

Wedding and Marriage Preparation Guidelines

St. John Neumann Catholic Church

Introduction

Congratulations! You have decided to get married. Your desire to give yourselves to each other in marriage is wonderful and beautiful. Indeed, it is holy. You wish to share with one another the most sacred gift God has given you, the gift of yourself.

This is an important step, perhaps the most important of your life. Like you, the Catholic Church considers this step very seriously. Our Catholic community wants to support you in the best possible ways as you prepare to marry.

It is our experience that a marriage preparation program, entered into with openness and a commitment to learning and growth, can be valuable to building a rewarding and satisfying life together. It is not our intention to place hurdles and obstacles in the way of your wedding plans. Rather, we want to provide you with an opportunity to evaluate your relationship, be aware of its strengths and weaknesses, and acquire skills and understandings which can strengthen your commitment to each other and your capacity to live out that commitment for the rest of your lives. We also hold the conviction that our faith in Christ informs a spirituality of married life. Whether this is a shared faith or not, the spirituality of spouses plays a role in married life, and, indeed, can be one of—if not the greatest—of resources.

When a Catholic marries either another Christian or someone who is not Christian, the Church wants to be respectful and welcoming of the non-Catholic party. Friends and family are encouraged to participate. If the family minister is available, he or she is most welcome to do so.

The following guidelines are intended to assist you in matters both practical and spiritual. They will guide you in the customs of having a wedding in a Catholic Church, and they will also outline for you the process of preparation that we offer in the hope that this will strengthen your married life. Best wishes for a rich and growth-filled engagement!

Setting a Date and Initiating the Preparation Process

Prior to setting a definite date for your wedding, it will be necessary to talk to the parish priest or deacon that you would like to have preside at your wedding (often referred to as the “celebrant” of your wedding). This contact should be at least six months prior to the wedding to allow sufficient time for premarital preparation. If either party has been married before, please bring this to the attention of the priest immediately. Attention to that previous marriage may require additional time.

Reservation of the church will be taken on the principle that those who apply first will be given first consideration. Once you are given an “ok” from the celebrant, he will ensure that the date for the rehearsal and wedding is put onto the parish calendar.

Times for Weddings

Weddings at St. John Neumann are usually celebrated at hours between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Because preparations for parish liturgical celebrations begin by 4:00 p.m. each Saturday, 2:00 p.m. is the latest time on Saturday for a wedding to begin. Consult the pastor for the possibilities of scheduling a wedding on another day of the week. Weddings cannot ordinarily be celebrated on Sundays because of the schedule of Masses for the parish.

The Officiant/Celebrant of the Ceremony

The Pastor, Parochial Vicar, and Deacons of St. John Neumann are available to officiate at weddings of the parish’s members as part of their pastoral responsibilities.

If you wish to have a Catholic minister (priest or deacon) from another parish preside, this is allowable. Please inform the pastor of St. John Neumann when you make the first contact for setting a date. All ministers must be able to show that they are priests or deacons in good standing. If you wish to ask a Catholic priest or deacon to preside who is from another diocese (i.e. from outside of South Carolina), this minister must provide written proof that he is in good standing (a “celebrant”).

Participation by Clergy of Another Christian Church or Another Faith

You are welcome to involve the clergy of your church or faith to participate in your Catholic wedding ceremony and in your preparation process. Let the presiding Catholic minister know of your desire for this when you meet the first time. The Catholic celebrant will discuss with you how the minister of the other church can assist with your preparation. He will want to make direct contact with this minister as well to discuss their respective involvement. At the wedding, the Catholic officiant will preside and “receives” the vows, but other ministers can participate by offering prayers, a reflection, or by reading a selection from sacred scripture.

Having a Wedding outside the Catholic Ritual

Catholics are bound by church law to have their marriage celebrated in a Catholic ceremony, but permission can be requested to have their wedding in another church or in a civil ceremony. Please consult with the priest if you are considering a wedding outside the Catholic ritual so that arrangements can be made.

When you ask a Catholic priest or deacon to participate in your wedding that takes place in the ritual of another church or faith, the Catholic minister participates in a subsidiary way, allowing the other officiant to preside. He can offer prayer, read a reading from sacred scripture, or offer a reflection. Any participation by a Catholic minister should respect the customs of the church in which the wedding takes place.

