

Marriage Preparation Guidelines

St. James Catholic Church | 17400 Northwood Ave | Lakewood, Ohio 44107 | 216-712-6755



Marriage and the Catholic Church

When the Catholic Church teaches that marriage is a Christian Vocation it is saying that the couples' relationship is more than simply their choice to enter a union which is a social and legal institution. In addition to these things, marriage involves a call from God and a response from a man and a woman who promise to build, with the help of divine grace, a lifelong, intimate and sacramental partnership of love and life.

What begins as attraction must deepen into conviction and commitment. Those who are called to the married life should be ready to learn what their vocation means and to acquire the virtues and skills needed for a happy and holy marriage.

Marriage is a gift from the hand of God. This holy institution unites a couple in faithful and mutual love. A couple's intimacy brings forth new life and God's love is manifested in their care of their children. Further, a married couple's life together is a sign to the world of God's covenantal love.

As you have discerned your call to enter into the holy state of marriage, the faith community of St. James desires to assist you prepare for your new life together. It is our hope that in addition to preparing of a wedding ceremony in our church that you would also prepare yourself to enter into a life-long union.

The following guidelines are meant to provide you with important information that will assist you with your preparation. Please take time to read these guidelines carefully. These guidelines apply to all couples seeking to celebrate Marriage in the Catholic Church at St. James Parish.

A Special Word to Couples Who Were Married at a Service Outside of the Catholic Church --Validation of Marriage:

When a couple seeks to validate their marriage which took place earlier without permission of the church or without the presence of a Roman Catholic minister, they are required to participate in the Marriage Preparation program.

It is the policy of St. James Church that the liturgical service is to be simple and reverent. While the validation does require a statement of vows, legally the couple has been married. The celebration is to be a primarily sacramental celebration with the presence of 2 witnesses and family/friends. Full wedding apparel, numerous attendants/ushers and efforts to seeking to create a full wedding ceremony that was not previously held with the civil ceremony will not be allowed with the validation ceremony in St. James Church.

Let us begin together.

Mindful that you are preparing for a religious event, begin by preparing yourself spiritually. It is important that you participate in the Sacramental life of the Church. Please make every effort to attend Mass on the weekends, receive God's forgiveness in Reconciliation and His Body and Blood in Holy Communion. At all times pray for God's strength and guidance.

Here is our prayer for you...

Lord God,

the source of all love,

the wise plan of your providence has brought

this man and woman together.

As they prepare themselves to embrace the vocation of marriage,

grant that strengthen by your blessing and grace,

they may grow in their respect for one another and cherish

each other with a sincere love.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Making Your Arrangements

The Wedding Date

The Diocese of Cleveland requires a couple desiring to be married in the Catholic Church needs to notify a priest or deacon at least six (6) months prior to the desired date of their wedding. During this time, the couple is prepared within their local community since the Church views marriage as a life-long commitment and a community celebration. In asking to be married here in this community, you are stating that you want the members of your Christian community to witness and support you through your preparation program and your married life, in thought and in prayer. The preparation focuses on the relationship between the two persons, the couple's responsibility within the community, and their relationship with God.

Prior to the setting of the date, an initial assessment based on Church and civil will be made by the priest or deacon. In subsequent meeting (s), the priest or deacon will be exploring the following:

Canonical: Before planning their wedding, the parties in a mixed marriage (where one part is not a Catholic) should discuss the raising of their children in the Catholic faith. The Catholic party is required to sign a promise that he or she will do all in their power to see to it that the children will be baptized and raised as Catholics.

In the case of a remarriage or validation of an existing union, the priest or deacon will be happy to assist you in taking the necessary steps to ensure compliance with the Diocesan Tribunal.

Spiritual: Minimal religious readiness includes, among other things: The acceptance and practice of the Catholic faith by at least one of the parties, or the serious intention to resume such practice. This also includes the acceptance of the religious and sacramental nature of marriage. The priest or deacon reserves the right to delay and/or refuse to witness the marriage of any couple not regularly practicing their faith here at Saint James Church or another Church.

Personal: Areas of psycho-social development: self-sufficiency, reality awareness, responsibility, selfless relationships and self-acceptance are evaluated to assess the ability to make a mature marriage commitment.

The Time

Weddings in Saint James Church are normally scheduled on Saturday at 12:00 noon and 2:00 p.m. No weddings are held on Sundays, Holy Days nor legal Holidays.

