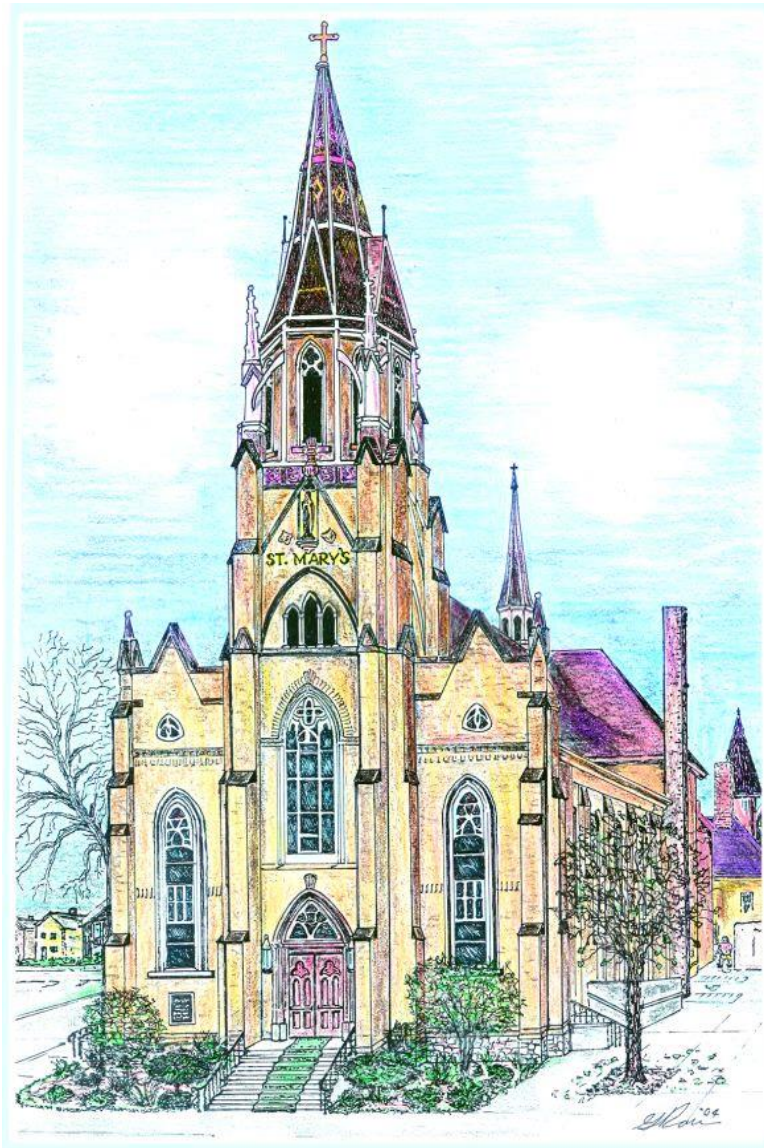


U n i t e d i n C h r i s t



Wedding Preparation Guidelines

*St. Mary Roman Catholic Church
Grand Rapids, Michigan*

Revised: January 2023

How to Contact Us

St. Mary Catholic Church
423 First Street NW
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49504-5277

These guidelines, along with other useful marriage preparation information are found on our parish web site: stmarygr.org | Click on Sacraments – Matrimony

Parish Offices:

Tel. 616.459.7390

Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 8:30 AM-noon
(and by appointment)

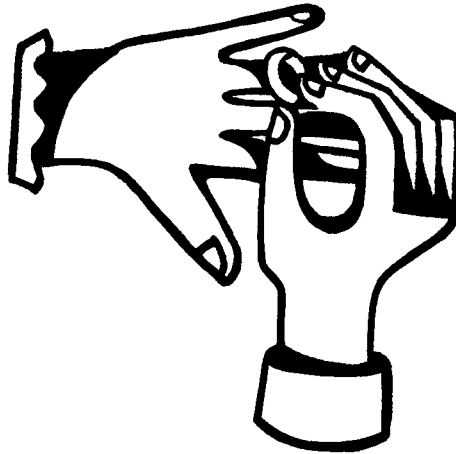
Wedding Liturgy Preparations (including music):

Director of Liturgy and Music Ministries, ext. 16
music@stmarygr.org

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God is Love; let us
love one another as
he has loved us.

WEDDING PREPARATION POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Introduction

Congratulations on your engagement! You'll be glad to know that we give personal attention to the preparation and celebration of wedding liturgies here at St. Mary's.

We've put together these guidelines to inform and assist you in your marriage and wedding preparations at St. Mary Church. Answers to many common questions are collected here for you.

A Catholic wedding is not a private event, but a public liturgy celebrated with certain expectations and boundaries. By choosing to celebrate this sacrament at St. Mary's, you are choosing to respect the form and purpose of the liturgy and act within the boundaries set by these guidelines.

Understanding these policies and guidelines is very important. If, after reading through this booklet, you have any questions or concerns that are not addressed, please contact our parish staff as soon as possible.

Preparation

At least one member of the engaged couple must be a practicing Catholic in order to have their wedding liturgy celebrated in a Catholic church. The Catholic Church takes marriage very seriously. Requirements for your marriage preparation are not arbitrary, but come from the universal Catholic Church, the Roman Catholic Province of Michigan, the State of Michigan, and the Diocese of Grand Rapids, as well as our parish church. A couple is expected to demonstrate evidence of our Catholic Christian faith being present and practiced in their lives and must show a willingness to take the time and make the necessary effort for proper religious preparation for the reception of the sacrament.

There are many dimensions to preparing for this sacrament. Spiritual preparation for the sacrament of Christian Matrimony demands more time, thought, prayer and discussion than the material preparations for the wedding day itself. While these material things must be arranged, they have little effect on the outcome of the marriage. They are merely incidental to it.

The Roman Catholic wedding liturgy is rich in tradition and meaning. Since a wedding is a liturgical worship service, great thoughtfulness and care should go into preparing the liturgy.

If your marriage preparation is taking place at a parish other than St. Mary's, the priest or deacon leading your preparation needs to have the file sent to our parish office no later than one month before the wedding. If your preparation is happening outside of the Diocese of Grand Rapids, the file must first be sent to the office of the bishop of the diocese in which your marriage preparations are taking place. From there it will be forwarded to the Diocese of Grand Rapids and then to St. Mary Church.

