

Wedding Liturgy Guidelines



St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church
91 East Main Street
Norwalk, Ohio 44857
419-668-6044
www.stpaulchurch.org

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on your upcoming marriage!

We at St. Paul's are very happy for you and want to do all we can to help you prepare for a full and happy life together. Your wedding – your entering into this lifelong covenant of love with each other and with God – is a special, joyous event, not only for you and your family, but for the whole Church community. From such unions come strong families and healthy children; it is in such homes that both adults and children grow in the experience of God's love. The health of society and the vitality of the Church as well rest on the foundations of a strong home life, so we all have a stake in your marriage turning out to be the very best it can be.

Nevertheless, it is a tragic fact that despite these beautiful truths, many marriages end in divorce. It's disturbing to realize that those marriages that end in suffering and humiliation often began with the same expectations as those that prove to be joyful and fruitful and lasting.

Accordingly, we at St. Paul embrace the full Marriage Preparation Program of the Diocese of Toledo which has been formulated specifically to help keep that tragedy from occurring. Many entities will be vying to sell you what you need for a good *wedding*; we want to make sure you have a good *marriage!* The priest with whom you are working will create for you a custom program of preparation to meet your particular situation.

But the marriage itself does begin with that wedding ceremony, and so this booklet has been prepared to help you specifically with that part of your preparations. We hope that the following pages, which grow out of the experience of many other couples before you, will answer many of the questions that you may have too. If you have any that are not covered here, by all means ask the priest who is helping you with your preparations; we want to help!

Have a prayerful, reverent, beautiful wedding, filled with joy!

I. MAKING THE ARRANGEMENTS

Scheduling the Wedding

Although initial information may be obtained by telephone, to actually set the date for the wedding the couple comes in and speaks personally with one of the priests of the parish. This is true even if the couple has a priest or deacon from outside the parish who will actually witness the vows. After getting to know them a bit, the priest will work up with them a plan of preparation that is appropriate for their particular situation and then reserve the date and time for the ceremony and rehearsal in the calendar of the parish.

Because the preparations in question are for the marriage, not merely for the wedding, Diocesan Guidelines require that couples make these arrangements at least six months in advance of the date they want for their wedding. It is not that the preparations take six months, but it's important that they take place at a time when the couple is still relatively free to focus on the relationship as contrasted with the celebration. Experience shows that the closer the couple comes to the time of the wedding, the more hectic things become, the less time they have, the more commitments have already been made, and the less free they are to fully explore the nature of the commitment that they are going to be making to each other.

The Date and Time of the Wedding

By custom, weddings at St. Paul's are celebrated on Friday evenings or Saturdays, with the rehearsal held the evening before. If a Saturday is chosen, the wedding needs to begin no later than 1:30 p.m. in order to allow the couple sufficient time for the ceremony, the post-ceremony photographs, and the re-setting of the church prior to confessions and the Saturday evening Lord's Day Mass.

Because Lent is a penitential season and weddings are by their nature joyous, festive occasions, weddings are not celebrated during this six-week season except under very special circumstances. The need to celebrate in music and décor in a "subdued" way and "a penitential tone" in Lent will make this season a time you'll probably prefer to avoid for your celebration!

The Rehearsal

The rehearsal is scheduled at the same time as the wedding because it too reserves the church. The rehearsal is usually held the evening before the wedding, but can be scheduled any time that works out for all involved. It is very important that both sets of parents, lectors, and all members of the wedding party be present for the rehearsal, so it should be scheduled at a time that makes this possible in view of people's work schedules, etc. (most couples choose a time such as 5:00, 5:30, or 6:00 pm), and the couple should make sure that all members of the party realize the importance of their being present on time.

The couple is requested to drop off to the priest who will be having the ceremony the planning sheets for their wedding (and their marriage license) at least 48 hours before the rehearsal. If this is done and everyone is on time, experience shows that the rehearsal can then be concluded in 30-45 minutes or so, allowing plenty of time for rehearsal dinner and other last-minute preparations.

