

The Sacrament of Marriage

Marriage in the Catholic Church is something special. It is not just an institution, a ceremony, or an alternative to civil marriage. The Catholic Church recognizes marriage as a Sacrament, a sacred encounter between God and his People, and the living out of that holy union. The Sacrament of Marriage sees the love between husband and wife as a gift from God. In turn, the love of husband and wife becomes a living sign of Christ's presence and love in the Christian Community. A couple joined in the Sacrament of Marriage lives that sacrament by loving God and practicing their faith.

You live the sacrament by the service in love you have for each other and the selfless ways you allow that love to grow. You live the sacrament by being open to the gift of children and creating an environment in which children can grow in a spirit of love and holiness. You live the sacrament in your service to their Church and to the world.

The Church recognizes the tremendous gift and the awesome responsibility of Christian Marriage and wishes to share this understanding with all couples who seek the sacrament of Marriage in the Catholic Church. We wish to help couples embrace marriage as a Sacrament and to live their lives together on the road to God's kingdom.

Requirements of Faith

Catholics approaching the sacrament of Marriage must believe in Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church. They are expected to practice their faith through regular attendance at Sunday Eucharist and by living a good Christian life. They are also expected to be registered members of their parish.

If one of the partners of the Marriage is not Catholic they must agree to allow the Catholic partner to continue in the practice of the Catholic faith.

A Catholic approaching the Sacrament of Marriage should have a good understanding of the teachings of the Catholic Church. Catholics approaching the Sacrament of Marriage should understand the meaning of Marriage as a Sacrament. They must be ready to accept the vocation of marriage and be open to accepting God's gift of children. They should also recognize that the Church asks that all children be baptized and raised in Catholic Church faith as members of the community.

Requirements of Maturity

Both partners approaching marriage must be 18 years of age. Those under 18 are subject to a special, diocesan policy. Age alone, however, is not a sign of maturity. The Church expects both partners to be physically, psychologically and socially ready for marriage. In some cases the priest may ask the couple to consult a counselor to help the couple to better understand their readiness for marriage.

Process of Marriage Preparation

1. When planning a wedding, the couple should consult the parish priest concerning the date, time, and place of the marriage before any other plans are made. **This should be**

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- done at least six (6) months prior to selecting the wedding day.** For the couple to be married in St. Peter Parish, one of the partners must be a committed Catholic registered at the parish. If neither of the couple is registered and active at St. Peter Parish the Marriage Guidelines for Out-of-Town Couples Requesting Marriage at St. Peter Parish must be consulted. These guidelines may be obtained from the Parish Office or the web page for St. Peter Parish (www.stpeter.ptdiocese.org).
2. Catholics must present a baptismal certificate dated within six months of the wedding arrangements. The priest or deacon preparing your marriage can help you obtain this.
 3. Both bride and groom must fill out, individually, under oath, and in the presence of a priest, a prenuptial questionnaire, known as the “A” form.
 4. Two relatives (preferably parents) or friends of each party must sign individually, under oath, in the presence of a priest or a person delegated by him, the “B” form to declare the freedom of each party to marry.
 5. All couples will take the FOCCUS Questionnaire as a means of helping the priest or deacon preparing your marriage as well as the couple to determine strengths and weaknesses regarding the Sacrament of Matrimony for which the couples are preparing.
 6. A marriage preparation course is mandatory for ALL COUPLES whether one or both parties are Catholic. The couple is expected to attend an Engaged Encounter Weekend. The Pre-Cana conference will also meet this requirement if it is impossible to attend the Engaged Encounter Weekend.
 7. If there has been a former marriage, both the Marriage Certificate and the Death Certificate or Declaration of Nullity must be produced.
 8. In a marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic, the Catholic party alone is to make a written or verbal promise to attend to the Catholic upbringing of all children born of the marriage. The non-Catholic is made aware of the Catholic’s responsibility in this matter.
 9. If a priest other than the local parish priest is to perform the ceremony, he must have the permission of the pastor and usually attends to the prenuptial preparation.
 10. As a general rule, the marriage takes place in the parish of the bride (if she is Catholic). If the marriage is to take place elsewhere, a letter of permission is to be obtained from her pastor.
 11. Weddings which take place during the seasons of Advent or Lent have special requirements regarding decorations for the wedding. The priest or deacon working with you will be able to answer any questions concerning these seasons.

12. The Catholic party should attend the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) before marriage.
13. A non-Catholic minister may take part in the Catholic wedding ceremony. The priest or deacon preparing you for the sacrament will help you understand what can be done by the non-Catholic minister.

The Marriage Ceremony

The Church takes great joy in witnessing marriages that recognize God's love for us. A Christian Marriage is a source of strength and vitality for the whole community.

A Christian Marriage Ceremony can be a powerful witness of faith to all present. Therefore, couples planning marriage will be helped by the priest to take the time to carefully plan their ceremony. A detailed list of policies and guidelines will be made available to the couple from the priest during the planning stage.

We recognize that the Eucharist is the center of our Catholic Life. It is at the Eucharist that we join together most fully as Christians. Therefore, in a marriage between two Catholics, the Mass should be part of the marriage ceremony.

Because those who are not practicing members of the Catholic Church are not permitted to receive the Holy Eucharist due to the sad state of division among Christians, the marriage between a Catholic and non-Catholic would better be celebrated in the context of the Liturgy of the Word. The priest will help you explore this option for Catholic Marriage.

We ask all couples planning marriage to join us in making marriages within our community visible signs of our faith, our hope, and our Lord's love.