

Marriage Procedures

Congratulations!

Congratulations on your anticipated marriage in the Catholic church. This information is intended to help you in your preparation for a joyous and holy celebration for marriage.

Because you are preparing for the sacrament of marriage, your preparation should include a regular practice of the faith. For couples who reside in the parish, ideally, one of you should be registered in the parish and actively participating at Sunday Mass. Attending Sunday Mass will also help you select a priest to officiate at your wedding if he is available. For those who reside outside of the parish, a statement from your own pastor that you are an active parishioner and have permission to marry at St. Thomas More is needed.

The process of marriage preparation should begin once you are engaged, ideally at least 1 Year before the desired wedding date. The minimum time ordinarily needed to fulfill the following Marriage preparation requirements is six months.

Step 1 – Marriage Information Meeting

To begin the process, please attend a marriage information meeting held on the fourth Thursday of each month at 6:30 p.m. In addition to receiving basic information on the marriage preparation, you will take a pre-marital inventory at the meeting, which are surveys used later as the basis for discussion between you and the priest. It is important that both parties attend this meeting so that both complete the inventories at the same time. If one party is unable to attend the meeting, arrangements will need to be made through Pam Trendell in the parish office to take the inventories during office hours.

Prior Marriages: If you were married, in any, (religious or civil ceremony) and were divorced, you must make an appointment to speak with a priest before attending this meeting. All issues related to any prior marriages and civil divorce must be settled before beginning the process of marriage preparation, and may delay the marriage preparation process.

Step 2 – Make Appointment with Priest

After attending the marriage information meeting, call the parish office to schedule a first appointment with one of the priests. These appointments can be arranged through Pam Trendell in the parish office.

When you meet with the priest, he will set the wedding date with you once your Freedom to Marry is established. Once the wedding date is set, remember that you are nonetheless obligated to fulfill all pre-marital preparation requirements in order for the wedding ceremony to take place.

The times for the wedding ceremonies are as follows:

- Friday at 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.
- Saturday 11:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m., and 6:00 p.m.
- Requests for weddings Monday—Thursday may be considered provided that they do not conflict with other activities. Weddings are not celebrated during Lent or Holy week, or on Sundays.

Important: Please do not book a reception hall prior to scheduling the date and time of your marriage with the priest. All the prior requirements must be met before a date on the church calendar can be confirmed. We have many weddings annually at St. Thomas More already confirmed on the calendar. Please have at least 2 alternate dates in mind when you meet with the priest.

Step 3 – Documents and offerings

The following documents and offerings are required:

- **Catholic Baptism:** For all Catholics, a new baptism certificate issued within the last 6 months must be provided. You need to contact your church of baptism to receive this. The authentic certificate must be submitted to the parish. Photocopies or faxes are not accepted.
- **Non-Catholic Proof of Baptism:** For baptized non-Catholics, any proof of baptism may take the form of, in order of preference, a baptismal certificate, a page copied from a sacramental register, and affidavit of the fact of baptism by a parent or other witness, or some other reliable proof.
- **Affidavits of Freedom to Marry:** An affidavit of freedom to marry is required for each of you. The forms will be distributed at the Marriage Informational Meeting. The form is completed by a parent, close relative, or, if necessary, another person who has known you at least since the age of 16. It needs to be notarized by a priest, deacon, or public notary.
- **Certificate of Death or Declaration of Nullity:** A certificate of death or ecclesiastical declaration of nullity is required for each prior marriage (religious or civil), if any.
- **Offering:** Wedding offerings cover the hard costs of a wedding ceremony here at St. Thomas More. *Note: No couple will be denied a Catholic marriage or preparation for a Catholic marriage due to poverty. If the offering to the church creates a hardship, please discuss this with the priest preparing you for marriage.*

The suggested wedding offering of \$850 includes: pre-marital inventory, wedding planning booklet, wedding coordinator, altar servers, cantor and pianist, church fees, etc. Couples may give a separate offering/gift to the priest the day of the wedding. To confirm the date of the wedding, couples will need to make a deposit. The balance of the wedding offering is due no later than 1 month prior to the wedding. Once the deposit is made, a wedding coordinator and wedding rehearsal times will be assigned. (If you later decide not to get married, the offering already paid will be refunded less the cost of materials already received.)

