

Historic
St. Mary's Church
on Capitol Hill in Albany, New York



MARRIAGE GUIDELINES

We welcome you to St. Mary's Church and parish. Your reception of the Sacrament of Marriage is a joyful and sacred moment in your lives. We understand the importance of this day. Marriage is a major commitment and planning a wedding can be a time consuming endeavor with many questions to ask and details to discuss. We have prepared this handout to help facilitate the planning of your wedding at St. Mary's.

May we ask you to please read the guidelines over carefully.

Required Procedures for Marriage at St. Mary's

1. Once your engagement is announced, it is our expectation that the bride or groom, one or both of whom **are Parishioners**, will contact one of the parish priests or deacon to make an initial appointment. It is advisable that you begin to plan your wedding at least eight months prior to the preferred date.

Parishioners of St. Mary's are those who:

- Have been registered in the parish for at least one year at the time of the initial contact; and/or
- Are the children of registered families but are no longer living at home; and/or
- Live within the territorial boundaries of St. Mary's and are practicing Catholics.

2. Because of the shortage of clergy and the large number of requests for weddings here at St. Mary's we are unable to accommodate the weddings of people who are not registered parishioners. However, we have developed the following guidelines which can hopefully be of some help to non-parishioners wishing to celebrate their wedding here. These guidelines con-

form to diocesan and canonical requirements.

- Any non-parishioner Catholic wishing to marry at St. Mary's should first approach the pastor of the parish where they reside and discuss their prospective marriage plans at St. Mary's and receive the **written permission** from your pastor to be married at St. Mary's.
- The couple should contact a priest or deacon who would be willing to perform their wedding here at St. Mary's. That priest or deacon should give his **written acknowledgement** that he will witness the marriage, be at the rehearsal and meet with the couple to complete all the requirements of the pre-marital preparations including the completion and filing of the diocesan Pre-Marital investigation forms.
- The written permission of the couple's Pastor as well as the written acknowledgement of the priest or deacon who will perform the ceremony should be in hand before the couple make an appointment with the Pastor of St. Mary's to come in and schedule the wedding date.

3. No date or time will be reserved on St. Mary's calendar until the couple contact the Pastor of St. Mary's to meet in person. No dates or times will be scheduled by letter or phone. Please read these guidelines carefully and if you have any questions please call for any clarification you may need. Please do not make any arrangements for invitations or a reception until a date has been finalized with the parish.

4. Please note that no marriages will be scheduled on Friday or Sunday.

5. **Required Papers:** In the course of the premarital preparations certain documents will need to be obtained:

A. For those baptized in the Catholic Church, a copy of their **Baptismal Certificate** issued within the past six months. Contact the church of Baptism to have them send you a copy. For those baptized in another Christian Church, a copy of your original baptismal certificate will suffice.

B. For Catholic parties, certificates of **First Communion and Confirmation** should also be obtained unless the dates have been noted on the back of the recent Baptismal certificate.

C. If previously married, a certificate of death of the spouse or a copy of the Decree of Church nullity in order to establish your freedom to marry is necessary.

D. If either party is under 21, there are additional Diocesan requirements which must

be followed and the preparation period is somewhat extended. We are not allowed to set a date when either party is under 21 without permission from the Diocese. Therefore these couples must begin a preparation program prior to setting a wedding date.

Church Procedures

In order to help you in your planning:

1. We ask you to please keep in mind that the throwing of rice, rose petals, confetti or bird seed etc. is **not allowed** during or after the celebration. This is a safety and liability issue for the parish.
2. Because of time constraints, **reception lines** in the rear or outside of the Church are normally not permitted due to the likelihood of other weddings as well as our regularly scheduled weekend Masses and other liturgical functions.
3. In conjunction with the priest or deacon who will be presiding at the wedding, couples should contact St. Mary's office to schedule a **rehearsal time**. Rehearsal times should be scheduled for 4:00pm or 5:00pm on **Friday** evening prior to your wedding.
4. You are welcome to use the vases owned by St. Mary's for your floral arrangements. We do not allow the brass urns to be removed from the Church. However, you are welcome to use the **liners** which fit into the urns. **Liners are not to be removed from the Church until the Wednesday afternoon prior to your Saturday wedding date.** *Please see the following pages for additional information about florists and flowers.*
5. **At your rehearsal** we ask that you bring the following materials with you and give them to the priest or deacon rehearsing your wedding:
 - A. The "work sheet" for your ceremony.
 - B. **Marriage License** - **MUST** be brought with you **to the rehearsal**.
Application for a marriage license in New York State may be made up to 60 days before the wedding and there is a 24 hour waiting period between the time the license is issued and when it becomes effective. Your marriage license may be obtained in any town or city clerk's office in New York State.
 - C. **Donation** envelopes containing the professional fees of your organist, instrumentalist/soloist, etc... as well as the offering for the Church. The customary offering to St.

