

Guidelines for the celebration of Christian Marriage

(as of July 1, 2009)

St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church
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For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:31-32)

My dear brother and sister in the Lord,

After a period of discernment and reflection, you have decided to vow your love for each other through the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. This is no small undertaking. When He created Adam, God saw that he would benefit from a helpmate and drew from Adam's side his wife, Eve. The Lord gave them the command to go forth and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, and to be faithful to Him. The Bible continually refers to the love of husband and wife as reflecting God's love for mankind and calls marriage a covenant; not a simple partnership, but an inseparable union of persons. In speaking of marriage, Jesus reminds us that "what God has joined, no man can divide."

The purpose of marriage is threefold: spousal union, generation of new life, and eternal salvation. No one assumes the married state unless called to it by God, Who has given to His Church alone the power to regulate marriage. No human institution has any influence on the sacramental nature of Holy Matrimony, nor should the celebration of the sacrament be reduced to worldly spectacle. As Catholics, we have certain structures and rituals that must be respected. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church, the Diocese of Lafayette, and St. Peter Catholic Church, present to you these guidelines and reflections to assist you in adequately preparing to enter Holy Matrimony. Please pay particular attention to the guidelines for the Sacred Liturgy, the music, bridal/attendant conduct and attire, and church décor. No exceptions to the guidelines will be granted. Should you intend to fully cooperate with the following requirements, you may call the office for an appointment to begin preparation. May the Lord in His goodness strengthen your love for one another and bless you abundantly.

Civil Requirements

Louisiana Law requires that a marriage license be obtained from the Clerk of Court's office in the courthouse of the parish in which you reside *no earlier than 30 days before the wedding and at least 72 hours before the wedding begins*. Each of you will need to supply a birth certificate or other proof of age or identity. The fee is set by the Clerk of Court. This license must be brought to the wedding rehearsal; it will be signed by the celebrant, the bride and groom, and two witnesses either then or after the wedding ceremony.

Church Requirements

Marriage is not a one-day ceremony, but a lifetime of constant commitment to you spouse and to the vows you exchanged. The procedure for preparation, then, is to be followed thoroughly and begun as early as possible. The first interview is always with the Pastor of St. Peter Church no fewer than *six months prior to the anticipated date*. At this first meeting, basic family information and faith history will be recorded on the Diocesan marriage preparation form. Please bring your sacramental records: official and recently-issued certificates of baptism and confirmation (these are to be obtained from the church where you received these sacraments; This is NOT your original or copies of your original), and recent copies of paperwork in reference to any previous marriage, divorce, annulment or death of a former spouse. Be prepared to discuss why a church wedding is important to you. The dates for the rehearsal and wedding will be discussed and the availability of these dates will be checked in the parish calendar. Understand that these dates are tentative and depend on the discussion and evaluation of the marriage preparation instructions. Do not order invitations until after attending the marriage preparation instruction and a second interview with the celebrant. You will be asked to choose a date and location for the Diocesan Engaged Couples Conference.

In addition to the Engaged Couples Conference, you will also choose a date and location for the required Natural Family Planning classes. The Catholic Church teaches that one of the purposes of marriage according to God's design is the begetting and raising of children and that, for the fertile, every sexual act must permit the possibility of transmitting life. The Church also understands that couples may have a just reason to limit the number of children or space the timing of pregnancies. The use of any type of artificial contraception is absolutely forbidden as it perverts the nature of sex within marriage (as a means of sanctifying grace), and St. Augustine (4th century) warns, "Intercourse with one's legitimate wife is unlawful and wicked where the conception of offspring is prevented. Onan, the son of Judah did this, and the Lord killed him for it" (see Genesis 38:9-10). Natural Family Planning, however, respects the necessary possibility of both love and life in the marital act, and so is allowed by the Church and the medical establishment as a moral and effective way of limiting (or increasing) the size of your family. The Couple to Couple League trains instructors for this purpose and classes are offered in several locations in the area and at various times. You must have the attendance sheet filled out and returned to the parish office when the classes are completed.