Place of Marriage

According to Diocesan Policy, all marriages are to be celebrated in a parish Church or a place designated as a sacred worship space.. A marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic should take place in the parish of the Catholic party. Any departure of these norms requires the permission of the pastor of the parish where the wedding should normally take place. The couple should take care of this before making any definite plans.

Visiting Priest or Deacon

If a priest or deacon from some place other than St. James Parish is going to witness the marriage, then our Parish is to be informed of this. The priest or deacon must provide proof prior to the wedding that he is in good standing with his Diocese. The priest or deacon who is going to perform the ceremony will then see to it that all Diocesan requirements are taken care of, will complete all of the necessary paperwork, will conduct the rehearsal, and is expected to follow the guidelines of Saint James Parish. A separate offering to the visiting priest for his services should be made by the couple. This offering is in addition to the offering to the church.

Witnesses for Marriage

Catholics, members of other Christian churches and non-Christians may be witnesses (Best Man and Maid of Honor) at the celebration of marriage.

Financial Responsibilities -- Offering to the Church (as of January 2013)

It is customary to give an offering to the Church. A minimum offering of \$450.00 should be given to the Church one month prior to the wedding date. This offering includes the services of the Church, priest and/or deacon, altar servers, organist and cantor. This is a minimum offering, extra gifts are appreciated.

A couple may request permission to have a visiting priest, organist, cantor, or servers participate in the ceremony. Realize that the minimum offering of \$450.00 is still required and it is the responsibility of the couple to compensate the visiting guest.

Preparation Process for Marriage

Evaluative Tool

As part of the couple's preparation for their marriage, the couple may be required to complete an evaluation for marriage questionnaire which is a tool designed primarily to be a facilitative instrument, raising questions and identifying concern areas for in-depth discussion. Prepare/Enrich is a tool used to assess a couple's readiness for marriage and to help encourage communication on topics related to marriage. Prepare/Enrich is administered via the internet and is to be completed individually and alone in the privacy of their home, school or library. The cost of scoring the answers of this tool is the responsibility of the couple and is paid for on-line. The priest or deacon will review and share your responses as part of the preparation process.

Marriage Programs of Preparation

In addition, the couple is asked to attend one or more of the following programs offered by the Diocese of Cleveland:

Pre-Cana Day

Engaged Couple Encounter

Couple-to-Couple Ministry

Information concerning these programs and the dates they are offered can be found at [Cleveland Catholic Charities](#)

Documentation

In order to prepare for marriage, the following documents will be required.

All required documentation will be kept as part of the permanent marriage file at Saint James Parish.

New Record of Baptism

A new record of baptism is obtained by phoning the Church of your baptism. This record should be issued no more than six months before the marriage. When requesting a copy of a baptismal record, please request that proper notations be made and that you are preparing for marriage. This applies only to the Catholic parties. Baptized non-Catholics can present their original document. If you were baptized at St. James, you do not need to get a new baptismal record. Have the document mailed to the priest or deacon. You may choose to pick up the document yourself and bring it to one of your preparation meetings.

Civil Marriage License

A marriage license must be obtained in the Ohio County of residence of either the bride or the groom.

The Marriage License is to be presented to the priest or deacon at the time of the Wedding Rehearsal.

To apply for a civil marriage license in Cuyahoga County, both parties must appear in person and at the same time at the Cuyahoga County Probate Court, Marriage License Bureau, 1 Lakeside Avenue, NW, downtown Cleveland. Their offices are open Monday - Friday, from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. The county charges a fee of \$50. They will accept only cash payments. The license is valid for up to sixty (60) days. If you have any further questions about this procedure, call the Marriage License Bureau at (216) 443-8920. Online Pre-Registration for Cuyahoga County can be found at: www.probate.cuyahogacounty.us

Planning Your Ceremony

Wedding Ceremony Planning

In order to make the wedding day as personal and joyous as possible, the priest or deacon will be happy to assist the couple plan and prepare for the wedding ceremony. Careful, prayerful planning and selection of texts for the wedding can add a great deal of warmth and meaning to the wedding and can make it a tremendously rewarding religious treasure for the rest of your lives.

The ceremony is planned with the help of the priest or deacon presider. The priest or deacon meets with the engaged couple to review the Catholic Wedding Ritual and provides materials to assist with the selection of reading and prayer texts.

The marriage of two Catholics takes place within the context of Mass. This is their special privilege and is the proper setting for the Nuptial Blessing. In the case of a Catholic marrying a Christian or a non-baptized person, a wedding ceremony without Mass is customary and most appropriate. The couple may desire to have the minister from the other denomination to be present and participate. The couple should make their desire known to the priest or deacon preparing them.