It is helpful if servers that are not familiar with how to serve weddings at St. Paul be present for the rehearsal, but not strictly essential. Music rehearsals are not scheduled during wedding rehearsals but at another time as arranged with the music minister/organist of the parish. (See separate section below.)

The Place of the Wedding

The ordinary place for a wedding to be celebrated in the Roman Rite is the parish church of the bride. If the couple desires another church, the pastor here, Msgr. Ken, will be happy to send to the pastor there the official permission for that to happen. If the couple wishes to be married in the non-Catholic church of one of them, the priest who handles the arrangements for the wedding will secure the necessary permission from the Bishop for you. Because marriage is a sacrament of the Church, an official celebration of the Catholic community as well as of the individual couple, the Diocese of Toledo does not permit weddings to be celebrated out of doors, in secular places, or in the chapels of high schools, colleges, or hospitals.

In St. Paul parish the usual place for the celebration of the wedding is our church. It is possible for registered members of the parish to be married in our Mother of Sorrows Shrine on west Main Street, but it must be remembered that that space is very small (there is seating for ± 30 people; no room in the sanctuary for bride and groom who consequently need to sit in the congregation), and is without water, heat or air conditioning, so the building can be used only during the summer for very small groups. Because the weather cannot be predicted and in case of rain there is no place for the bride and groom to be ahead of time and the limited parking is on a muddy lawn, the parish church is by far the recommended venue.

II. PLANNING THE WEDDING LITURGY

Texts and Ceremonies

At the couple's final preparation session with the priest or deacon who will preside at the wedding, they will be given the materials they will need to prepare the actual ceremony itself. The new ritual which goes into effect at the end of 2016 has three forms depending on whether the marriage is celebrated between two baptized Catholics in Mass, between a Catholic and another baptized Christian in a wedding liturgy, or between a Catholic and a non-baptized person, in which case all references to the sacrament in the prayers and texts is omitted.

The couple will be provided with copies of the scripture readings and prayers so they can choose the texts that would express their ideals and aspirations which they would like to convey to the congregation. These choices are every bit as important as choosing a color scheme and menu for the reception or other decisions that couples make regarding their wedding, because these go to the heart of what happens at this celebration. Because the ceremony is an official act of worship of the Church as such, other texts and non-scripture readings are more appropriate for use at the rehearsal dinner and/or reception.

A worship aid or program prepared by the couple may be very helpful for the full, active participation of the congregation in the ceremony through song and responses. The priest or deacon preparing the wedding liturgy with the couple will be happy to proofread these materials to make sure everything is in proper sequence and clear.

This staff member will also be able to answer specific questions or address particular issues that a couple may face regarding the celebration of their wedding. In view of the fact that the new ritual may still be somewhat unfamiliar, what follows is an outline of the ceremony from the perspective of what might be different from we have been used to.

III. THE WEDDING LITURGY

Entrance and Opening Rites

- The ceremony allows for the priest to meet the couple at the door of the church and lead them and the wedding party in by means of a customary liturgical procession with cross and candles, such as we do, for example, with baptisms and other sacraments, OR he may meet the couple at the front, which would allow for the kind of wedding processions with which we've become familiar.
- There are many variations on the latter, for example, having the bridesmaids come up singly to meet the groomsmen at the front or to come up two by two; to have the bride escorted by her father alone or to have both father and mother give the bride away to the groom who stands with his parents at the front, the two families giving away their respective children to form a new family unit, etc. All these options will be explored with the couple by the priest or deacon preparing the ceremony with them.

- Please be aware that animals, other than seeing-eye dogs, are not permitted inside the church.
- The lighting of the Unity Candle, which had become a custom here in Norwalk and many other places, is not a part of the new ritual; it's now encouraged to be the centerpiece at the head table and part of the prayer before the meal at the reception instead.
- The ceremony now begins with a greeting of all present by the priest, the singing of a festive "Gloria," and an opening prayer.

