



GUIDELINES FOR MARRIAGE PREPARATION AND WEDDINGS

**St. Mary of the Assumption Catholic Church
1401 Washington Ave.
Waco, TX 76701
(254) 753-0146**

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THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

Congratulations on your upcoming marriage. We are grateful that God has brought you together and that you have decided to have your wedding at St. Mary's Church of the Assumption. To assist you in your long range planning for this great event in your life, we offer these necessary guidelines. Please read these guidelines carefully. If you have any questions please call us at **(254) 753-0146**. We will be glad to answer your questions. The Catholic Dioceses of Texas recommends that you contact your parish before setting your wedding date. This contact is to be at least six (6) months before your proposed date of marriage.

What is a Christian Marriage?

The Catholic Church believes that Christian marriage is the union of a man and woman who freely enter into a covenant of love with each other in Christ for the purpose of giving and receiving love, and for the procreation and education of children.

Married couples live their sacrament by the way they care for one another, love one another, and are enthusiastic for one another as husband and wife. In their daily love for each other, their children, and the larger community, they become a living sign (a sacrament) for all of how much Jesus loves us and wishes to embrace us as His brothers and sisters.

As they work their way through marital and family crises and struggles, they witness to the power of the Holy Spirit at work in all our lives.

In order to live out this ideal Christian marriage, couples must have the ability to give and receive love and to sustain an intimate relationship. They must also have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and His Body, the Church.

IN THE BEGINNING ...

Your preparation begins by contacting a priest or deacon at St. Mary's Catholic Church. You will be asked to obtain records of your sacramental history:

1. Recent Baptismal Certificate/s (issued within the last 6 (six) months). You may obtain these by contacting the parish where you were baptized. Request the Church of Baptism to include **all notations** on the certificate.

2. First Communion and Confirmation Certificate's. This information should be noted on the back of the Baptismal Certificate, but if it is not, then contact the Church of your First Communion and/or Confirmation. It is good to have these documents by the time you have your first meeting with the priest or deacon.

At the first meeting you will:

1. Discuss your plans and prepare your paper work and review the Marriage Guidelines.
2. Tentatively reserve the church for rehearsal and ceremony.
3. Determine if you wish a Priest or Deacon to preside at your wedding. A priest must preside if you wish to have a Mass.
4. Discuss your structured marriage preparation program.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Registration:

The couple (or at least one of the pair) must be active and REGISTERED in St. Mary's Church and should be a contributing parishioner. A person is considered registered if they are still living with their family and their family is registered. However, it is encouraged that adult children be registered as individuals and as a couple after the marriage.

If the couple is not registered at St. Mary's a Letter of Permission is required from the pastor of the bride's home parish.

SACRAMENTAL REQUIREMENTS

A Catholic should have received all 3 (three) sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Holy Communion, and Confirmation) prior to marriage in the Catholic Church. If a Catholic lacks one of these sacraments, we will work with you to receive that sacrament. However, it is understood that this will be done **before** the wedding.

Non-Catholics:

Non-Catholics may marry a Catholic in the Catholic Church 1) if they are not hostile to the Catholic Religion, 2) if they will allow their spouse to continue practicing the faith and be open to having their children baptized and reared as Catholics, and 3) if they have not been married previously (by a Church or civilly). If you have been married previously, whether by a civil magistrate (judge) or in your church, you will need to receive an annulment prior to being married in the Catholic Church. This process may take up to a year.

Prior Catholic Marriage:

A person may not marry in the Catholic Church if they were previously married in the Catholic Church and their first spouse is still living. **(The exception is if the prior marriage has been annulled or their previous spouse has died.)** If a prior church marriage is to be annulled by a church marriage court, the process can take up to a year for a decision. No marriage preparations are begun until a favorable decision has been received from the Church Marriage Tribunal and both parties are free to marry.

Prior Civil Marriage:

Church law holds that a baptized Catholic must be married before a priest or deacon and two witnesses. Therefore, any attempt by a Catholic to marry before a civil magistrate (judge) or Protestant Minister is not recognized by the Catholic Church as a valid marriage.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS OF TEXAS

A priest or deacon witnesses the marriage on behalf of the Church and State. You will need a Civil Marriage License.