Marriage Preparation Period

The Catholic Province of Michigan requires a minimum of six months preparation time for all marriages. **(We recommend one year or more.)** This preparation includes:

1. a pre-marital questionnaire
2. an approved Pre-Cana program which includes a communication inventory (details of upcoming marriage preparation sessions are available from the parish staff)
3. fulfillment of all other preparation responsibilities as outlined in these guidelines

Complications That Lengthen Preparation

The marriage preparation period will necessarily be longer if one or both persons has ever been married before. Also, if one or both persons are under the age of 18, or if there is a pregnancy

involved, a longer and more careful assessment will be made which will minimally include professional counseling, parental interviews and pastoral judgment.

Inter-Denominational and Inter-Faith Marriages

The marriage of a Catholic to a non-Catholic is permitted if certain requirements are fulfilled and proper permission is obtained from the Church. For these weddings, the Rite of Marriage is celebrated within a Liturgy of the Word, not within Mass. The wedding may take place in the church of the non-Catholic party with proper permission.

Dates and Times

Reserving the Church

To reserve a wedding date at St. Mary's: Contact the parish office as soon as possible once you know you want to be married at St. Mary's. While there is a minimum of six months preparation time for all marriages, we strongly advise couples to contact the parish **one year or more** before the proposed wedding date.

Please wait until confirming your wedding liturgy date at St. Mary's before scheduling any other wedding facilities or services; your first choice of a date may not be available.

The following details must fall into place before the proposed date will be officially reserved on the parish calendar:

1. **Previous marriages.** Both Catholic **and** non-Catholic people who have **ever** been married previously should consult with the Catholic pastor and parish staff to see what special documentation will be necessary in their specific cases to ensure that they are free to marry. Contact the parish at least 18 months in advance of the tentative wedding date. **Dates cannot be held for couples waiting for a declaration of nullity from the Tribunal confirming their freedom to marry.** The date should be set *after* the declaration is obtained, a process that sometimes takes 12 months or more.
2. **Interview.** If you are a parishioner, your date will be confirmed when you first meet with our priest and he is confident that you are both free to marry. If you are not a parishioner, you must meet with the priest at the parish where you are registered and have him email or call our office to confirm that he has met with you and you are free to marry.
3. **Contact Information.** The Wedding Information sheet for our office needs to be filled out completely and turned in.
4. **Deposit.** Paying the requested deposit confirms your intent to be married at St. Mary's.

Your **intended wedding date is only tentative** until these steps are complete.

The Time of Year

The liturgical seasons of Advent (*which starts four Sundays before Christmas*) and Lent (*which starts seven Wednesdays before Easter*) are not as well suited for weddings. In Advent, restraints are placed on music and decorations that may not match your expectations. The same applies to Lent, with the additional restriction that neither flowers nor instrumental music are suitable to the season's liturgies.

Weddings are strongly discouraged during Lent for these reasons. Please be aware that there are some days of the year for which no weddings will be scheduled to accommodate other parish and diocesan activities.

Confirming the Time for the Wedding Liturgy

Weddings at St. Mary's commonly take place on:

- ☐ **Fridays**, somewhere between 3:00 PM and 6:00 PM, or
- ☐ **Saturdays** at 1:00 PM

Other times may be possible, but must be negotiated with the priest and parish staff.

It is also possible to celebrate the sacrament of marriage at a regular parish Sunday Mass. This option has an influence on the wedding liturgy preparations and should be chosen only after speaking with the parish priest or staff.

The church will usually be open for wedding preparations **2½ hours before** the scheduled wedding time. After a wedding liturgy, please complete all photos and have the church clean within 1½ hours after the end of the wedding liturgy. **Please inform your florist and photographer of these times and plan deliveries and photography times accordingly.**

The Time for the Rehearsal

Rehearsals for weddings take place most commonly on the evening before the wedding liturgy. Rehearsals most commonly take place at **6:00 PM**. (For a Thursday night rehearsal, it will need to be completed before scheduled music rehearsals.)

Wedding Costs

To help defray costs associated with weddings, as well as to maintain our beautiful church, our parish has set cost levels for members and non-members. *Please see Appendix 5, p. 15 of this booklet, the current “Wedding Costs” information sheet.*

Because a wedding is a celebration of our Christian community, wedding liturgies are most naturally celebrated in the parish where one or both of the engaged is a member. Most of the cost of a wedding liturgy at St. Mary’s for established, active parishioners is absorbed by the parish. Non-members are asked to pay a price that reflects the support a member family would likely contribute to the parish during a year through the gifts of “time, talent and treasure”.

Parish Membership

The membership of a parent or other relative does not constitute membership for the one seeking marriage. To be considered a parishioner, either one or both of you must:

1. be registered **under your own name** for a minimum of one year before the wedding
2. have been **attending Mass** here regularly on Sundays and holy days
3. have demonstrated a **consistent pattern** of contributing to the financial support of the parish, and/or have volunteered their time and talent to parish activities

Anyone not meeting the three criteria above pays the non-member cost for weddings.

The use of the church is not a “rental” of the building. By getting married at St. Mary’s, you are agreeing to act cooperatively with our parish guidelines, even if a guest presider or visiting musicians are leading the liturgy.

Necessary Documents

Baptismal/Sacramental Record For Catholics, this is **different** than the certificate given to the family at the time of baptism. Within six months of the wedding date, Catholics must contact the parish of your baptism and request that your baptismal/sacramental record be sent to St. Mary’s. If you were baptized here at St. Mary’s, just let us know. While it is not required that a person has received the Sacrament of Confirmation to enter marriage, it is fitting since it is one of the three sacraments of initiation. It makes sense to receive all the sacraments of initiation before entering the Sacrament of Marriage!

A non-Catholic person’s requirements are a bit different—ask the priest or deacon guiding your marriage preparation about what is needed.

Marriage License No later than the Monday before the wedding you must acquire a State of Michigan Marriage License and bring it to our parish office. *Please refer to Appendix 4, p. 14 in this booklet, “Obtaining a State of Michigan Wedding License”.*

The Wedding Liturgy

Although beginning a marriage is a very special event for an engaged couple, it is much more than the personal exchange of vows and rings. **Weddings are public rituals of the community**, celebrated with family, friends and the rich traditions of our faith. By choosing to be married in the Catholic Church you are seeking a particular celebration in a particular spirit.



Wedding celebrations within the Catholic Church are much like Sunday Mass. They are celebrated in the community prayer space (the church building, not outdoors) and encourage those who have gathered not only to witness the vows of the couple but also to participate fully in the liturgy. As on Sundays, the communal atmosphere of prayer colors all aspects of the wedding celebration. You are inviting people to experience God's presence in your wedding celebration and your marriage. The following notes will help you make choices about ministries, music and the worship environment of your wedding liturgy.