Music

All arrangements for wedding music must be made through the parish music director, who may be contacted either at the rectory or in Church after one of the weekend Masses. In keeping with Diocesan guidelines and mindful that the wedding ceremony is primarily a religious celebration, secular or pre-recorded music is inappropriate at any time before, during, and after the service. The parish music director must approve all arrangements with musicians, vocalists, and musical selections. If guest musicians or vocalists are utilized, they must be available to rehearse in Church the day of the wedding, immediately prior to the service. There will be an additional fee should additional rehearsals be required.

Photography

In order to make things run smoothly and to keep the ceremony as sacred as possible, all photographers and videographers must abide by the following guidelines:

It is important that you keep a low profile.

Before and after the ceremony, you are welcome to use the Church or the grounds (weather permitting) for photos.

Church appointments (altar, candles, chairs) are not to be moved.

If there is a wedding after your wedding, you will need to be sensitive to the next wedding party that needs to begin preparations. All wedding parties need to vacate the church by 4:00 p.m. so that preparations for the next service can be made.

Flowers

Flowers may certainly be used, but no flowers are to be placed on the altar of sacrifice itself. One or two arrangements of flowers on pedestals can be placed beside the altar. Flowers in front of the altar are discouraged as this is the area the couple stands to exchange their vows. Another possible location for an arrangement is on the floor in front of the pulpit.

It is the responsibility of the priest or deacon to place the flower arrangements. Wedding party members or florist are NOT permitted to move any existing church decorations.

Pew bows should be tied on or positioned with plastic clips. The use of tape damages the finish of the pew.

Aisle Runner

The use of an aisle runner, provided by the bridal party is allowed. The length of the aisle is 120 feet. If the bridal party brings the aisle runner it is their responsibility to also bring tape and fasten the runner prior to the ceremony.

Wedding Programs

Wedding programs or worship aids are not required but may be helpful in encouraging the assembly to participate. If you are duplicating music (words and/or actual music) you must obtain copyright permission to do so. You must also give proper credit to the composer under the published music and/or words. The Presider for your ceremony will gladly assist in proof reading the program to assure that the proper order of the ceremony is listed.

Rehearsal

In most cases, the rehearsal takes place the evening before the wedding and is conducted by the presider. The priest or deacon will schedule the date and time of the rehearsal with you. ALL members of the wedding party, whoever walks the bride down the aisle, and the readers, should be present. Children under the age of six (6) are not recommended to be part of the wedding party.

Optional Devotional Practices and Customs

Blessed Virgin Mary Visitation

A newly married couple may gather before the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Couples reflect upon the example of commitment to family life witnessed by the Blessed Virgin. Flowers may be placed before the images as the saints intercession is implored .

Unity Candle

Some couples choose to include the symbolic action of lighting of a Unity Candle either in the church ceremony or at the reception. It is the responsibility of the couple to provide the candles and candle holder. A small table will be provided by the church to place the candle holder/candles on.

Departure from the church

Throwing of rice, birdseed, confetti, or rose petals is NOT permitted. As the newly wedded couple leaves the Church, you may use bubbles, balloons, bells or other noisemakers. The Bridal Party is responsible to remove bows, programs, and the runner. Kindly clean up the areas used for dressing/preparation. Trash receptacles can be found in the hall.

The Wedding Day

Plan on arriving about one hour prior to the scheduled time of the marriage ceremony.

The church hall will be available for the bride and bridesmaids for immediate preparations.

The Priest Sacristy will be available for the groom and best man. The remaining ushers should be in the Gathering Area to greet the guests.

There is to be no consumption of alcohol before the wedding and no alcohol is to be brought on the property. Canon law forbids the Presider to marry anyone who might be intoxicated, because the individual might not freely be giving his/her consent.

After the Wedding Ceremony

After the marriage ceremony and once settled in to home, the couple is strongly encouraged to contact the local Catholic Church and register there. Registration provides the means for the Pastor to assure you receive support and care in your marriage and as you form a family.

In the days that follow the Wedding ceremony, the need to remain and grow in love will present themselves. Be connected to your Church community. Participate in weekend Mass celebrations and receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist so that you may be a living instrument of how God longs for all to be in a covenant relationship.

Contact your Pastor before issues arise and learn of marriage enrichment programs that help facilitate even deeper communication skills such as Marriage Encounter. The Church also has programs such as Retrouvaille to assist with couples having difficulties.

While your parish church has been privileged to help you prepare to celebrate your wedding, support to live your vocation of marriage is also available to you.