To obtain the civil license you need to:

1. Appear together before the County Clerk.
2. Present legal proof of age, (Driver's License, Certified Birth Certificate or a Passport). You will also need your Social Security Number and the money for the fee.
3. The license is **valid for 30 (thirty) days**. State law requires that the license be issued **at least 72 (seventy-two) hours before the wedding ceremony takes place**.
4. You are responsible to give the license to the priest/deacon, at the latest, on the day of the wedding rehearsal.

MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMS

You will be asked to take part in one or several marriage preparation programs. These could include the following:

1. *FOCCUS*: This is a self-diagnostic inventory designed to help couples learn about themselves and their unique relationship.
2. *The PREPARE/ENRICH Program*: is used for premarital counseling, marriage preparation, marriage counseling and marriage enrichment. PREPARE/ENRICH includes a comprehensive couple assessment along with feedback using skills building exercises.

3. *Natural Family Planning*: All couples for whom the pastor will be the presider of their weddings are required to attend a pre-marriage session of Natural Family Planning. This is offered at various locations in our Diocese.
4. *Sponsor Couple*: This is a married couple who assist the priest in helping prepare engaged couples for the Sacrament of Matrimony. They meet with the engaged couple for a specified number of times. The Sponsor Couple meetings focus on the practical realities of everyday communication between husband and wife; the laws of building a life-long relationship; the meaning of sex and sexuality within marriage; and the religious dimensions of their lives as a couple.
5. *Together in God's Image: An introduction to Catholic Marriage*: This is a diocesan program offered in a retreat format at Cedarbrake Retreat Center in Belton or at other locations in the diocese. Call the Office of Catholic Family Counseling and Family Life at 512-873-7771 for more information.
6. *Several Meetings with the Priest or Deacon who is preparing you for marriage*.

These will be discussed with you in detail when you have your first meeting with the Priest or Deacon.

GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF THE CHURCH

The decor of the church is a part of the atmosphere for a joyful wedding celebration. We wish to give couples as much freedom as possible in choosing decorations keeping in mind that they are working in a sacred space. When choosing a wedding date remember that the church will be decorated for liturgical seasons. You are invited to work with the color appropriate for that season. You may not remove seasonal decorations or themes from the sanctuary area. All furnishings in the church and sanctuary must remain as they are placed for weekend liturgies. Before decorating for your wedding, please contact the parish office to see if the church is being used for other celebrations.

Large solemn weddings are not celebrated during the seasons of Advent and Lent because of their penitential nature. It is recommended that you choose a date outside the Advent and Lenten Seasons for your wedding.

As a reminder, because the Church is a Sacred Place we ask that there be no food, drinks, tobacco, or gum in church. We also want you to be aware that flower petals, rice or bird seed may not be used in or outside the church. Please inform your wedding party and guests of these guidelines.

Candles:

Use drip-less, self-contained candelabras in the sanctuary. Tubed candles are preferred. If candles are used on the pews they must be drip-less and contained in a Hurricane Lamp. All candles are

to have a plastic drip protector under the candle stand. You are responsible for the care of the carpet.

The Unity Candle is not part of Catholic Liturgical Tradition, however, if desired by the couple, it may be incorporated into the wedding service. The Unity Candle and Stand are placed on the right side of the Altar.

Flowers:

You may select either fresh or artificial flowers. Again, keep in mind that the church will be decorated for the season. **Your florist must follow parish guidelines.**

In attaching bows or flowers to the pews, **NO TAPE OR TACKS OR STAPLES OF ANY SORT MAY BE USED, INCLUDING MASKING TAPE.** Pew bows and flowers may be attached with ribbon, string or plastic clips that fit over the side of the pew.

Flowers may be placed well behind the altar under the crucifix or on stands in specified places in the sanctuary. Flowers may not be placed on the Altar nor may they be placed in a way in which they obstruct the Altar for Mass nor may they be placed in a way which would obstruct the tabernacle. The priest/deacon may move the flowers if they are not placed in the appropriate place.

Couples being married at St. Mary's are encouraged to leave the floral arrangements or a floral arrangement as an offering to the Church. All flowers left as an offering will be used in the Sunday Masses following the wedding. The couple will be thanked as donors in the following week's bulletin.

The church will be fully decorated with flowers and decorations on the two weekends after Easter and after Christmas through Epiphany. These cannot be moved nor may other flowers be added. However, with these decorations, no other flowers will be needed. That means couples with weddings on those weekends will enjoy significant savings from not having to purchase flowers.