For a marriage between a Catholic and a person who is not Catholic, the wedding liturgy without Mass is celebrated. For a marriage between two Catholics, they may choose to celebrate their wedding either within Mass or in a liturgy without Mass.

Expectations – A Reality Check

These guidelines are filled with a variety of expectations for you, but it is also worthwhile to examine are what is *not* expected.

***Not* a Part of our Catholic Weddings**

For carefully considered reasons, following are some things that are not a part of our Catholic wedding liturgies at St. Mary's. Please read the explanations carefully and bring any questions you have to the parish pastoral staff.

- **perfection**; there is no such thing as a perfect wedding! Couples who insist on a perfect wedding are inevitably disappointed. Instead, be flexible and strive for a *prayerful* wedding
- **a procession for the bride that is separate** from the groom and the rest of the wedding party (see p. 11, *Appendix 1: The Catholic Wedding Procession*)
- **the men** in the wedding party standing in front instead of participating in the procession (see p. 11)
- **giving away the bride** during the liturgy (see p. 11)
- ***Bridal Chorus* (“Here Comes the Bride”)** [by Wagner] or the *Wedding March* [by Mendelssohn] (See our *Music for the Sacrament of Marriage* guidelines.)
- **an aisle runner** (see p. 10)
- **flower petals being dropped** (see p. 10)
- **rice**, balloon launches, birdseed or confetti (see p. 10)
- **decorative fencing**, arches, tall plant stands, and/or extra candelabra (see p. 10)
- **seating guests by “bride’s side”/“groom’s side”** (see p. 5, *The Assembly*)
- **a photographer up close to the sanctuary during the liturgy** (see p. 9)
- a military arch of swords or sabers (see p. 12, *Military Traditions*)
- the influence of a professional wedding planner on the liturgy itself (see p. 8, *Use of the Church*)

What is Not Required?

It may surprise you to learn some of the things that are not required at a wedding liturgy:

- **hiding the bride and groom from each other** before the liturgy (we strongly discourage this practice)
- **seating grandparents last**, just before the liturgy begins (optional)
- **a flower girl or ring bearer** (children in the wedding party are possible with some restrictions) (see p. 6)
- **lighting a wedding candle**, or having parents light the sides of a wedding candelabra (options) (see p. 12)
- **a prayer to Mary** (an option if both the bride *and* groom have a strong devotion) (see p. 12)
- **a lot of decorations** (our church interior doesn't require a lot of decorations) (see p. 10)
- **a big wedding party** (only the two witnesses are expected; the rest are extra)

The People in your Wedding Liturgy

Who does what? You have probably thought about the people you would like to participate in the wedding with you. As you know from Sunday Mass, there are a variety of roles in the liturgy. Since secular wedding planners and etiquette books are not adequate guides in this area, this information will help you get an overall picture of the various roles involved.

The Assembly

The goal of your liturgy preparation is to encourage the full and active participation of all who will gather to celebrate your marriage. Liturgies are not private functions, but rather celebrations belonging to the Church community. At any liturgy, the primary ministry belongs to the assembly of people who gather to celebrate. (When this is overlooked, the majority of the people at a wedding may feel like spectators at a show.)

When celebrating this sacrament of unity, designating one side of the church “for the bride” and the other “for the groom” is a counter-productive practice and will be avoided. Beyond seating immediate family together, the assembly will be seated equally and indiscriminately on both sides of the church.

How can we encourage everyone to participate? Many things contribute to people's participation. Hospitality, a printed program, and familiar music for all to sing are some of the ways that help people to feel welcome and a part of the celebration. The way that you and the other people with special roles in the liturgy conduct yourselves is also a key influence!

The Couple

In the Roman Catholic wedding liturgy, **the engaged persons are the ministers of the sacrament**. The priest or deacon serves as the Church's official witness, but does not “pronounce you husband and wife.” Since a great deal of attention is focused on you during the wedding, you also set the tone for the assembly by your own attitudes and behavior. If, for example, you are at ease before the liturgy and taking the time to greet people as they arrive, people will feel welcome and relaxed. If you enter into the prayers and singing during the liturgy, others in the assembly will be inclined to follow your lead.

The Priest or Deacon

For parishioners, our parish clergy will gladly preside at your wedding, their schedule allowing.

If you are not a parishioner you will need to find a priest or deacon to preside at your wedding and he must confirm with our parish office that he will do so. Our parish priest is responsible for multiple churches and is rarely available for wedding liturgies for non-parishioners. Ask the priests or deacons you know if they are able to preside at your wedding! If you run into difficulties finding a priest or deacon, our parish staff may be able to assist you.

The Wedding Party

Two witnesses are required to be present for the legality of the wedding according to the laws of both the State of Michigan and the Catholic Church. They must be at least 18 years of age and be competent to attest to the events as they have transpired. They may be men or women.

The size and makeup of the wedding party is a personal decision of the couple. It is our experience that **smaller wedding parties contribute to a smoother, more elegant and less confusing celebration**. Also, our church worship space is narrow, and wedding parties of more than four couples are more awkward to accommodate.

Hospitality is a wonderful way to show people how much you appreciate their presence at your wedding. It also encourages their active participation in the liturgy. The members of your wedding party (men *and* women) can be of tremendous help here as **greeters and ushers**. Ask them to cordially greet people arriving at the church, hand out any printed program for the wedding, and lead people to a seat near the front of the church. We encourage both the men and women in your wedding party to assist with this hospitality. It is an option to assign the role of ushers to people who are not in the wedding party.

People serving as ushers, assistants and/or MM of ceremony are also expected to assist **after the liturgy** by going throughout the church to collect loose programs (if any), clean up the pews and lift up the kneelers.

Children in the Wedding Party?

Caution is necessary if you are considering the inclusion of children in your wedding party. The sometimes seen social roles of flower girl or ring bearer are not needed nor even expected.

Any children participating must be old enough to rehearse, remember and carry out their roles in a respectful and reverent manner. **Children under the age of seven should not be in the procession.**

If you insist, they should be guided by an adult. Even then, have a backup plan of who will care for them if they don't cooperate with your plans! Note that cute kid stuff that lends an atmosphere of spectacle to the wedding procession (such as kids wearing signs or little ones in wagons) may be suitable for a reception but are not appropriate for the liturgy.

Designating people to be junior/miniature bride & groom is strongly discouraged. It would be appropriate for any children in the party be dressed like the other members of the wedding party, but not to appear dressed as a bride and groom.