The Preparation Process

The marriage preparation process consists of the following:

1. An initial meeting with the priest or deacon, giving him a chance to explain the marriage preparation program, begin the necessary paperwork, set a tentative date for your wedding and answer your questions.
2. Participation in the “Witness to Love” marriage preparation process. Witness to Love is a 6-session preparation process that helps a couple discuss and discern many aspects of married life and spirituality. The couple who plans to marry chooses a couple from the parish that they admire and who are strong Catholics to act as their mentor through this process. One aspect of this process will be completion of a pre-marital inventory which deals with a wide range of issues important to your

married life. This inventory will help set the agenda for your discussions with the mentor couple. Additionally, the spirituality of marriage will be introduced, and topics concerning the special needs of interchurch or interfaith couples will be addressed (if applicable). In your first meeting with the celebrant, this process will be explained in more detail.

3. Meeting with the Director of Liturgy: The Director of Liturgy will guide you in the planning of the wedding liturgy and all the possible variations to make it truly your own. At your first meeting with the celebrant, he will give you a planning book for the wedding liturgy. This book will help you select scriptural passages and prayers for the wedding. Please contact the Liturgy Director soon after your initial meeting with the celebrant.
4. Meeting with the Parish Wedding Coordinator: We require that you contract to use the services of the Parish Wedding Coordinator. This person provides leadership at the rehearsal and wedding. An outside wedding coordinator is not needed for the rehearsal or wedding service, though you may want such a person to help with your reception or other events related to your wedding. The Parish Wedding Coordinator will answer questions and assist you in working out the details of the ceremony and use of the church facilities. Please arrange the meeting with the coordinator at least two months prior to the wedding.

Required Documentation

You will need to obtain copies of the following documents to complete the paperwork for your wedding:

1. Certificate of Baptism: If they are baptized, both the bride and groom need to obtain this document regardless of church affiliation. Catholics who are baptized must contact the church where they were baptized and request a Certificate of Baptism that is issued within six months of the wedding date. Ask for a certificate “with notations” of all other sacraments. Christians from other churches should also present a certificate or a letter attesting to their baptism from the church in which it took place.
2. Civil Wedding License: This is obtained from the probate court. SC State law requires that the license be applied for at least 24 hours

before it is issued. It is illegal to celebrate a wedding without a proper SC license. Present the license at least one week early to the parish office prior to the wedding so that relevant data can be typed in it in advance of the wedding. If you are already civilly married, a copy of your original marriage license will be needed.

3. Decree of Nullity: This is required in the case of a previous marriage by either party (whether Catholic or not).
4. Other documents may be necessary—your celebrant will let you know what may be needed.

A Wedding within Mass or Outside of Mass?

Weddings may be celebrated within or outside of the Eucharist. When two Catholics marry, it is the longstanding custom to celebrate the wedding within Mass. When the couple is interchurch or interfaith, it is recommended that the wedding take place in a ceremony outside of Mass. This is recommended because of the awkwardness that arises at the time of communion at Mass. The Catholic Church does not invite intercommunion at this time (Note: there are exceptions for the Orthodox and some other churches). Please consult the parish priest if you have questions or concerns.

Again, with the permission of the bishop, Catholics may be married by a minister of another church or faith or in a civil wedding. Please consult with the parish priest if you are considering a wedding outside the Catholic ritual.

Where can the wedding take place? In general, weddings whether Catholic or in a different tradition will be required to take place in a sacred space, meaning in a church or oratory rather than outdoors or in a secular venue.

Music

Various styles of suitable music and a variety of instruments may be used for your wedding. The music you choose should support the celebration of marriage as a sacrament. There is a rich treasury of sacred music. This vast store of music will enhance the celebration of your marriage. The giving and taking of vows in the presence of God and his community is a most sacred event. Because of the religious nature of this event, only sacred music or instrumental “classical” music may be used at the wedding.

There may be some songs which are special to you and have sentimental value which are not of these types. Such songs would be best reserved for the reception honoring you following the wedding.