Mary's Church is \$250 for parishioners and \$500 for non-parishioners. Non-parishioners are asked to make the offering at the time the wedding date is set or as soon as possible thereafter to confirm the scheduled date. The offering goes toward the maintenance of the church and the cost of marriage preparation materials. It is left to the discretion of the couple if they wish to give a gift to the priest or deacon who helped prepare them for their wedding day.

Some other helpful reminders:

The fundamental principle that must guide everyone is that marriage is a sacrament, and so all must be done in a **sacred and solemn manner**; everything in **dress, music, flowers etc.** should be guided by the above basic principle.

1. **Music:** The music selected should be Church music. Therefore, one must guard against choosing current popular tunes or music that is purely secular. These would be more appropriate at the reception. A competent organist of your choice may be selected by you or, if you request it, St. Mary's will be glad to provide you with names of organists. If you use your own organist, and they wish to practice beforehand, the time should be coordinated with the Church staff. *Please see the following pages for further details about music.*

2. Out of respect for the Blessed Sacrament, **no** food or drink should be brought into the Church.

3. **Photography:** The taking of still or motion pictures is allowed. Please check with the officiating priest about his wishes concerning picture-taking during the ceremony. The photographer will not be allowed to be in the Sanctuary. Posed photos after the ceremony are permitted provided that the posing never interferes with the approaching time of regularly scheduled Masses. Always remember that **respectful conduct** be observed because it is the sanctuary of God's house. *Please see the following pages for further details about photographers.*

**Please be certain that you have read the Guidelines over carefully
before you contact us.**

MUSIC

Name of musician _____ & _____

A marriage has many dimensions, all of which are considered when planning the festivities and rituals of your wedding day. It is an intensely personal day for you. It is a celebration of faith supported by the Church community. The love shared in marriage is a sign to you, and a sign to the whole community, that God's love is always among us and is reflected to us through your love for each other.

We, therefore, suggest that the music chosen for your wedding day be reflective of what a Catholic wedding should be but also be appropriate and meaningful.

1. **St. Mary's does not provide an organist or other musicians for your wedding.** It is your responsibility to engage the services of appropriate personnel. If it is requested, we will provide you with the names of an organist and/or soloist.
2. The organist whom you have selected to be part of your plans can help you in choosing or making proper judgments about appropriate hymns.
3. Certain guidelines should be followed:
 - A. **Musical** - Is the choice appropriate or expressive of your Christian faith?
 - B. **Liturgical** - Is the music suitable for such a celebration?
 - C. **Pastoral** - Does the music enable people to express their faith as well as your personal love?
4. All musicians will **always be playing in the choir loft.**

All styles of music for marriage - classical, contemporary & folk - should conform to these three principles.

No matter how personally meaningful love songs and secular ballads may be to you, these are best left to the reception which represents your continuing celebration. Your organist is very capable of helping you to make these preparations, and we heartily recommend that you sincerely consider their suggestions.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Name of photographer _____

1. The taking of still, moving pictures or video is allowed. We ask you to please check with the officiating priest regarding his wishes concerning picture-taking during the ceremony.
2. It is permitted to take posed photographs after the ceremony provided that the posing **never** interferes with the approaching time of one of our regularly scheduled Masses or devotions.
3. In all cases of posed photography, we **never** allow more than **ten (10) minutes** following the ceremony. We also remind you that respectful conduct should be maintained during this session because it is the sanctuary of God's house.
4. We ask you to please remember that the couple has spent many hours in preparing for this sacred event. Please be guided by this basic concept.

FLORIST

Name of florist _____

1. FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS:

- A. You are welcome to make use of the vases owned by St. Mary's. We do not allow the brass urns on the altar to be removed from the Church. You are, however, permitted to use the liners which fit inside the urns. **The liners are not to be removed from the Church until the Wednesday afternoon prior to your Saturday wedding.**

Liners measure 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide and 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ " long and are tapered from top to bottom. The liners are oval in shape.