Assistants

It is important to assign one or more people of hospitality to act as assistants. (The title "master of ceremonies" doesn't really reflect their role.) These helpers provide a valuable service by:

- helping with setup and cleanup
- gathering people together for the photographer
- distributing corsages and boutonnieres
- serving as greeters before the liturgy
- acting as "go-fors"
- assisting as needed with anything and everything

The **parish wedding coordinator's duties** also include the traditional duties of a master of ceremonies during the rehearsal and on the day of the wedding:

- opening the building
- serving as the host
- leading the rehearsal

- directing the wedding party and liturgical ministers
- preparing any items needed for the liturgy (readings, prayers, candelabra, etc.)
- assisting the presider
- giving cues
- answering questions

Lectors (Readers)

Select scripture readers from among the people who will be at the wedding. One or two people may be asked to proclaim the readings. One of these readers might lead the Prayer of the Faithful, or these prayers may be led by the cantor. People who serve as lectors at St. Mary's or in their home parishes are good choices because of their familiarity with the role. Otherwise, look for people with clear voices and good public speaking skills. (They do not need to be Catholic.)

Weddings within Mass only:

Gift Bearers

If both of you are Catholic and your wedding will be celebrated within Mass, you will need to assign at least two people to be gift bearers to bring the bread and wine for the Eucharist to the altar.

You may also choose to present **gifts for the poor** at this time. Friends and relatives are often exceedingly generous at weddings. You may already be overwhelmed by the outpouring of gifts. Some couples choose to express their gratitude to this outpouring of gifts by making a gift of their own to the needy in their area, perhaps in the form of a basket of food items that can be brought up with the bread and wine and placed before the altar.

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

These ministers (usually two people) assist the priest with the distribution of the Eucharist. Holy Communion in both forms (bread and wine) is the clearer expression of the sacramental sign and offers a particular opportunity of deepening the understanding of the mystery in which the faithful take part. If a marriage is celebrated within a Mass, it is important to offer Holy Communion under both forms if at all possible.

As with lectors, ministers from St. Mary's are the logical first choice since they are familiar with our routine. Otherwise, think of people who will be at your wedding who are ministers of Holy Communion in their home parishes. Of course, with the permission of our pastor, Catholic members of the assembly who are not commissioned may be able to serve in this role for this special event.

It is a beautiful expression of faith for yourselves as the bride and groom to assist with the distribution of Communion.

Wedding Music and Musicians

Music is a key and integral element of any liturgy! Our director of music ministries is responsible for guiding all music selections and musicians for wedding liturgies, even if they will not be serving at your liturgy themselves. The director of music ministries will meet with the two of you well in advance of the wedding date to prepare the music for the wedding. This will give you an opportunity to ask questions, explore options and listen to appropriate options. Please do not make any arrangements for music until you have met with our director of music ministries. *Refer to our handout, "Music for the Sacrament of Marriage" for important details. (If you don't have this handout, please visit our parish web site: stmarygr.org → Sacraments → Matrimony)*

Restrictions and Other Information

You're responsible for communicating this information to your family, wedding party, assistants, photographers, videographers, florist, and guests.

Use of the Church

We have a zero tolerance policy for alcohol. Alcohol is not allowed on the property, even the parking lot. If any of the staff discover evidence of alcohol consumption by the bride, groom or wedding party, the wedding liturgy can be cancelled. Don't even risk it. The wedding day is too important!

The buildings of St. Mary's and areas nearby any doors or windows are entirely no-smoking areas.

St. Mary staff will be on hand to open the church, prepare the church space for the wedding, run the wedding rehearsal and help with the wedding liturgy.

If you happen hire **a professional wedding planner**, please note: a professional wedding planner does not have any authority over the wedding liturgy. Their assistance is allowed before and after the liturgy, but not needed during. Sharing these guidelines with them will be helpful, although they will not be allowed to change how we celebrate a wedding liturgy.

The **organ loft** may be used as an excellent vantage point for photography and videography during the liturgy. The wedding party may gather here before and/or after the wedding liturgy. The loft is not open to guests.

As a courtesy, **a room in the adjacent office building** will be available for the women of the wedding party to use for dressing, and then for the entire wedding party to use as a "staging area" before the liturgy. Ironing gowns and personal hygiene should be taken care of before you arrive. This room must be cleaned after the wedding liturgy. **Please do not leave any valuable items (purses, cameras, etc.) unattended in any room.** There are no dressing facilities available for the men of the wedding party. The rest of the office building is off limits and might be in use for other activities. Because of security issues, the doors to the outside from the office building may not be used except in an emergency.

We strongly discourage the practice of "hiding" the bride from the groom before the wedding liturgy. Long gone are the days when a groom met his bride for perhaps the first time at the wedding. In our time, to pretend that they are meeting each other for the first time as the bride enters the church contradicts the work that goes into a relationship to prepare for marriage.

Please remember that St. Mary's is **not air conditioned**. The church seats up to about 400 people comfortably.

The parish Activity Center is available for rental for alcohol-free wedding receptions. Please contact the parish office if you are interested.

The Wedding Rehearsal

Except for the musicians, **any member of the assembly who has a special role to play in your wedding liturgy is expected to be at the rehearsal.** This includes ushers, groomsmen, bridesmaids, witnesses, readers/lectors, ministers of the Eucharist, assistants (M/M of ceremony), people bringing up the gifts of bread and wine, altar servers, etc. It is very important that these people participate in the rehearsal because they need to see the specifics of the flow and expectations for weddings in this church. This will allow them to receive instructions, ask questions and familiarize themselves with what they will be doing at the liturgy.

Photography / Videography for Wedding Liturgies

IT'S IMPORTANT TO SHARE THIS PAGE WITH YOUR PHOTOGRAPHERS AND VIDEOGRAPHERS IN ADVANCE. *Copies of this page are available from the parish office and at stmarygr.org/Photography. You're responsible for making sure they receive these guidelines.*

A balancing act is necessary to respect the wedding liturgy and the worship space, record the event, and take photos or video that are artistic, creative and beautiful. Above all, photographers and videographers are expected to be both **reverent** and **discreet** during the liturgy.

The use of the church for pictures is a privilege, not a right of either the couple or the photographer. All photography or video before, during or after the liturgy must respect the sacredness of the sacrament and of the church. As a guest of our parish, do not move any existing flowers, furnishings, candles, plants, or seasonal decorations.

The church will usually be open no sooner than 2½ hours before the scheduled wedding time. After a wedding, please complete all photos and have the church clean and empty of all equipment within 1½ hours after the end of the liturgy. Photo sessions may be held inside and outside the church before and after the liturgy within these time boundaries.

We strongly discourage separating or “hiding” the bride from the groom before the wedding liturgy. Such a practice is incongruous with this sacrament. Please keep this in mind when scheduling photographs.