There is a suggested offering of \$300 for couples who intend to marry at another parish, and are only being prepared at St. Thomas More. This suggested offering includes: pre-marital inventory, wedding planning booklet, and parish expense associated with marriage preparation.

Important: All canonical documents, marriage license and certificates, wedding planner, music selections and offering must be received in the parish office no later than 1 month prior to the wedding. If documents are not received by then, the marriage will be cancelled.

Step 4 – Marriage Preparation Program

A program for Marriage preparation must be completed. You may attend any Pre-Cana Program, Engaged Encounter Weekend, Evenings for the Engaged, or other similar program offered by any

parish of the Diocese of Las Vegas. Here at St. Thomas More we offer a Pre-Cana Day twice per year, Evening for the Engaged twice per year, and Couple to Couple programs. This will be discussed with the priest at your initial meeting to determine which program is best for you. There is a fee of \$100.00 which covers materials for these programs due at the time of registration.

Step 5 – Sacramental Preparation

Prior to celebrating your wedding ceremony, Catholics are to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation (Confession) and Holy Communion. It is also strongly recommended that if you are baptized as a Catholic, but have not yet received Confirmation that you enroll in the parish program for Confirmation preparation. Contact the Faith Formation Office at (702) 361-3022 for more information.

Step 6 – Planning the Ceremony

Wedding coordinator: After the wedding date is set, and a deposit is made, a wedding coordinator is assigned to help you plan the ceremony. The wedding coordinator will:

- Meet with you to plan the ceremony (except music), including selection of the readings, planning the procession, and assist with plans for decoration.
- Conduct the rehearsal.
- Assist at the wedding ceremony.

The wedding coordinator should contact you within 2 weeks of being assigned. The wedding coordinator will give you her contact information at that time. Planning of the ceremony is done with the bride and groom only, not through parents or others.

Note: If you have hired an outside wedding coordinator, they are welcome to help at the wedding, but will take direction from the parish wedding coordinator, and will follow all parish guidelines. The parish wedding coordinator will handle all details related to the church wedding ceremony itself. Outside wedding coordinators may not promote St. Thomas More as a destination wedding, or advertise, using any media forums, weddings they have coordinated with St. Thomas More.

Note: St. Thomas More reserves the right to bar any outside wedding coordinator from returning for future weddings if these rules are not adhered to.

Rehearsal: After the wedding date is set, and the deposit is made, you will be assigned a time for the rehearsal. Wedding rehearsal dates are usually the day before the wedding; however, they are scheduled based on the availability of the parish. One hour maximum is allotted for rehearsals. The ceremony must be completely planned prior to the rehearsal. All rehearsals must begin on time as there may be other rehearsals or parish events scheduled afterwards. Wedding rehearsals start at the scheduled time, even if everyone has not arrived on time, so please encourage those in your wedding party to arrive early.

Wedding ceremony: The Rite of Marriage is ordinarily celebrated within Mass when both of you are baptized, practicing Catholics. When a Catholic is marrying a non-Catholic, a full wedding ceremony is celebrated, but the celebration of the Eucharist is omitted.

Music: 2-3 months before the wedding, call the office to set an appointment with Lisa Fairweather, the parish music director, to plan the music. The following rules apply to the music:

- Only sacred or religious music that is positive and joyful and expresses a Christian view of life and love is permitted. Contemporary love songs, secular music, show tunes, etc., can more appropriately be incorporated into the wedding reception plans.
- The music is to fit the part of the liturgy in which it will be used.
- Recorded music is also not permitted as the worship of God is meant to be live.
- Only pianists and cantors who are employed at St. Thomas More may be used.
- Additional instrumentalists, such as trumpet, harp, or a string group, may be hired at additional cost. Those hired are subject to approval of the parish music director.

Step 7 – Civil Marriage License

You need to obtain a civil marriage license from the Clark County Clerk's Office. The license and certificates must be submitted to the parish office no later than 1 month before the wedding. For information on securing the civil marriage license, go to:

www.accessclarkcounty.com/depts/clerk/pages/marriag_information.aspx.

Final Step – The Wedding Day

Timeliness: Weddings will start at the scheduled time, even if everyone has not arrived on time, so please encourage those in your wedding party to arrive early. If you, as bride or groom, arrive late, portions of your ceremony will be omitted, music ministers may need to depart prior to the end of your ceremony due to other commitments they may have, and photographs in the worship space after the ceremony will not be possible.

