



SACRED STEPS TO MARRIAGE

Our Lady of Grace Church

1011 Mt. Pleasant Road, Greensburg, PA 15601

A Place to Grow in the Love & Knowledge of Jesus Christ
www.ourladyofgracechurch.org

This time of engagement will be special for you and your fiancé as you prepare to celebrate your marriage to each other in Christ. The Priests and staff of the parish of Our Lady of Grace Church will do all we can to help you to properly prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage. We wish to make this time of preparation helpful and formative.

To assist couples planning for marriage, it is necessary to know the procedures that exist in our parish and diocese. Our parish guidelines are based on the current code of canon law and our diocesan marriage guidelines. This is a joyous time and we want to provide you and your fiancé the tools you will need to experience a holy and blessed ceremony and a life dedicated to God through the vocation of Marriage.

Your wedding day will be a time of great rejoicing for you, as well as your families, friends and for the parish of Our Lady of Grace. We will be keeping you in our prayers as you prepare for your life together.

Scheduling

Marriages must be scheduled at least 12 months in advance, so that all paperwork and formation can take place. The wedding will ordinarily take place in the church of the bride, or in the parish of the Catholic party.

A wedding date will be confirmed on the parish calendar only after a parish priest has spoken with the engaged couple and determined the couple's freedom to marry. No couple needing a decree of nullity (annulment) for a previous marriage will be given a marriage date until this circumstance is resolved. For this reason, no commitments should be made with caterers, reception halls, etc. until the date is confirmed.

The pastor and other priests assigned to our parish are available to preside at the weddings of current parishioners and previous members raised in the parish, as well as children of current members. If neither the bride nor groom is a member of Our Lady of Grace Church, the Catholic pastor of either the bride or groom must grant permission for the wedding to take place here.

Proper permission must be granted by the pastor to have a visiting priest preside at a wedding in our parish. Visiting priests are expected to follow all parish guidelines for the celebration of the wedding liturgy.

Weddings are typically scheduled at 1:30 p.m. on Saturday. Weddings can also be scheduled for weekdays, but not Sundays. Weddings are not celebrated during Lent, on Holy Days of Obligation, and typically not during the season of Advent.

When a Catholic is engaged to a non-Catholic and chooses to be married in a non-Catholic church, all proper papers must still be completed here by the priest, and all formative preparation for marriage must still be followed. To marry in a non-Catholic church without proper dispensations and preparations could make the marriage invalid from the beginning. When a Catholic party, with proper dispensations and formation, is married in a non-Catholic church, a priest does not have to be present for the marriage to be accepted as a Catholic sacrament.

If neither the bride nor groom are current members, previous members raised in the parish, or children of current members of Our Lady of Grace, a Facility Fee in the amount of \$250 payable to the church is required at the time of scheduling the wedding.

Catholic weddings are never permitted in secular or outdoor places such as gardens, gazebos, beaches, or hotel banquet rooms.

Scheduling of marriages in the church for those prior to their 18th birthday will be delayed until an evaluation by Catholic Charities can be made. The parish priest, in the final analysis, knowing best all the details, will make the final decision.

Marriage Preparation (One Year to Six Months Before Wedding)

Marriage preparation begins after the wedding date has been finalized and confirmed by the parish office and should be completed six to 12 months prior to the wedding date. The Diocese of Greensburg requires that all couples preparing for marriage participate in some form of marriage preparation program. There are various programs available. Please review the following three options with our parish priest to decide which option best applies and suits you:

Parish Sponsor Couple: Once a wedding date has been confirmed, the engaged couple will be contacted to arrange for them to complete the readiness for marriage questionnaire called FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study). The priest will arrange for a meeting to discuss the FOCCUS outcomes and to assign a sponsor couple. The engaged couple meet in the mentor couple's home over the course of a few evenings that are scheduled at mutually agreed upon dates and times. Typically, the couple meets in four, two-hour meetings typically taking place over the course of two or three months. No out-of-diocese couples will be assigned to the parish sponsor couple mentoring process.