It is necessary to **avoid any movement** or action during the liturgy that will distract from or interrupt our worship. Therefore, photographers and video operators will not be allowed to operate near the sanctuary (front) during the liturgy. Movement up the side aisles is distracting and therefore strongly discouraged. *Please remain behind the assembly and work as discreetly as possible.* There is **a small space at the front of the side pews** where a stationary camera or video recorder may be discreetly placed and operated. A stationary camera may be allowed to the right, near the piano, only if it does not interfere with the musicians. (Please ask.) No cameras will be allowed between the other front pews and the sanctuary.

The **organ loft** is an excellent vantage point for photography and videography during the liturgy. Keep in mind that the traffic path of the organist to and from the north side of the organ console must not be obstructed.

During the entrance procession, flash may be used. There is only one procession, and it includes everyone—the wedding party, parents, and the bride and groom. The photographer may place themselves in front or in the center aisle at that time, *but may not slow or stop the procession in any way.*

During the rest of the liturgy, only non-flash photography is permitted. Our worship space is not brightly lit. Our light fixtures cast an amber glow. Please plan ahead to bring the equipment you may need.

Please be aware that there are times during the liturgy at which the assembly stands. For example, everyone stands during the entire entrance procession, not just for the bride. During those times, the lines of sight are most clear down the main aisle or from the loft.

Every moment of our worship—word, song and silence—is intentional and significant. This fact is especially important to anyone recording the liturgy with **video**. Consider continuous video footage of the entire liturgy to honor the spirit of our liturgy.

Photographers and videographers are encouraged to be familiar with the Roman Catholic *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (2016) as part of their preparation.

We may be able to offer a sound feed for video from our sound system. Please contact the parish staff in advance for more information.

Decoration Suggestions and Restrictions for Wedding Liturgies

IT IS IMPORTANT TO SHARE THIS PAGE WITH YOUR FLORIST IN ADVANCE. *Copies of this page are available from the parish office and at stmarygr.org/WeddingDecor. You're responsible for making sure they receive these guidelines.*

The church will usually be open no sooner than 2½ hours before the scheduled wedding time. After a wedding, please have the church clean and empty of any rented items within 1½ hours after the end of the liturgy. It's very important to plan floral deliveries and pickups accordingly!

Because of the style of our church building, we encourage those responsible for flowers and decorations at weddings to strive for beauty in **simple rather than extravagant** ways. The church is ornate and does not require much for decorations to achieve the desired effect. One should be able to sense something special (and nothing trivial) in everything that is seen, heard, touched, smelled and tasted in our liturgy so that it's experienced as a prayer, not as a show.

The church is the place where the parish faith community gathers for prayer. As a guest of our parish, do not move any existing flowers, furnishings, candles, plants, seasonal decorations, etc. without explicit permission from our staff. The church environment—especially during the Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter seasons—takes priority over decorations for a wedding.

Decorations or arrangements may not be placed on the altar. (The *altar* is the sacramental table, not to be confused with the *sanctuary*, which is the raised area at the front of the church.)

Decorations may not be so large as to **obstruct the view** of the sanctuary furnishings from anyone in the church, nor should they ever **hinder any ritual movement** and action. Specifically, no decorations in the sanctuary should be taller than 40" (the height of the altar). Decorations on the main floor level should be no taller than 60". Plant stands may be used to raise smaller decorations within the height limits. The use of arches, decorative fencing and/or extra candelabra are not allowed. (As a general rule, anything artificial is less than appropriate for worship, including artificial flowers.)

Aisle runners are a safety hazard and are not allowed.

Possible **decorations placed on the pews** (flowers or bows, for example) should be used to offer hospitality to the entire assembly, not to emphasize the aisle or to set apart special seating. If used, flowers or bows used on the center ends of the pews may also be matched by decorations on the outside ends of the pews. There are 25 pews on each side of the main aisle, although placing decorations on each and every pew appears excessive in our space. **No tape, glue or tacks are to be used.** Ribbons or chenille wire stems/pipe cleaners are suggested.

St. Mary's has a wedding (unity) candelabra which you may use. It is adjustable in height and holds two tapers and a 3" pillar candle. The candles are not provided by the parish. A photo of the candelabra is available upon request.

For reasons of safety and cleanliness, we cannot allow balloon launches or allow flower petals (fresh or artificial), rice, birdseed or confetti to be thrown or scattered, inside or outside the church. These all cause special problems.



Appendix 1: The Catholic Wedding Procession

“The gathering and entrance rites of the liturgy are designed to transform the many individuals in the church into a unified assembly of worshippers, ready to celebrate and hear the scriptures.”

Weddings are very meaningful occasions in our worship life. Because you will be customizing the form of the procession to your wedding party and family, you will need to consider the following to guide your choices.

Catholic wedding processions don't look like TV wedding processions. **There is no separate procession for the bride in the ritual, for instance.** The entrance procession is a liturgical action and the ritual entrance of the ministers for the liturgy.

The bride & groom are the ministers for this sacrament of unity and are (both) included in a unified procession. You both enter from the same door, avoiding any visual suggestion that one is more important than the other. You are even encouraged to enter together. Separation of the men & women in the procession sends mixed messages, clouds the symbolism of the ritual, unnecessarily lengthens the procession, and may seem more like a fashion show.

The entrance procession at a wedding is an extended form of the regular entrance of the priest and other ministers at Sunday Mass. If the bride and groom will not be walking down together, consider each walking with both of your parents in the procession.

Doesn't the father of the bride give her away? Even when the father walks with the bride down the aisle, giving the bride away is not a part of the liturgy. Besides, that practice of former years loses much of its attractiveness when its original purpose is known, namely, one man handing over a woman to another man. It dates to a time when women were considered as property, and was indeed a father giving away his daughter. Even though that is not what is now intended, we have a directive and a responsibility to do better. The way in which we worship both manifests our faith & affects our faith, although not always consciously.

There are many varied customs involved with wedding processions. These customs are not necessarily religious, and they often don't reflect contemporary attitudes toward marriage. The Church does not require such social customs, and not all of them are appropriate for a Christian wedding.

To embody the spirit of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, **here are three suggested forms for the procession.** Please look them over and choose how you will use or adapt these suggestions to order the procession for your liturgy. At the recessional, a similar order (in reverse) will be taken...

Form 1:
{Cross Bearer/Altar Server}
{Lector(s)}
Presiding Celebrant
Wedding Party Members
Witnesses
Parents of the Groom
Parents of the Bride
Bride & Groom

Form 2:
Presiding Celebrant
Wedding Party Members
Witnesses
Bride & Groom

Form 3:
Presiding Celebrant
Wedding Party Members
Witnesses
Mother - Groom – Father
Mother - Bride – Father

Other variations in this spirit are possible, of course. Couples who want this moment to be a deeply meaningful part of the liturgy will keep this spirit in mind when customizing the procession of their wedding party and family.

