

# Preparing For Your Marriage

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## ST. JUDE CATHOLIC CHURCH ALLEN, TEXAS

Congratulations on your engagement. Marriage is probably the biggest step that anyone makes and involves many changes and challenges. The marriage of a Christian is an event of great celebration and one that we approach with great care. There are some points that need clarification at the beginning of your planning; the information is provided as a guide. Some of this may need further clarification and your priests are available to assist you.

### Actively Participating In Your Faith

Marriage between two Christians is a public celebration of God's grace and blessing. Sometimes people come to us wanting to use the church building for a wedding celebration and they have little or no connection to the community of faith. We are always concerned that there is a clear understanding of the place of the sacrament of marriage in the life of the community. In order that the spiritual dimension of marriage is insured, marriages may only take place where at least one of the fiancés is a practicing Catholic. That means that one must have received the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist) and be regularly attending Mass and living the life of an active member of a parish. For those who are living in another city, this would mean establishing a relationship with a parish there and fulfilling this requirement.

### Who May Marry at St. Jude?

The Catholic Church has very particular rules about who may be married in a particular parish. This grows out of the notion of people being connected to faith communities. Generally speaking, a Catholic who resides in the geographical area (parish) of St. Jude and who is practicing their faith here, may be married here. There are others that do not live here that may be married here. These include college students or those in military service who intend to reside in the parish even though they are temporarily absent from it. Those from other parishes (who live within the geographic area of another parish), may also be married here with the permission of the pastor of the parish in which they reside, and the pastor of St. Jude.

### Preparation

The Catholic Church requires that everyone who is married in the Catholic Church be prepared for their marriage. In order to accomplish this in an orderly fashion and with adequate reflection, notice must be given to the parish six months prior to the desired date for the wedding. The preparation involves three areas: documents, spiritual formation, and preparing for the ceremony. You may also want to look at the marriage ministries information on the Diocese of Dallas website. Two areas of the website will be helpful. The Bishop's directives concerning marriage and preparation may be found at

<http://www.cathdal.org/default.asp?contentID=221>. Information concerning Engaged Encounter and other marriage courses and seminars is at <http://www.cathdal.org/downloads/EE.pdf>. Information on Natural Family Planning courses at St. Jude are available online at <http://www.stjudeparish.com/growth/formation/nfp/default.asp> for interested couples.

## The Documents

You will need to obtain a recently issued baptismal certificate for the parish in which you were baptized. This is not the certificate that was given to your parents at the time of your baptism, but one newly issued. You may obtain this by simply calling that parish and requesting the certificate. We must have that original, not a copy. You must also have one of your parents fill out and sign in the presence of a priest or deacon (or the pastor's delegate) a testimony of the truth that you are free to marry. (I will explain "freedom to marriage" in a moment.) If parents are not available another person may give this testimony. Please speak to the priest about this. You must also have a civil marriage license to be married in the Catholic Church. A marriage cannot proceed without one.

The final "documentary preparation" before marriage includes what is called a premarital questionnaire, which is simply the collection of a variety of information about you, information that pertains to your marriage in the Catholic Church. This also includes a series of questions that insure that you are pursuing a marriage according to Catholic teachings. Perhaps it would be helpful to review a few of these.

1.) The norm of the Catholic Church is marriage between Catholics, although Catholics are usually permitted to marry other Christians if there is no danger that the marriage will persuade a person to fail to practice their faith. In order to further insure that this is the case, the Catholic party in a mixed marriage is required to agree to raise their children as Catholic. A marriage between a Catholic and a person who is not baptized must have the permission of the bishop. (See below for more information at "My Fiancé is not a Catholic.")

2.) It is the norm that a Catholic must be baptized, have received first reconciliation and first communion and be confirmed. Your pastor may waive the requirement to be confirmed if it would prove difficult to receive this sacrament before marriage.

3.) Both parties to a marriage must be able to give their free consent to the marriage. Such things as pregnancy or emotional pressures could be coercive forces that would make such consent difficult or impossible. In most circumstances the permission of the bishop must be sought in the case of a pregnancy before the public announcement of an engagement. Other circumstances such as drug and alcohol abuse are factors that can impair a person's free choice. These matters must be brought to the attention of your priest.