Engaged Encounter Weekend: A retreat style program that begins on Friday evening and ends on Sunday afternoon takes place in Greensburg and in many other areas of the country. It is led by two or more married couples, with up to 20 engaged couples in attendance. Scheduled weekends in Greensburg are listed on a brochure that the parish can provide for you. You can also find a weekend for other areas of the country at www.engagedencounter.org.

Out-of-Diocese Preparation: All Catholic dioceses and many parishes offer marriage preparation programs that are accepted by the Diocese of Greensburg. In some instances, one or both of the engaged live outside of the Diocese of Greensburg. If one member of the engaged couple lives locally, the marriage preparation can be provided by our parish; however, if neither of the engaged couple are registered members of our parish, it is expected that they will arrange for marriage preparation in the parish or the diocese where either resides. Any approved parish or diocesan program is acceptable. Proof of participation in the marriage preparation program should be provided to the parish office.

Required Paperwork and Documents (Six to Three Months Before Wedding)

Once the couple has completed their marriage preparation, they are to contact the priest who will be performing their wedding to make an appointment to complete the required interviews and paperwork for their Catholic wedding. This should be done anywhere from three to six months prior to the wedding. Engaged couples who are members of another parish or residents of another state must have permission from their local pastor for the marriage to take place at Our Lady of Grace.

All baptized persons preparing for marriage must present a copy of their baptismal record. Catholic parties must present a **recent** baptismal certificate issued within six months of the marriage date. To obtain a **recent** copy of your baptismal certificate, call the church where you were baptized and ask to have this copy sent to the parish office.

Finally, a civil marriage license from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania must be obtained and should be received by the parish office at least 10 days prior to the wedding date. Marriage licenses can be obtained from any county courthouse in Pennsylvania, but no sooner than two months before the wedding date since they are valid for only 60 days.

Planning for the Celebration of the Sacrament (Three Months to One Month before Wedding)

During their appointment, the priest will give the couple a copy of the “Together For Life” workbook. This resource will help guide the couple through their selection of Scripture Readings, Prayers, and other parts of their wedding.

If the bride and groom are both Roman Catholics, the church expects the wedding to be held within the celebration of the Mass since the celebration of Holy Eucharist is a sign of unity in Christ. This will enable members from both families and their guests who are Catholic (and are properly disposed) to receive Holy Communion at the Mass.

If either the bride or the groom is not Catholic, the church strongly recommends that the wedding be celebrated according to the *Rite of Marriage Outside of Mass* since the non-Catholic party, their family and invited guests would not be able to receive Holy Communion. This allows for the proclamation of God’s Word and the Catholic Rite of Marriage while not including the celebration of Holy Communion.

Details of the Wedding Celebration

Flowers Two fresh (not artificial) floral arrangements provided by the couple will be placed on the floral stands in the sanctuary and will remain in the sanctuary for the Sunday Masses. No other flowers are permitted on the altar or in the sanctuary.

Bows may be used on the pew ends and attached with rubber bands only. No tape or pins of any kind are permitted.

Aisle Runner The use of a white aisle runner (commonly called a ‘crash’) is prohibited since it is a potential tripping hazard to the wedding party and guests.

Unity Candle The unity candle is not a part of the Liturgy of the Catholic Church and is not permitted to be used at Our Lady of Grace Church.

Altar Servers Two altar servers will be provided by the parish unless you notify us otherwise. If you have relatives or friends who are trained for service at the altar and who you would like to serve at your wedding, please discuss this with the priest.

Presentation of Flowers to the Blessed Virgin Mary Private devotions are normally celebrated outside of Mass. If both parties hold a special devotion to Mary, however, the presentation of flowers may be considered.

Throwing Rice and Other Such Customs Absolutely no material (rice, flower petals, sparkles, confetti, balloons, etc.) may be thrown or disbursed at any time on church grounds since it is a safety hazard and dirties the church grounds. Bubbles may be used outside of the church only.

Flower girls are not permitted to drop flower petals in the church aisles.

Children in the Wedding It is strongly recommended that children must be at least 7 years of age in order to participate in the wedding party. For your own benefit, and from experience, we discourage the use of younger children in the wedding party.