Liturgy of the Word

- There can be a total of three readings from Scripture (Old Testament, New Testament, and Gospel) such as we have on Sundays, or a total of two (either an Old Testament OR a New Testament reading and the Gospel); the psalm response in between is sung. The priest or deacon who presides will then give the homily.

The Vows ("The Consent")

- The couple now stands before the priest/deacon, facing the altar or facing the congregation, and he asks them the official questions regarding whether they are willing to make this commitment to each other.
- When they answer that they are, first the groom then the bride pledges their life-long faithful commitment to each other in a choice of two wordings.
- New in the new rite, the priest/deacon now explicitly "receives" the consent and then as customary blesses the rings which the couple gives to each other.
- An optional new ceremony, at this time the couple may choose to give each other a symbolic handful of coins, called the *arras*, by which they profess to each

other that they will share all the good gifts of their married life.

- This part of the ceremony then concludes with the General Intercessions or Prayer of the Faithful (“the Petitions”).

The Remainder of the Ceremony if in Mass

- If the marriage is between two baptized Catholics in the context of a Mass, the couple returns to their places and the altar is prepared. They themselves or their best man and maid of honor or their parents or siblings or others whom they choose bring up the bread and wine.
- Mass continues exactly as usual (the couple can choose their texts for the prayers, preface, etc.) till the Lord’s Prayer – after that prayer the priest gives the couple the special “Nuptial Blessing”; the couple can choose the formulary they would like.
- Immediately before that prayer another optional ceremony very popular especially in the southwest United States is the placing of a *lazo* or rosary around the shoulders of the couple, often by their parents, symbolizing their oneness as they receive the blessing.
- Since there is not enough time for the couple to give the Kiss of Peace to everyone, they will be asked to plan ahead of time to whom they will give it – just to each other, to their wedding party, their parents, etc.
- The couple is asked to supply two Eucharistic ministers so they and the congregation will be able to receive communion under the appearances of bread and wine.

The Remainder of the Ceremony if outside of Mass

- If the marriage is celebrated outside of Mass, the General Intercessions are followed immediately by the Lord's Prayer, in preparation for which the couple may, if they wish, have the *lazo* ceremony as above. They also may give the Kiss of Peace to those whom they wish, as described above, as well.

The Conclusion

- Whether celebrated within Mass or apart from Mass, the ceremony concludes with a blessing chosen by the couple and a festive, joyful recessional, usually instrumental in nature.
- The optional custom of bringing flowers to a statue of the Blessed Virgin and praying for her intercession that the couple may have healthy children is no longer found within the wedding celebration as such, but a couple may choose to do so after the ceremony.

All these many choices and options and, indeed, many more will be explored with the couple by the priest/deacon who is preparing them for marriage.

IV. THE MINISTERS OF THE LITURGY

The Presider and Witnesses

- In the Roman Catholic tradition, the bride and groom administer the sacrament of marriage to one another; the priest or deacon along with two witnesses are just that, the official *witnesses* of the sacrament. Traditionally the two witnesses are the best man and maid of honor but it's not actually required that they be of different sexes. If in a given circumstance a couple may find it difficult to choose between two siblings,

for example, for this function, they may both have equal and identical roles in the liturgy, as if there were two “maids of honor,” but ultimately one needs to be designated as the “official” witness for the legal documents.

- On occasion, a couple may have a priest friend or priest relative whom they want to invite to preside at the wedding. In this case, the couple should mention this to the priest preparing them for marriage; Msgr. Ken is very willing to delegate that priest to witness the marriage and to make sure that all canonical, civil, and diocesan requirements are met by the visiting priest.
- Both civil and canon law require one presider to be the officiant at a wedding and officially receive the vows, and when it is a Catholic liturgy, that would need to be the priest or deacon. However, when either bride or groom comes from a different Christian tradition and the couple would like his/her minister to have a role in the wedding, it's possible for that minister to read a reading, give an exhortation, offer a prayer or blessing, lead the petitions or fill other similar roles. Mention your desire to the priest or deacon preparing you for the wedding early in the process and something appropriate will be worked out that will be comfortable for all involved.