4.) A prior marriage must in all cases be carefully investigated to determine if an annulment is needed. No date for a wedding may be set until after an annulment is received.

5.) A person must be 18 years of age or older to be married without the permission of the bishop of the diocese.

6.) Those related to each other as cousins (or closer) cannot be married in the state of Texas.

7.) Both parties must firmly consent to a marriage that is for life and both must be open to having children.

8.) Prenuptial agreements are legal conditions agreed upon by the parties before the marriage takes place. Because these are limits to the degree of commitment two people may have for one another, the Catholic Church does not generally allow marriages where such limits take place. If there is some unusual necessity, the prenuptial agreement must be submitted to the tribunal of the Diocese of Dallas for approval. This would usually take several months.

## **The Spiritual Preparation**

Once again, the context of marriage is our faith, what we believe and how we live as Catholics. Marriage includes many challenges and we need to be ready for them. Couples have the opportunity in marriage to grow together in their life as a married couple, but there needs to be a foundation for that growth. The Catholic Church makes available opportunities to enlarge our understanding of marriage and to enjoy sharing our thoughts and feelings, our expectations and dreams, even the kinds of things that irritate us. All this is to help us understand our future together.

Engaged Encounter is the program that is used by the parish to prepare a couple for marriage. We also facilitate the "Faithful in Love" program which ties into the Engaged Encounter weekend. This takes place at the Formation Center in Dallas, a Catholic retreat and conference center. It begins on Saturday morning and ends on Sunday afternoon. Some advance planning for a scheduled session is important and we will provide you with information and registration forms. You can also gain this information from the Diocesan website at <http://www.cathdal.org/downloads/EE.pdf>.

## **Freedom to Marry**

Those preparing for marriage in the Catholic Church must be free to do so. Sometimes this is a matter that requires the examination of details. The first meeting with your priest will help to determine this if there are questions. Those who have been married before must allow additional time for this determination. In most cases a Catholic who has been married before must have an "annulment" before they can proceed with the preparation. If an annulment is in process you must wait until you have received the final judgment of the tribunal before a date can be set for a wedding.

## **My Fiancé is not a Catholic**

It is not uncommon today for Catholics to marry those of another faith tradition. While it is the norm that Catholics marry within their Church, permission is generally given to marry outside the Catholic Church. There are two considerations here, that the Catholic party to the marriage will not be persuaded by their non-Catholic spouse to discontinue their participation in the Catholic Church and that the Catholic spouse will do all in their power to raise their children in the Catholic Church.

While it is permissible for the wedding ceremony that involves a Catholic and non-Catholic couple to include a Mass, it is more common that the ceremony be a liturgy of the word. It is also permissible for

a Catholic who is marrying a non-Catholic for the marriage ceremony to take place in a non-Catholic church. When this happens it is necessary to receive a special permission for this to take place.

### **Can the Marriage Take Place Outside?**

In the Diocese of Dallas (and in many other Catholic Dioceses) marriages can only take place in a sacred space, a church or chapel. Garden weddings or home weddings are not permitted. This may shatter a long held image of your wedding, but remember that your marriage is important enough to the Church to want the very best witness of the sacred character of your special day.

### **Preparing For the Ceremony**

A Catholic wedding is first and foremost a sacred event. Since many Catholics are exposed to non-Catholic or secular ceremonies they may be unaware that many of the practices seen there are not in accord with Catholic norms. Several months before the wedding, you should meet with the priest presiding at the liturgy to discuss details so that, if you are intent on a particular secular custom, you will be able to understand the directives of the Catholic Church.

Music is a big part of the ceremony. Our parish director of music will help coordinate the music including the selection of appropriate sacred music. It should be noted that all music at a wedding must be sacred music, the music of the Catholic Church. Even though certain songs may be popular in our culture, secular songs may not be used. Great care should be taken to respect the sacramental nature of a wedding in the Catholic Church. The director should be contacted soon after you set a date for the wedding.