[Please note that, for couples who choose the option to light a wedding (unity) candle during the liturgy, the side candles would be lit five minutes before the liturgy procession begins. Check out the notes in *Appendix 2: Adding Elements to the Wedding Liturgy*, p.12.]

Will the doors be closed before the bride enters, to give her a grand entrance? No. Anything that separates the bride from the rest of the liturgical procession is out of step with the spirit of the sacrament.

Will the music be changed when the bride enters? No (for the same reason).

So what about the Opening Song?

The introductory rites of Catholic liturgies are there to bring the people together as a community and prepare them to listen to God's word. An opening song combines the voices of those assembled and intensifies the unity of those gathered. Together, we become more conscious of ourselves as a worshipping community, not just as individuals! The Church points out the importance of this simple but powerful action.

At wedding liturgies, an instrumental processional can be beautiful and serve to accompany the procession, but, if alone, fails to recognize the role and needs of the assembly. The assembly at a wedding is just as important as at any other liturgy and there is still the need for an opening song sung by everyone together. You will be asked to choose such a song to be sung either during the procession or immediately after it.

Appendix 2: Adding Elements to the Wedding Liturgy

Wedding Candle, Prayer to our Blessed Mother, Arras, Lazo, Veil, etc.

Additional rituals and symbols, including ethnically derived traditions, may be admitted to the wedding liturgy after discussion with the parish staff as to their appropriate inclusion. These customs are not a part of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, may be redundant expressions of the sacramental action, and are not required. These are secondary to the central ritual actions of the wedding liturgy. Any such additions take place in the liturgy **after the blessing and giving of rings** and before the universal prayer.

Wedding Candle The symbolism of “two becoming one” is already present with your exchange of vows and the blessing and exchange of rings. If you desire to light a wedding (unity) candle, we encourage you to do so as a table prayer at the reception instead. This allows those who are not able to be present at the wedding to witness a symbolic action and avoids adding symbol upon symbol in the wedding ceremony itself. *Please see p. 18, Examples of a Wedding (Unity) Candle Ceremony, for some examples of what this could look like.*

If a wedding candle is used in the wedding liturgy, it is placed on a candelabra near the sanctuary in a location where it does not interfere with ritual movement and action. St. Mary's has a wedding candelabra available for use at the wedding. Two small, lighted candles, perhaps even the baptismal candles, are symbolic of the separate families and histories of the bride and groom. They are commonly used to light central, larger candle that represents their oneness in Christ. (The parish does not provide the candles.) The **side candles** are not extinguished but left burning, as the families and histories of the couple do not cease to exist because of the marriage. Another meaningful possibility is to use a unity/wedding candle as the beginning prayer of the wedding reception.

For couples who choose the option to light a wedding candle during the liturgy, the side candles will be lit five minutes before the liturgy procession begins. They may be lit by the sacristan/wedding coordinator, the witnesses, the parents, etc, but no special ceremony is indicated or required for this.

Prayer to the Blessed Mother If both the bride *and* the groom have a genuine devotion to Mary in their prayer life, it is possible for them to say a prayer (together) in front of the image of the Blessed Mother, offering flowers, a lit candle, or some other appropriate symbol.

Military Traditions Although we recognize that an arch of swords or sabers is an act and symbol of loyalty, swords and sabers are not permitted in the church building because of the inherent conflict between Christian love and violence. Therefore, any arch of swords or sabers must take place *outside* after the conclusion of the liturgy.

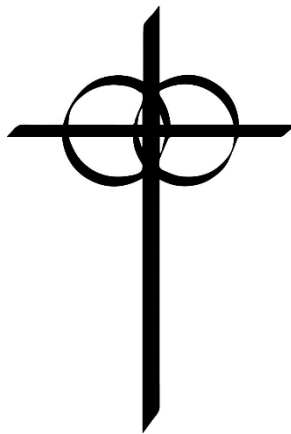
Appendix 3: Preparing a Printed Program/Worship Aid

The St. Mary staff will normally produce and print a worship aid (program) for you. A printed program is primarily a **gesture of hospitality** for those who gather to celebrate the sacrament, and therefore should be much more than a simple listing of titles of the different parts of the liturgy. (As such, it will require several pages.) A worship aid is especially important when a significant number of the assembly will not be familiar with the Roman Catholic liturgy for celebrating matrimony. Another function of a printed program is as a record of the event.

If you like, you can have our staff include optional details such as:

- ☐ the names of the parents, the members of the wedding party and others who contribute to this special occasion (lectors, presiding celebrant, special ministers of Holy Communion, musicians, etc.)
- ☐ a personal message from you to your guests
- ☐ a photo

If you would like to have a professional printer design and print the program for your liturgy, our staff can furnish you with a computer template for a wedding worship aid which can be adapted to fit your needs. Using the notes you receive from the staff of St. Mary's will help you with the liturgical jargon, an accurate order of service, music images, copyright credits and little details. The ability to copy and paste text from the template will help the program designer save time and avoid errors. Our staff is also available to proofread your worship aid before it is printed.



Appendix 4: Obtaining a State of Michigan Wedding License

The State of Michigan requires all parties intending to be married to obtain a marriage license from the county clerk of the county in which either applicant resides. Out of state residents apply for their license in Kent County.

How To Apply For a Marriage License in Kent County

These details will be different in other counties.

Apply on line: For Kent County, please visit:

https://www.accesskent.com/Departments/CountyClerk/marriage_app.htm

Apply in person at:

Kent County Clerk
County Administration Building, 1st floor
300 Monroe Avenue NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503-2288
Tel.: 616-336-3550

- One applicant must be a resident of Kent or both be non-Michigan residents marrying in Kent. (Proof of address required such as current, valid driver's license.)
- One applicant must apply in person or online within 33 days of the wedding date.
- Proof of age is required for both applicants. Bring in a birth certificate, along with driver's license, state ID, or passport at time of application. (Documents must be in English.)
- \$20.00 fee for county residents, \$30.00 for Out-of-State applicants.
- 16–17 year olds need parental or guardian consent. (One parent must be present with their ID to sign consent form.)
- Note: if wedding is to be in English, then both parties must understand English.
- Social security numbers required of both parties (**or** legal reason why none).