- B. If the liners from St. Mary's are not used, then the **vases or baskets of your choice should be placed on saucers with a piece of plain plastic underneath to protect our altar cloth from moisture and soiling.**
- C. The florist or wedding party are **NEVER** to use adhesive tape or any other kind of tape or tacks to attach flowers, bows or bouquets to the pews.

If the bridal party chooses to or requests that bows be placed on the pews, **PLEASE** arrange the bows to be attached to some plastic bracket which can be mounted or rest on top of the pews.

If you choose an evening wedding, please note that the bows **should not** be placed on the pews until after the 4:00 pm Mass. Your failure to adhere to this policy could result in the loss, damage or destruction of the bows by careless people prior to your scheduled event.

2. AISLE RUNNER:

Our center aisle measures 100 ft.

MARRIAGE PREPARATIONS

Your Catholic wedding day is a very special day in each of your lives. Basically, the day is always made up of two parts - the **sacred** moment and then it's followed by the **social** celebration. The **sacred** (or Catholic) ceremony always occurs in a **Church** while the **social** event is usually celebrated at the reception hall. In other words, if it is sacred, it takes place in Church; if not or if you are not sure it is sacred, it occurs at a reception hall.

The Church's marriage regulations are meant to ensure that the nuptials retain their sacramental reverence. Below are some replies to often asked questions on Catholic marriages.

1. Outdoor Ceremonies

Question: *If you can have Mass outside, why do Catholics have to be married inside a Church and not on a beach, backyard, garden, hotel or reception hall?*

Answer: The Church requires that a marriage take place in a Church because the liturgical rites require a **sacred** place in which the ceremony is performed in a dignified and becoming manner. However, some bishops may allow the marriage to be celebrated elsewhere if there is good reason. This is extremely rare. Sometimes, it seems that the wish to have the marriage take place outside a Church expresses a desire to have the sacred or religious features of the wedding played down.

2. Creative Vows

Question: *We want to write our own vows. Is this allowed?*

Answer: While there is considerable flexibility in marriage celebrations and the desires of the couple are properly taken into consideration, the Church allows only for the use of one of four sets of vows that are provided in the liturgical books. Since the exchange of vows

belong to the heart of the marriage rite, the Church does not allow couples to make up their own vows.

3. Drinking

Question: *If the bride or groom or attendants are inebriated or otherwise incapacitated via chemical enhancement during the ceremony is the marriage valid?*

Answer: If the bride or groom is so incapacitated that he or she does not know what he or she is doing, then the wedding would be invalid because what is so necessary for validity is that he or she must be able to give substantial consent. It should be remembered by all that this wedding day is a very special moment in the lives of two very special people. It is a day in which both the bride and groom have spent a lot of time and energy to prepare for this sacred and momentous day. It would be a shame for anyone to ruin this occasion for each of them. Remember that this day is a sacred celebration.

4. Communion

Question: *The man or woman that I am marrying is not a Catholic. May he or she (and their family) receive the Eucharist at our wedding?*

Answer : The answer to this is no, but not because the Church rejects non-Catholics or because they are second-class Christians in the eyes of Church law. Rather, non-Catholics are not “in communion” with the Catholic Church. Couples in interfaith marriages normally avoid having their weddings in the context of the Mass (even though that option is still open to them) so that an element of disunity is not introduced into the service by one person receiving Communion and the other not. Simply put, a decision should

always be discussed among the couple prior to the wedding so that it doesn't offend the members of the non-Catholic family.

5. Readings or Music

Question: *May we substitute contemporary songs or replace some of the biblical readings with some other readings?*

Answer: The **sacredness** of the marriage ceremony must always be your main focus. The answer would seem to be no because of the sacramental and religious character of your wedding. The use of secular writings or songs comes up against the same objections to weddings on beaches or in gardens. The Ritual calls for a reading from the Old Testament, New Testament and Gospel.

Question: Sometimes, the question is frequently asked - *"Must we have a Catholic Mass for our Catholic wedding or can we just have the wedding rite (in the Church) outside of Mass?"*

Answer: The norm is that when both parties are Catholic, the ceremony takes place in the context of the Mass. When the Eucharist is celebrated, the truth that marriage is an expression of the union of Christ and his Church is made manifest. Sometimes, however, even a Catholic couple will choose to have their marriage without Mass if few of their family members can be present, and the congregation is made up mostly of non-Catholics. The marriage rite, as we stated earlier, can take place outside of the Eucharist so that an element of disunity is not introduced into the wedding liturgy.

A non-Catholic minister can be invited to give a blessing. The priest or deacon must **receive or witness the exchange of vows.**