### **Wedding Coordination**

Our parish staff includes a pastoral associate, Jeanne Girsch, who is responsible for providing coordination both in preparation for your marriage and the details of the wedding ceremony. She may be contacted at any time for questions or concerns (972-727-1177, extension 2215).

### **Decoration**

Our beautiful Church is a great blessing to our parish. It is an enormously expensive building for which many people have made extraordinary sacrifices. Sometimes people want to overly decorate a church for a wedding, but this can lead to undignified choices. We believe that little decorating is necessary. Nothing should detract from the altar as the appropriate center of our attention.

Flowers may be placed in the sanctuary only. (The sanctuary is the area of the church formed by the raised platform around the altar.) These floral arrangements may consist of one or two vases of flowers near the back wall of the sanctuary on either side of the tabernacle. A small vase of flowers is appropriately placed at the shrine of Mary. According to Catholic norms it is not permissible to place anything on the altar or to obstruct the view of the altar in any way. There can be no other floral decorations including an arbor. Any "pew bows" must be attached with clips (not tape) that do not mar

the finish of the pews. Because of the penitential character of the season of Lent no flowers are used for weddings taking place during the season. Such restrictions may seem unusual but it should be remembered that many other Catholic parishes do not even permit weddings at all during Lent. Once again, you can access the directives of the diocese to see a confirmation of this policy.

We have determined that center aisle runners are too dangerous and could cause people to fall, therefore they are not allowed. Candelabra may be used but the candles must in all cases be driplless. Please understand that these are optional and are usually available from a florist. These are placed at the back of the sanctuary on either side of the tabernacle.

The parish provides the "unity candle" stand. Only a unity candle of a particular size will fit it. The parish provides this for a nominal cost. If the family is providing the unity candle, it must be driplless.

### Visiting Priests

We are happy for you to invite priests or deacons who are family members or friends. They will need to send us a copy of their celebret (statement of good standing in their diocese) before they will be welcome to preside at your wedding. This is a strictly enforced requirement of all the dioceses of the United States. Of course, they must also follow all of the wedding guidelines of our parish.

### Some General Concerns

The sanctuary is the most sacred space in our facility. The area around the altar should not be entered without reason or without the invitation or permission of the priest. Nothing should ever be placed on the altar or credence table (near the west banner).

These may never be used as a holding place for hand flowers, cameras or the like.

No one should ever bring anything to drink into the church. If you or your guests have a medical condition that requires something, please speak to the priest and he will be sure you have what you need. If anyone in the bridal party or a guest is even mildly intoxicated they will be asked to leave the ceremony.

The consumption of alcoholic beverages is prohibited on all church property (including the parking lot). Remembering the seriousness of the occasion, members of the wedding party should refrain from the use of alcohol before both the rehearsal and the wedding itself. Marriages will not be held if the couple has consumed alcohol prior to the wedding and members of the wedding party will be dismissed.

### Fees

The parish does not charge for weddings, per se. We do have certain costs associated with the wedding that we need for couples to cover. These include:

**Music Director:** The basic fee for the director of music is \$125. If other musicians are required or there is something unusual that you want, this will have to be negotiated. Prices range from \$125 to \$175.

**Wedding Support:** The fees for coordination are \$200. This includes two staff members who coordinate the rehearsal, provide support and direction for the ceremony and assistance in tidying up after.

A stipend for the priest or deacon presiding is typical for a wedding but there is no established amount.

### Some Additional Details

There are some practical matters related to marriage at St. Jude that need to be mentioned.

Generally, marriages take place on Saturday at the following times: 1:00pm and 7:00 p.m. It should be noted, however, that because of the regular time of baptisms, the wedding party and decorations must be out of the Church by 3:00pm. Because of the 5:00pm Mass, wedding decorations cannot be placed in the Church until after the congregation has left the Church (about 6:15pm). Please do not arrive at the church until this time.

The use of wedding programs is permitted only if they have been reviewed and approved. Please see Jeanne Girsch for more information. Programs must be submitted 6-weeks prior to the wedding.

It is the responsibility of the marriage party to leave the church and confines in good order after the wedding.

Wedding rehearsals take place on Friday at either 5:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m.

Because of the inadequacy of our facility, we cannot accommodate rehearsal dinners or receptions in our facility.