Picking up the License

- The license may be picked up at the county clerk's office no sooner than three days after applying, by the applicant.
- The license is good for 33 days from the date of application.
- The bottom portion of the marriage license document is the marriage certificate. It is filled out by our parish office and signed by the presiding priest or deacon, the two witnesses, and the bride and groom. Witnesses must be 18 years of age or older.
- Depending on the county, there are either two or three copies of the license/certificate. You will receive one copy after the wedding liturgy. St. Mary's will mail the others to the office of the county clerk for you.

NOTE: our parish office is responsible for filling out part of the marriage license. Please drop off all copies of your license (and the envelope they give you) to our office no later than **the Monday before your wedding**. If that's not possible, contact our parish office in advance and arrange a suitable time.

Appendix 5: Wedding Costs

Updated: April 2021

To help defray costs associated with weddings, as well as to maintain our beautiful church, our parish has set the following costs:

I. Current Parishioners

Most of the cost of a wedding liturgy at St. Mary's for established, active parishioners is absorbed by the parish. At least one member of the wedding couple must be *registered* with our parish under their own name for a minimum of one year, attend Mass here regularly and have demonstrated a consistent pattern of financial and/or volunteer support to this parish to be considered as a current parishioner.

Costs:	Donation to the parish:	free-will offering
	Preparation costs:	\$100
	Parish Wedding Coordinator:	\$100
	Musician Stipends: *	\$250 (accompanist and cantor) (<i>see our "Music for the Sacrament of Marriage" guidelines</i>)
	Clergy	(clergy must be paid a stipend from you directly on the day of the wedding, usually \$100, in thanks for their ministry)
	Total:	\$450 + a donation of your choosing to St. Mary Church + your gift to the priest or deacon

A **deposit of \$100** is required to secure the wedding date for current parishioners. The balance is due **one month** prior to the wedding day.

II. Non-Parishioners

If the above conditions have not been met, the following costs apply:

Costs:	Donation to the parish:	\$950
	Preparation costs:	\$100
	Parish Wedding Coordinator:	\$100
	Musician Stipends: *	\$250 (accompanist and cantor) (<i>see our "Music for the Sacrament of Marriage" guidelines</i>)
	Clergy	(clergy must be paid a stipend from you directly on the day of the wedding, usually \$100, in thanks for their ministry)
	Total:	\$1,400.00 payable to St. Mary Church + your gift to the priest or deacon

A **deposit of \$700** is required to secure the wedding date for non-parishioners. The balance is due **one month** prior to the wedding date.

Note: Our priest is not usually available for non-parishioner weddings. Ask the priests or deacons you know if they are able to preside at your wedding! If you run into difficulties finding a priest or deacon, our parish staff may be able to assist you.

III. Other Considerations

The use of the church is not a "rental" of the building. By getting married at St. Mary's, you are agreeing to act cooperatively with our parish guidelines, including if a guest presider or visiting musicians are leading the liturgy.

* Any musician besides the parish accompanist and cantor will require additional stipends. Estimate \$150 per musician as a minimum for this expense. Music and musicians are chosen in collaboration with the parish director of music ministries.

Appendix 6: Checklist

This list is provided to help you organize the tasks that go into preparing for the wedding day. It is our experience that completing these tasks early allows the final weeks or months before the wedding to be far less stressful.

Eighteen months or more ahead:

- ❑ If either of you (Catholic or not) have ever been married before, contact the parish as far in advance of the proposed wedding date as possible. **Dates cannot be held for couples waiting for a declaration of nullity from the Tribunal confirming their freedom to marry.** *Please refer to the “Reserving the Church” section of these guidelines, p.2.*

Six or more months ahead: (a full year is better!)

- ❑ Call the parish to request a wedding date and begin the marriage preparation process. We will mail a Wedding Information sheet to you along with other information.
- ❑ You should wait to schedule other facilities or services until after your wedding date has been confirmed.
- ❑ Promptly fill out and return the Wedding Information sheet with your deposit to officially complete the reservation your wedding date.
- ❑ Schedule a meeting with our pastor or associate pastor to fill out necessary Church paperwork. At this meeting you should receive a copy of the book *United in Christ* from the parish office containing guidance for your choices of scripture readings, prayers and other options for your wedding liturgy.
- ❑ If renting the Activities Center, schedule the rental with the parish office as soon as your wedding date has been confirmed.
- ❑ Contact the director of music ministries and schedule a meeting to select music and musicians for the liturgy.

At least five months ahead:

- ❑ Acquire copies of your baptismal/sacramental records. For Catholics, these must be *new* (with notations) and cannot be issued until within six months before the wedding date.
- ❑ Choose scripture readings for the wedding liturgy, preferably before meeting with the director of music ministries.
- ❑ Confirm the date and time of the wedding rehearsal with the parish office.
- ❑ Schedule a meeting with the pastor or associate pastor, if necessary, to follow up on any forms/dispensations that may need to be filled out, etc.

At least four months ahead:

- ❑ If necessary, finalize the plans for music and musicians you discussed with the director of music ministries.
- ❑ If renting the Activities Center, meet with the parish staff to iron out questions and responsibilities, sign the rental agreement, etc.
- ❑ Choose liturgical ministers for the wedding liturgy (lector(s), ushers; possibly special ministers of the Eucharist, people bringing up the gifts of bread and wine, altar servers, etc.)
- ❑ Participate in an appropriate “Pre-Cana” marriage preparation program and provide confirmation of your participation to the parish office.

At least three months ahead:

- ❑ Collect the information necessary for the church to create a printed worship aid.

At least two months ahead:

- ❑ Provide a copy of the Photography/Videography page of these guidelines to any photographer or videographer that will be recording your wedding.
(Available from the parish office and at stmarygr.org/Photography.)

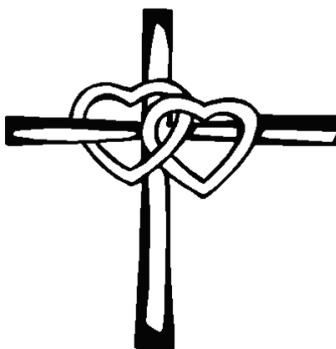
- ❑ Provide a copy of the Decoration Suggestions and Restrictions page of these guidelines to anyone who is preparing flowers or decorations for your wedding.
(Available from the parish office and at stmarygr.org/WeddingDecor.)
- ❑ Decide on the details of the wedding procession with the assistance of our parish pastoral staff.

At least one month ahead:

- ❑ Be certain all paperwork and choices for the liturgy have been received by the parish office.
- ❑ Pay any remaining balance of the wedding costs to the parish office.
- ❑ For the worship aid/order of service/program for the wedding, finalize and proofread the details, names, spellings, and layout.
- ❑ Arrange for the program to be printed at least a week before the wedding.
- ❑ Discuss the rehearsal time and date with all people who have special roles in the wedding liturgy [ushers, groomsmen, bridesmaids, witnesses, readers/lectors, special ministers of Holy Communion, assistants (M/M of ceremony), people bringing up the gifts of bread and wine, altar servers, etc.] (Musicians are not involved in the wedding rehearsal.)