The Rite of Christian Marriage

1. The Nuptial Mass is the proper expression for two Roman Catholics who live their faith to publicly celebrate their intention to enter into married life. This is best represented in their common reception of Holy Communion.

2. For weddings between one who is Catholic and one who is not, there is no Mass in most cases. This is to avoid any awkwardness that may result from the Catholic spouse and not the other receiving Holy Communion. The Catholic Church does not practice inter-communion. (Catholics are not allowed by the Church to receive communion in a non-Catholic church and non-Catholics may not receive Holy Communion at a Catholic Mass). There are exceptions for a Mass to be celebrated at such a wedding if the Catholic spouse desires to receive the Holy Eucharist and the other spouse approves.
3. The Nuptial Mass is not celebrated at weddings between Catholics and those who are not baptized.
4. Couples cohabitating prior to marriage would do well to celebrate the Rite of Marriage outside of Holy Mass; a Wedding Mass is permitted if the couple demonstrates they understand the Sacrament of Marriage by sacrificing in order to live chastely and choose to receive the Sacrament of Penance (confession).
5. In accord with the Church's ancient tradition, and in order for us to live out the penitential themes of the Church's liturgical year, weddings are not celebrated during the holy season of Lent. Weddings may be celebrated during Advent, but must avoid great display of ceremony.

The hours of marriage are any time during the day on weekdays (other than the times for daily Mass) and weekday evenings until 7:00pm. On Saturdays, weddings may be scheduled at 10:00am, 11:00am, 12:00pm or 1:00pm. ***There are no weddings on Saturday evenings or Sundays.*** Likewise, no wedding can be scheduled on the afternoon/eve of a major feast or holy day of obligation. Also, no wedding can be scheduled on All Soul's Day, Ash Wednesday, or during Holy Week.

Rehearsals are usually scheduled one or two days before the wedding, at 6:00 or 6:30pm depending on the church's schedule. One half hour is allowed and must begin promptly at the scheduled time. If any member of the wedding party is not on time, the rehearsal will begin without him/her. The rehearsal cannot be delayed for later arrivals.

Any visiting Priest or Deacon in good standing is welcome to officiate at your wedding. To avoid any schedule conflicts, you must first contact the Pastor of St. Peter Church, who will give permission (delegation) to visiting clergy. Please do not embarrass visiting clergy by asking them to make exceptions from this policy; these guidelines regulate all weddings solemnized in St. Peter Church. If you are not registered members of St. Peter's, you must receive written permission to marry here from the Pastor of your home parish.

Conduct, Behavior and Attire

For both the rehearsal and wedding, you are reminded that our church is a place of prayer and worship where Christ is present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. It is not to be used as an auditorium or rental hall. The conduct of the wedding party and guests is expected to show reverence to this sacred place. There is to be no shouting, loud or excessive talking, or improper dress or conduct on church grounds. **DRUNKENNES WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!** If any member of the wedding party comes to the wedding or rehearsal under any form of intoxication, the wedding will be postponed or canceled. Inebriation and disorderly conduct can ruin your wedding. The bride and groom will be held responsible for the conduct and behavior of the wedding party inside the church and on the church grounds.

The foyer workroom may be used as a gathering area for the bride and bridesmaids, but may not be used as a dressing room. All members of the wedding party are to arrive fully dressed for the wedding. Likewise, Sacred Worship of God demands Christian modesty in action and attire. No plunging necklines, bare backs, halter-tops, or sleeveless shoulders or arms are allowed. Feel free to bring a photo of a dress or gown if have any questions. No shorts or immodest clothing are permitted to be worn for the rehearsal.

Attendants

There is no set age for attendants, but ring bearers or flower girls must be of sufficient maturity to walk themselves to the front of the church. It is not “cute” to watch them panic or get distracted. Please remember that this a sacred ceremony. Likewise, groomsmen and bridesmaids must have the maturity to conduct themselves in a respectable manner. They need not be Catholic but must respect the Church’s beliefs and customs. All attendants should understand and respect the holiness of Christian marriage.