Flowers may be presented by the bride to the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Please be sure your florist is informed of the above guidelines. You may want to give them a copy of this page.

Dressing Room:

The bride may get dressed in the parish hall or in Assumption House. It is recommended that you lock your purses and other valuables in the trunk of your car and not leave them in any building during the wedding. We do not have a dressing room for men so they should already be dressed when they arrive for the wedding. Building spaces used by the wedding party (i.e., church, parish hall or Assumption House) should be cleared of personal items and cleaned **immediately**

following the ceremony. We request that you appoint someone to be responsible for checking these rooms while the wedding pictures are being taken.

Rehearsal:

The rehearsal is very important for your wedding to go smoothly. Your rehearsal will be scheduled for **one hour**, usually the night before the wedding. This time is very precious so it is up to you to make sure the wedding party members arrive on time. Please ask them to arrive 15 minutes early. This will help lessen stress. All principle members of the wedding party should attend the rehearsal. It is recommended that any children in the wedding party be over the age of five.

Photographs:

Photographers and videographers are welcome during the wedding ceremony but they must always remember that a church wedding is a Sacred ceremony. They must take care not to interfere with the religious nature of that ceremony. Photographers should arrive well ahead of time and consult with the presiding priest or deacon on his specific guidelines and requirements. Please inform friends and relatives that they **may not** take photos during the wedding ceremony. This will help maintain the sacredness of the ceremony and protect your official photos. Flood lights are not permitted during the ceremony. The photographer/videographer may never be in the sanctuary during the ceremony.

Pictures are usually taken immediately after the wedding. Therefore the wedding party will need to return to the Altar area as soon as possible after the recessional. We ask that if poses with the priest or deacon are desired that they be taken first. The entire picture taking session is to be completed in 30 minutes. (It helps to have a pre-planned list of photos which you give to your photographer ahead of time.)

Please be sure your photographer is aware of the above guidelines. You may want to give them a copy of this page.

Music and Musicians:

A church wedding is a sacred act of worship. All music must be sacred in nature and reflect the common faith of the whole Church. The words of any vocal music used either before or during the ceremony must reflect the context of faith. Songs that are secular in origin or which are simply about romantic love are better suited for the reception. All music to be used at a wedding ceremony must be approved by the priest or deacon presiding.

Do not overlook the effectiveness of congregational hymns as part of the ceremony. The singing of hymns by the congregation draws your guests into more active, meaningful participation.

Music played before the wedding ceremony begins should be of a sacred nature. If there is a formal seating of the mothers, this will occur at the hour the ceremony is to begin. Appropriate

music could be either a vocal or instrumental. A traditional selection would be either the Bach-Gounod or Schubert "Ave Maria."

The attendants and bride usually have an instrumental procession. Because of its secular nature and overuse in many areas other than the Sacrament of Matrimony, "Bridal Chorus" from Lohengrin ("Here Comes the Bride") should not be used. Your organist/pianist can offer a number of other excellent alternatives for the procession. One recommendation is "Trumpet Voluntary" or "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring." It is recommended that the parts of the Mass be sung. The Lord's Prayer may be sung or said according to the wishes of the bride and groom. As they work their way through marital and family crises and struggles, they witness to the power of the Holy Spirit at work in all our lives.

No country and western or rock music may be used during the wedding ceremony.

Please be sure your musicians are aware of the above guidelines. You may want to give them a copy of these guidelines.

BUILDING USE FEES

Church:

For active contributing members of St. Mary's there is no fee required for the use of the church for a wedding. However, it is recommended that a donation be made to help cover air conditioning or heating costs.

For non-parishioners the church use fee is \$300 with a \$50 non-refundable deposit and that includes the brides room to dress in. This does not include a stipend to the priest or deacon nor does it include musicians' fees.

Parish Hall:

The Parish Hall is available for the reception following the wedding. There is a fee of \$150.00 for the use of this building for four hours with a \$100.00 deposit. Any additional hour is \$25.00 per hour. The couple is responsible for all clean up after the use of this facility.

Please check with the parish secretary to see if these facilities are available.

May God bless you and guide you as you prepare for your life-time commitment to one another and to God in the Sacrament of Matrimony.