Within the last month:

- ❑ Obtain the State of Michigan marriage license within 33 days of the wedding date.
- ❑ Remind any photographers or florists that the building will not be open sooner than 2½ hours before the wedding and to plan accordingly!
- ❑ Remind the following to all be at the rehearsal: witnesses, all men & women of the wedding party, ushers, assistants and any liturgical ministers (readers, gift bearers, ministers of Holy Communion).
- ❑ At least one week before the wedding, turn in the marriage license and payments for any additional wedding liturgy musicians to the parish office.



Appendix 7: Examples of a Wedding (Unity) Candle Ceremony

At the reception, have ready: a tabletop candle stand, the wedding candle, two side candles, a pair of taper candles to transfer the flames, and matches.

Before the meal, *the two side candles may be lit early as your guests are gathering, or you might ask your witnesses, or one/ both of your parents to light the side candles just before the table prayer begins.*

Example 1: A Parent's Prayer

The following blessing prayer over the couple and the meal is prayed by one or more of your parents. It is divided into sections to accommodate more than one prayer leader.

Dear friends,
let us pray together for _____ and _____,
and for God's blessing
on this meal we are about to share.

Pause briefly for silent prayer.

All-loving God, you have joined our children
_____ and _____ in marriage.
For this we praise and thank you.

May their joy be abundant
and their sorrows few.
May they embrace the challenge and beauty
of Christian marriage
and gratefully welcome children,
should they be so blessed.

May they know the comfort of loving friends
and enduring faith.
May they grow old together,
secure in your friendship and tender care.

May this candle that they light remind them
of the unbreakable bond they now share.

*The bride and groom then each takes a taper candle,
light it, and together light the wedding (unity) candle.*

Gracious Lord, we ask you
to pour out your blessing on this meal
we are about to share.
May it nourish our bodies
and strengthen the bonds of love
that we now share because of this happy day.

Bless us, O Lord, *(all join in praying)* and these
thy gifts, which we are about to receive from
thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen!

*The side candles and the wedding candle remain lit,
but the loose tapers that the couples used to transfer
the flames are extinguished and set aside.*

Example 2: A Couple's Prayer

*One or both of you lead the prayer and the blessing
over the meal.*

O God, you have joined us
together in marriage and surrounded us
with loving friends.
We now light this candle
to remind us of our unbreakable bond.

*Each takes a taper candle, lights it, and together you
light the wedding (unity) candle.*

Pour out your blessings upon those we love
and upon this meal we are about to share.
Fill our hearts with gratitude
and enduring confidence.
May the joy of this day sustain us,
comfort us, and bring us hope
all the days of our married life.
We pray through Christ, our Lord. Amen!

*The side candles and the wedding candle remain lit,
but the loose tapers that the couples used to transfer
the flames are extinguished and set aside.*

Example 3: Paired Prayers

A designated person, perhaps one of the witnesses or a parent, offers a blessing for the meal and the couple with these words:

Lord Jesus, be present among us
as you were present at Cana in Galilee.
Come with abundant gifts
for _____ and _____.
May their union in marriage
truly image your love for your Church.

Bless all of us, too,
who have come to join with them
in joyful celebration.

We thank you, Lord, for this food
and for the grace to eat it together.
May we all feast with you one day
at the banquet of eternal life
We ask all this through Christ, our Lord.
Amen!

Immediately following the blessing, another person, perhaps one of the witnesses or a parent, continues the prayer with the lighting of the wedding candle, saying:

We continue to ask God's blessing upon
_____ and _____ as we celebrate
their commitment to each other
in the sacrament of matrimony.
As a sign of their marriage,
they light the wedding candle
from the two candles
which represent their individual lives.

Lighting their tapers from the two side candles, the bride and groom join the two flames and light the wedding candle. As they do so, the prayer leader continues:

As the two flames become one,
symbolizing their union
with each other in the Lord,
we ask God to bless their marriage
and to keep _____ and _____ close
in the years ahead.
Father, may they turn to you in times of joy
and in times of need.
We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen!

The side candles and the wedding candle remain lit, but the loose tapers that the couples used to transfer the flames are extinguished and set aside.

Example 3 is from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.



Resources:

The site www.foryourmarriage.org is a great website from the U.S. Catholic bishops with many helpful tips for all aspects of a couple's relationship, including the dating process, marriage and wedding preparations, married life, and parenting.

The following resources were used in the creation of these guidelines. Particular ones (★) are excellent sources for your further reading.

- ★ *Celebrating Marriage: Preparing the Wedding Liturgy — a Workbook for Engaged Couples*, fourth edition, Paul Covino, ed., Pastoral Press, Portland, OR, 2016.
- Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Second Vatican Council, 1963.
- Don y Promesa: Costumbres y Tradiciones en los Ritos Matrimoniales Hispanos*, segunda edición, Instituto de Liturgia Hispana y Oregon Catholic Press, 2005.
- General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, Congregation for Divine Worship, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002.
- Guidelines for the Liturgical Celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage*, Province of Michigan, 1999, esp. p.4.
- Lectionary (Introduction)*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2016.
- Parish Weddings*, Austin Fleming, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, Illinois, 1987.
- Preaching About the Mass*, Gabe Huck, Liturgy Training Publications, Archdiocese of Chicago, 1992.
- Rite of Marriage*, Congregation for Divine Worship, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1969.
- Sacramental Handbook*, Diocese of Grand Rapids, 2001.
- Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007.
- ★ *The Gift of Love: A Bride and Groom's Guide to Preparing the Wedding Liturgy*, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, 2016.
- This Sacred Bond: A Pastoral Companion to the Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, 2016.
- ★ *Together for Life* (sixth edition), Joseph Champlin, Ave Maria Press, 2016.
- ★ ***United in Christ: Preparing the Liturgy of the Word at Catholic Weddings*, Liturgy Training Publications, 2016.**
- Wedding policies of the Basilica of St. Adalbert/St. James Church, 2018.
- Wedding policies of the Diocese of San Diego, Texas, 2000.
- Wedding policies of Holy Family Parish, Sparta, 2002.
- Wedding policies of St. Anthony Parish, Grand Rapids.
- Wedding policies of St. Clement Church, Chicago, Illinois.
- Wedding policies of St. Patrick Church, Troy, Ohio.

rev.: 01.05.2023