Ministers

For the Nuptial Mass, please provide two altar servers (you may ask the church secretary for a list of altar servers of our parish), one or two lectors, and two persons for the offertory. If there is no Mass, please provide a lector and a server. NOTE WELL: Lectors, servers, and ministers must be practicing Catholics and must go to the sacristy at least fifteen minutes before the wedding begins.

Photographers/Videographers

One hired photographer and one hired videographer are allowed to move about the church during the ceremony. However, ***they are not to enter the sanctuary (inside the Communion Rail) and must not distract the congregation.*** Please ask them to check with the celebrant before the wedding.

Flowers and Decorations

The Sacrament of Marriage is a sign of God’s love and faithfulness. We encourage simplicity in décor and restraint in spending. The beauty of the wedding is your love; let that be what stands out.

1. Florists appreciate being notified at least one month before the wedding. Your florist should check with the parish office before the wedding to find out when the church will be available for decorating. The families are responsible for the church being cleaned up immediately after the ceremony. *Someone must be responsible!*
2. During Ordinary Time and the festive seasons, two arrangements may be placed on either side of the Tabernacle, near the statues of Our Lady and St. Joseph, at the entrance outside the Communion Rail, and an arrangement in front of the pulpit. You may decorate the pews and rail; however, no tape or hard wire may be used because it destroys the polished wood. Candles are not to be placed on or near the carpeting. During Advent, arrangements are allowed by the Pulpit and Tabernacle only. Please understand that the liturgical seasons of the Church and their appropriate decorations take precedence and will not be changed; the sanctuary furniture is not to be moved.

3. The use of trellises, arches, and garlands is not permitted.
4. Likewise, the “unity” candle is not permitted. This recently-added symbol is repetitive of the rich symbols already present in the Church’s Sacred Liturgy and tends to confuse these rich symbols. The “unity” candle would be best used at the rehearsal or reception.
5. The use of an “aisle runner” is not permitted. Not only is it a liability and against the Insurance policy, but it is useless and only clutters the church aisle.
6. You are asked to pay a \$100 deposit fee for church maintenance. This deposit will be returned to you only if the church is left in good condition after the wedding.

Music

St. Augustine’s famous saying from the fourth century, “he who sings well prays twice,” expresses well the reason that only approved religious music may be used before, during, and after the wedding. Classical pieces may be permitted as preludes and postludes. On the other hand, country, rock, or popular music has absolutely no place in sacred worship, and is not to be used at any time. A list of suggested wedding music will be offered to you. You are not bound to this list, but it gives a good idea of what is expected; you are asked to submit a list of what music will be used to the celebrant. Please choose a musician or vocalist able to lead the congregation in the Mass parts: the Responsorial Psalm (if sung), the Alleluia, Holy Holy Holy, Memorial Acclamation, Amen, and Lamb of God. The use of recorded music is not allowed.

Final Notes

Married Christians understand that their obligations are to love one another faithfully and exclusively, they are there love and support each other in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. They are to be a sign of the unbreakable union of love between Jesus and the Church and to bring forth new life as the fruit of their love. You may feel at times that the Cross is too heavy to bear, but that is where faith is of the utmost importance. Begin a life of faith now by praying together, going to Mass together, going to confession regularly, especially if this has been neglected in the past. You will have great difficulty if Christ is not welcome in your marriage.

These guidelines have been written so that you may clearly understand the nature and purpose of the sacrament of Holy Matrimony and the solemnity of its celebration. It is not the purpose of these guidelines to prevent the “wedding of your dreams” but to assist you in having a beautiful wedding rich in the sacred meaning, which Our Lord intends. Thank you for your cooperation and understanding and may God bless you both as you prepare for this wonderful day and the rest of your married life.