In addition to this general principle about types of music, there are certain parts of the wedding liturgy which should be sung. It is important that everyone who attends your wedding be invited to participate as fully as possible rather than simply watch an event as spectators. For this reason, congregational singing is encouraged during the ceremony/Mass rather than solos.

Indeed, a cantor should be employed rather than or in addition to a soloist so as to facilitate the participation of the entire assembly. While there is opportunity for solo works (especially as prelude music), we encourage singing by the entire assembly during the ceremony.

Specifically during the ceremony, the following parts can or should be sung and include the participation of the assembly:

- a. The Responsorial Psalm (cantor with congregation)
- b. Gospel Acclamation (cantor with congregation)
- c. Eucharistic Prayer Acclamations (when the wedding is within Mass)
- d. The Lord's Prayer is an integral part of the wedding liturgy. It is to be prayed by the entire assembly rather than heard as a sung solo. A version sung as a solo is appropriate only as a prelude to the ceremony.
- e. The singing of congregational hymns is encouraged, especially at a nuptial Mass. There may be an opening hymn, a closing hymn, and (within Mass) an offertory and communion hymn.

The Director for Liturgy for St. John Neumann will assist you in planning music for the wedding. If you use musicians who are not from St. John's, your plan for music should be approved in advance by the Director of Liturgy.

A printed worship program can greatly enhance the assembly's participation in the liturgy. The Director of Liturgy can assist you in preparing a worship aid for the liturgy.

A list of musicians and cantors from the parish who are available for contracting to assist at your wedding is attached to this policy document.

Ministers for the Liturgy: The Wedding Coordinator will arrange for altar servers or Eucharistic Ministers for the ceremony/Mass if they are desired.

Flowers and Decorations

The sanctuary area is a sacred space. The appointments (altar, pulpit, baptismal font, presider's chair, etc.) there may be used to enhance your wedding, but they may not be moved. Rented pedestals, flowers, palms, ferns, etc. may be used as long as they do not obscure or hide any liturgical furnishings or impede movement. Flowers also can be placed on the floor in the sanctuary but never on the altar or pulpit. There are also two pedestal vases available that may hold flower arrangements.

The church is decorated to reflect the seasons of the church year. Keep this in mind when you plan your wedding. Though it may be possible to make minor changes, some things cannot be changed. For example, during Advent and Lent, the church is decorated in violet. The colors and conditions of the church space will need to be considered as you make your plans for flowers, etc. The use of the flowers is permitted for all seasons of the church year except during Lent. Artificial plants and flowers are discouraged.

Small arrangements of flowers or bows may be used to mark reserved pews. Such arrangements may only be attached in such a way as not to damage the pews—nails, glue or tape may not be used.

The church can provide kneelers and chairs. Please do not go to the added expense of bringing in more.

Aisle cloths, due to safety concerns, may not be used.

For the safety of those in the wedding party as well as their guests, it is not permitted to use rice or birdseed.

Please do not have flower girls throw real petals, greenery, or confetti on the aisle. Silk flower petals may be used if someone in the wedding party takes responsibility to pick them up after the ceremony.

The two candles next to the altar will be lit during the wedding. Other candles present special problems. Even the best dripleless candles have been known to

leave a great deal of wax on carpets. We strongly recommend using burners on candles to prevent dripping or a plastic cover for the carpet underneath. The wedding party is responsible for damages caused by use of rented candles.

Because the Unity Candle does not have significance in the Catholic wedding rite, it is not used. You might, however, make a place for the Unity Candle at your reception.

Rehearsal

Ordinarily, rehearsals are scheduled the night before the wedding. One hour of time is allotted for the rehearsal. Please instruct members of the wedding party to arrive at the church at least 15 minutes before the rehearsal.

A Note on the Use of Alcohol

No alcoholic beverages are allowed to be consumed or be present on church property prior to the wedding celebration. Consumption of alcohol by the bride, groom or any of the wedding party immediately prior to the wedding are grounds for cancellation of the ceremony. One must be sober for a valid marriage to be effected.