Flowers: In addition to corsages, boutonnieres and bouquets, you may desire to purchase floral arrangements for use during the liturgy. Flowers are to be delivered only 1 hour before the ceremony and need to be removed within 30 minutes after the ceremony.

Special Seasons: During the seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Easter, it is not permitted to remove or relocate season decorations. However, you may bring additional arrangements.

Pew bows: Pew bows or ribbons are permitted in the center aisle of the worship space. They are to be secured with rubber bands or pipe cleaners. Plastic clamps, scotch tape, tacks, pins, or other adhesives may not be used as they can damage the chairs.

Flower girl and ring bearer: Flower girls and ring bearers are permitted in the ceremony. However, it is unrealistic to expect children unaccompanied by an adult under the age of 5 to perform this task without excessive difficulty. Even when young children do well at the rehearsal, it is often overwhelming for them during the actual ceremony.

Lectors: You may choose three lectors to read the first and second readings and the General Intercessions from among your family and friends. If the marriage is being celebrated within Mass, the lectors need to be Catholic. If marriage is celebrated outside of Mass, any baptized Christians may serve as lectors.

Aisle runners, flower petals (real or silk), birdseed, rice, etc.: These things are prohibited both inside and outside because they pose potential danger, especially for older individuals. Nothing may be put on the floor or thrown. Due to concern for danger to individuals, damage to parish property, and harm to the environment, hurricane candles, confetti, silly string, glitter, bubbles, balloons, coins, doves, etc., are not to be thrown or released inside or outside on parish property, including in the parking lot. They create liability problems so no exceptions can be made.

Modesty: Modest and respectful attire is required for all in the worship space. Dresses of women in the wedding party must have a modest cut.

Unity Candle: This is not a required part of the Catholic marriage ceremony. If it is used, it must be done in a simple manner and without any accompanying music or prayers. If desired, you may purchase unity candle sets from the church or supply the candles yourself. The parish has a unity candle stand which the couple may use during the ceremony. Candelabras may be set-up on each side of the sanctuary, if desired and you wish to supply. Candles along the center aisle are not permitted to be used as additional decorations due to liability concerns.

Cultural/Ethnic customs: The observance of certain cultural/ethnic customs may be observed if desired, such as the use of the cord and veil or blessing and giving of coins (arras). Please discuss these with your wedding coordinator. If you desire these customs, you will need to supply the needed items.

Presentation of Flowers to the Blessed Virgin Mary: this is another optional custom. If desired, it can be included near the end of the ceremony. If chosen, you need to supply the flowers for this.

Photography: The marriage ceremony is a sacred event. In order to preserve the sacredness of the ceremony but also provide the opportunity for photography, please instruct your photographer or videographer according to the following rules:

- They are to have a respectful demeanor fitting for a place of prayer.
- Stationary tripods are encouraged.
- They are not permitted in the sanctuary at any time and may not cross in front of the sanctuary during the ceremony.
- They are not permitted in the center aisle during the processional or recessional.
- They are not permitted to block the bride, groom, or priest in any manner
- They are never to block the view of any guest attending the wedding ceremony.
- No tripods or other equipment may be set up in front of the musicians.
- No flash photography or video spotlights may be used. If modern equipment is used, the reliance on existing lighting is sufficient.
- No cords or wires may be placed in aisles due to concerns about possible danger.
- Photographs may be taken after the ceremony, but this is limited to 30 minutes because of other scheduled events.

Note: St. Thomas More reserves the right to bar any photographers or videographers from returning for future weddings if these rules are not adhered to.

Beverages and alcohol in particular: At the rehearsal and the day of your wedding, the only beverages allowed are water bottles. Alcohol is absolutely prohibited. This extends to all parish property, including the parking lot (and within limousines and other vehicles on parish property).

Any member of a wedding party intoxicated by alcohol or drugs may not participate in the ceremony. If the best man or maid/matron of honor is intoxicated, he or she may not function as witness. If either of you, bride or groom, are intoxicated, the marriage ceremony may not proceed.

Receiving line: Receiving lines should be planned at the place of the reception, not at St. Thomas More.