

OFFICE of the ARCHBISHOP

ARCHDIOCESE OF LOUISVILLE

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September 16, 2021

Dear Father,

May God bless you! I write to thank you for the important pastoral work of accompanying couples preparing for marriage. I wish to share this information to provide clarity about the issue of Catholic weddings taking place at a location other than the parish church.

A marriage between Catholics or between a Catholic person and a non-Catholic baptized person is to be celebrated in a parish church (canon 1118). Our churches are not merely gathering places. They are sacred spaces made holy through the acts of worship and the sacraments. The parish church itself is a public witness of faith, providing the setting that most explicitly enfolds the new couple into the faith community.

While the parish church is always the preferred location for the sacramental celebration of marriage, canon law allows a local bishop to give permission for marriage to be celebrated in another church, oratory, or “another suitable place.” Such an exception must respond to a genuine pastoral need determined together by the couple and the clergy accompanying them in preparation for marriage.

In such cases, a formal, written request for a wedding to take place in a location other than the parish church must be submitted to me. This request should include:

- A description of the pastoral need that the proposed location satisfies.
- Testimony from the couple themselves that answers the question: How does this location draw you closer to Christ and His Church?
- A statement of support (*votum*) from the priest or deacon who will celebrate the marriage. (If the celebrant is not the couple’s pastor, then the pastor’s support also should be indicated.)

Please note the following:

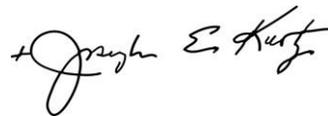
- In all cases, the couple must be adequately prepared for the sacrament of matrimony and understand why the parish church is the normative location for a wedding.
- Some care must be taken to ensure the suitability of a place for the sacrament of marriage. It must be a space that facilitates a purposeful encounter with God and that does not contain elements or symbols that distract from or conflict with the meaning of the sacrament.

- The wedding is always to be recorded at the parish within whose boundaries the venue lies. It is the responsibility of the presiding clergy to ensure that the pre-nuptial file is created, the marriage is properly recorded, and the church of baptism is notified.
- No permission is necessary for a non-sacramental wedding, i.e. between a Catholic and a non-baptized person. These may occur in “another suitable place” at the discretion of the presider, but the criteria for suitability outlined above should be followed in any case.
- These guidelines apply only to locations within the Archdiocese of Louisville.

I thank you for providing pastoral direction and support to couples during this very significant time in their spiritual lives. If you have questions concerning these directives, please contact Father Paul Beach for canonical questions, Dr. Karen Shadle for liturgical issues, and Deacon Stephen Bowling for marriage preparation questions.

You are in my prayers.

Fraternally yours in our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joseph E. Kurtz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D.
Archbishop of Louisville

Cc: Very Rev. R. Paul Beach
Deacon Stephen Bowling
Dr. Karen Shadle