the license and fees should be submitted to the priest/deacon at least one week prior to the wedding day.

** Additional rehearsal time with the accompanist is at the fee of \$50.00 per hour and is payable directly to the accompanist by the couple.

Cost of any additional instrumentalists are paid directly by the couple prior to the ceremony beginning

Cost of the pre-marriage seminar is paid directly by the engaged couple.