Photography

The parish welcomes professional photographers at your wedding. The following are guidelines for their work:

- Flash is permitted before and after the celebrations.
- For weddings, pictures of the wedding party as they enter may be taken with flash but the photographer may stand in the rear aisle area only, not near the altar.
- During the wedding, photos may be taken without flash. Exception: please avoid taking pictures during prayers, especially the Eucharistic Prayer, to avoid distraction during these more solemn moments.
- The photographer may move around the periphery of the pews (along the back and side walls) to take pictures. He/she may not approach via the center aisle or enter the altar area/sanctuary for pictures.
- Note for weddings that the bride and groom will be standing on the altar platform facing each other during the vows and ring exchange. You will find that pictures taken from the rear of the center aisle will provide a good view of the proceedings.

- Following the ceremony, you are welcome to pose the family/wedding party, etc. for pictures at the altar area or elsewhere in the church. Please be aware that preparation for other services may have to begin soon after the end of the wedding.
- Please keep in mind that the church is a sacred space. Please do not have overly casual or disrespectful poses for photos made in the church.

Videography

- The videographer may set up in one place along the back or side walls. Cameras also may be set up to the side of the altar or in other areas with the explicit permission of the presider of the liturgy. Once set up, cameras need to remain stationary. The main concern for locating equipment will be to prevent distractions or obstruction of view during the liturgy.

Fees and Honoraria

There is no charge for the reception of a sacrament or other services to the People of God. However, there are some costs incurred by the parish through the use of the church, and we do require the hiring of certain persons to perform some key tasks to make the wedding happen smoothly. It is required that you hire the Parish Wedding Coordinator. The coordinator will meet with you to plan the liturgy and logistics of the wedding and rehearsal. He/she will be present to assist in the rehearsal and at the wedding itself to ensure all runs smoothly. All fees and honoraria are to be paid at or before the rehearsal.

<u>Parish Wedding Coordinator</u>	<u>\$200.00</u>	<u>(required)</u>
<u>Altar Servers (arranged by Wedding Coord.)</u>	<u>\$25.00 each</u>	<u>(suggested honorarium)</u>
<u>Parish Keyboardist (see attached list)</u>	<u>\$150.00</u>	
<u>Cantor or other Musician (see list)</u>	<u>\$150.00</u>	
<u>Priest/Officiant Honorarium</u>	<u>Customary, but at your discretion</u>	
<u>Donation to Parish</u>	<u>Customary, but at your discretion</u>	

For couples who are not members of St. John Neumann Parish or are not children of members, a fee of \$200.00 is requested for use of the church. Half should be paid at the time of reserving the church. The balance is due not later than two weeks prior to the wedding. If the wedding is cancelled, a refund will be given, less a \$50.00 office fee.

Availability of the Hall

The hall at the church (behind the sanctuary) may be rented for rehearsal dinners or receptions. To reserve the church hall, please contact the church office (788-0811). Please refer to the Hall Use Policy for guidelines and fees. Because a reception is not considered to be a parish event (unlike the wedding itself), an insurance rider must also be purchased to provide the parish with liability coverage. Mass begins at 5:15 p.m. every Saturday evening, and so all receptions in the hall must be concluded by 4:00 p.m. because noise from the hall carries into the church and the hall may be needed for parish activities around the evening Mass.

A Final Thought

Again, congratulations! I hope your wedding will provide a lasting memory to savor all the days of your life together. It is also a memorable day in the life of our parish community because it is both a sign and a reminder of the faithful love between Christ and his Church. Thank you for making this sign more visible to our community!

Father Sandy McDonald, Pastor

Contact Information

Catherine Combier-Donovan, Director of Liturgy for St. John Neumann Parish
Cantor ccombierdo@sjnchurch.com 803-788-0811, x 326

Erika Langston, Wedding Liturgy Coordinator 803-788-5785
Also: Cantor, Soloist

Paula Mowbray, 10 a.m. Choir Director, organist 570-878-6293
pmowbray@sjnchurch.com

Vince Pace, Guitarist, cantor 803-446-8788

English Morris, Organist/Keyboardist 803-238-8295

Terra Chadwick, Keyboardist (Spanish) 803-331-8244

Brittany Hammock, Cantor contact Paula above

Various other cantors available—talk with Director of Liturgy or Choir Director