We do not permit casting rice or birdseed (or anything else) as the bridal couple leaves the Church.

Occasionally, because of the desire to be unique or creative, bridal couples will choose very unusual attire. We encourage you to consider the solemnity of the event and remain tasteful in your choices. Guests should also be discrete about their manner of dress. Revealing or suggestive attire is not appropriate.

### Practical Matters

A number of meetings will be planned for you for the preparation for your marriage. These include the following:

1. Meet with Jeanne Girsch (a minimum of six months before the desired wedding date.)
2. Meet with Sponsor Couple: A FOCUS assessment that is designed to help you better understand your relationship (and to prepare for your Engaged Encounter weekend) will be administered and you will gather information about attending Engaged Encounter.
3. Attend Engaged Encounter.

4. Meet with the director of music to plan the music for the wedding. (2-3 months before the wedding.) Notice of an approved date for your wedding needs to be given to the director of music as soon as you have this. The actual planning meeting can take place a few months before the wedding.

6. Meet with Pastoral Associate to complete your paperwork for your file. (4-6 weeks before the wedding.)

### Guidelines for Photography

This is a very difficult issue as photographers want to take as many pictures as possible in order to sell their product. We cannot allow a Mass (especially a wedding Mass) to deteriorate into a photography session. We recommend that you arrange a time before the ceremony when you can take staged photographs. The focus of the liturgy is the marriage service and the Mass. Your photographer (or videographer) must agree to these guidelines in order to take any photographs in our church.

Photographs may be taken during the ceremony from a specified location provided that:

- a. The photographer remain out of the view of the congregation
- b. The photographer does not move from their specified location,
- c. No flash is used

Videographers must remain in a specified location out of view of the congregation. The camera must remain stationary and on a tripod. Only available light may be used.

Photographers and videographers may never enter the sanctuary. Only a minimal amount of equipment will be allowed in the church at any time. This is not a photography studio!

The photographer needs to remember that during the ceremony it is impossible and completely undesirable to create a record of the ceremony.

The bride and groom are responsible for the behavior of the photographer or videographers. As this might prove uncomfortable for you we will help by requiring your photographer to sign the agreement that we have included with these guidelines. Please forward this to them before you make arrangements with them.

If you have a wedding program leaflet, please include the following statement to help guide guests:

*"Please refrain from taking photographs during the wedding ceremony."*

# Photographer's Agreement

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The following guidelines are strictly enforced.

A wedding is a joyous occasion. Those who serve the bride and groom and their families have a special and unique opportunity. Photographs are a wonderful part of the offering that is made to the couple. We are aware of the service you offer and we are also aware that this is your livelihood. However, we understand perfectly that we have an obligation to the Catholic Church and the parish of St. Jude. In order to maintain the decency and solemn dignity of the wedding ceremony it is necessary that you follow these guidelines without any compromise. If you have even the slightest question or concern, please discuss these with a priest from our parish.

A period of time may be scheduled for pictures before the ceremony. This must be arranged by a staff member in charge of marriages. There may be no such activity in the church thirty minutes prior to the liturgy.

Our church and our facility must be used in an orderly fashion. Large amounts of photographic equipment are not allowed in the facility. You may bring only what you and your assistant may carry on your person. No carts or storage containers are allowed in the church. You may use a tripod and free standing lights only for staged photographs before and after the ceremony. These or any other equipment may not be attached to or placed in the pews. You may never stand in the pews or on any other furniture. No photographic equipment may ever be placed in the sanctuary. Nothing may ever be placed on the altar, ambo or baptism font. Please ask before you move any furniture.

During the ceremony no flash pictures may be taken. You may take available light photographs while remaining out of the view of the congregation. You may not move about to find a new spot. You may take "action" shots of the procession but only in the narthex. These may be taken using flash but once the procession has entered the doors to the church, you must cease photographing using flash or moving about.

Pictures may be taken after the ceremony but the rules applying to those before the liturgy also apply here.

Photographers with whom we establish a good relationship will be placed on a preferred list that will be given to bridal couples who are preparing for marriage.

I agree to all of the above,

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Signed

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Date

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Please print your name and the name of your company