Decorum It is improper to eat or drink inside the church. There is to be no loitering inside the worship space or on the church grounds. It is prohibited to drink alcoholic beverages on church property. Please notify all members of your wedding party, family, and any transportation service of this restriction.

Dressing Area The bridal party may use Albanese Hall before the wedding, if it is available, for the purpose of dressing. While you are welcome to use this area, you are asked to leave it in the same clean condition as you found it upon your arrival.

Photographs/Videos Professional picture-taking of the Bridal Party inside the church **prior** to the wedding is not permitted. Following the ceremony, 30 minutes will be allowed for picture-taking inside the church. Only official photographers may take pictures at this time. The altar area may not be rearranged for picture-taking. The worship space is a sacred symbol and must be treated as such. The photographer should speak to the presiding priest before the ceremony. The use of video equipment is permitted for the taping of the marriage ceremony, however the videographer must speak to the presiding priest prior to the ceremony.

Music

It is the responsibility of the couple to contact our Director of Liturgy Marisa Cazden at mcazden@dioceseofgreensburg.org to set up an appointment to select your music. Only liturgical sacred music may be played or sung in the church before, during, or after the wedding. All music must be approved by our Music Director.

It is our policy that only the parish organist will play for the wedding — outside organists are not permitted. In the event that she/he is not available, she/he will arrange for an organist for the occasion. Requests for cantors, soloists, or instrumentalists must be made and approved by the Director of Liturgy. Cantors may be provided by the parish. We have several cantors who have sung for many weddings. Another cantor may be invited, but he/she must be approved by our Director of Liturgy.

Rehearsal

Rehearsals are usually scheduled for the evening before the wedding and will last approximately 45 minutes. The suggested start time for the rehearsal is 6 p.m. The rehearsal time is to be arranged with the presiding priest and the parish office. All participating in the ceremony must attend. The couple is to remind their wedding party that proper attire and conduct is required at the rehearsal.

Fees and Marriage License

Your wedding requires time and effort to plan, prepare, rehearse, and celebrate with the support of your pastor, organist, wedding coordinator, and altar servers. The total stipend for your wedding at Our Lady of Grace is \$500, which includes the celebrant, organist, wedding coordinator, and altar servers. If you are using additional professional musicians such as cantors and other instrumentalists, their professional fee is not included in this amount.

The \$500 fee payable to *Our Lady of Grace*, is due in the parish office two weeks prior to the wedding date. The marriage license needs to be submitted at the same time.

Life after the Wedding

It is indeed true that the marriage only begins after the wedding ceremony. The Catholic Church, in fact, is most concerned about spiritually supporting your marriage. If you will be living in the Greensburg area after your wedding, you are invited to register at our parish. Please complete a new census form, which is available online at the parish website and return it to the Parish Office or place it in the collection basket on Sunday. If you are moving outside of this area, please contact the nearest Catholic parish about becoming a member there. If our priests or parish staff can be of assistance to you in any way after your wedding, please do not hesitate to contact our parish office.

Marriage Timeline and Checklist

1 year prior to the wedding

- Schedule the wedding date.
- Call the parish office to schedule a time to take the FOCCUS questionnaire.
- Establish a plan for marriage preparation program.

6-12 months prior to the wedding

Complete one of the following marriage preparation programs:

- Parish Sponsor Couple
- Engaged Encounter Weekend
- Approved Marriage Preparation in another diocese

3-6 months prior to the wedding

- Meet with pastor to complete necessary church paperwork.
- Obtain recently prepared baptismal certificates from parishes of baptism.
- Schedule rehearsal time with parish office.

1-3 months prior to the wedding

- Meet with pastor to finalize marriage liturgy and address any questions.
- Meet with Director of Liturgy to plan the music and liturgy for the wedding. Call the parish office or email mcazden@dioceseofgreensburg.org to make an appointment.
- If a wedding program is being made, then the final draft must be submitted to the pastor for review before printing.

10-30 days prior to the wedding

- Obtain Marriage License from any county courthouse in the state of Pennsylvania and bring it to the parish office.
- Submit stipends for the wedding to the parish office.
- Confirm all details.