Music Minister

- Ordinarily, the music minister of St. Paul parish, Mr. Mark Niese, will provide music for weddings celebrated in this parish. *Engaged couples should contact him at the parish office (419-668-6044) as soon as a date has been set to make sure the date of the wedding is also reserved on his calendar, to discuss the musical forces that may be desired (soloists, instrumentalists, etc.) and their fees, and the parish wedding music policies.*

- Mr. Niese will help you in selecting appropriate music for the celebration of your marriage. St. Paul parish follows the wedding music guidelines established by the Catholic Diocese of Toledo; therefore, all music should be sacred in nature. A copy of our music guidelines will be provided for you when you contact him.

Lectors

- It is important to choose a lector(s) that are experienced and comfortable in this ministry; the texts of the Scripture are not read like newspaper articles but are proclaimed as God's word. This means that only those who have the necessary gifts for proclaiming the Word effectively and reverently should be invited to take this ministry. As noted earlier, lectors are asked to attend the wedding rehearsal so they may learn their cues and practice in the church with the sound system.

Eucharistic Ministers

- If a wedding is to be celebrated during Mass, there will be need for the service of at least two extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. If friends or family members of the bride or groom are ministers of the Eucharist in their home parishes, they may be invited to serve at the wedding. It is suggested that they also attend the wedding rehearsal so that they are familiar with the layout of our church and its procedures.

Altar Servers

- Servers are really *needed* only when weddings are celebrated within Mass, though if a couple would like to have servers in the case of weddings apart from Mass, they certainly can be utilized. The parish does not provide altar servers. If the servers are not from St. Paul's, they too are asked to come to the wedding rehearsal so they can learn our procedures and what their role will be.

Ring Bearers and Flower Girls

- Couples are asked to consider the age of children involved in the role of ring bearer and flower girl. Sometimes very young children are tapped for these roles out of a “cuteness” factor and may do fine at the rehearsal, but when these small children are suddenly faced with a whole church of strange faces and an unfamiliar setting they become terrified, which is cruel to them and detracting from the joyful solemnity of the celebration.

V. MONETARY OFFERINGS

It is appreciated if all fees be taken care of before the rehearsal; one less thing to worry about!

Church Offering

- There is never any charge for any sacrament or religious service, however, we ask if possible that the couple make a \$100 donation for the use of the church to help defray our ordinary operating expenses – light, heat, air conditioning, etc. Checks may be made payable to St. Paul Catholic Church. If this presents any problem for the couple they should simply let the priest / deacon know.

Presider

- The priests receive a salary so there is no need to give an offering to him; if you would wish to give a gift simply give that to him separately. Permanent deacons assigned to parishes do not receive any payment from the parish; any gift to them is certainly appreciated. Likewise, if the couple invites visiting clergy to come to take part in the ceremony an offering for that service is certainly appropriate. Again, these gifts would be taken care of by the couple directly and do not go through the church.

Musicians

- The fees going to the musicians – the parish musician and all vocalists and instrumentalists – are also separate from the donation to the church and must be given to them directly, preferably prior to the ceremony. These fees are set by the individual musicians. Our very accomplished parish musician, Mark Niese, requests a fee of \$150 for playing for weddings and an additional \$50 if he is also the cantor you choose. He can let you know what other vocalists and musicians in the area charge when you consult with him regarding the music you desire for your ceremony.

Altar Servers

- If you have asked boys or girls to be altar servers, it's a nice gesture to give them a modest offering for this service. These gifts too are given directly to them either at the rehearsal or in the sacristy before the ceremony (there probably will not be enough time to intersect with them after the service).

VI. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION TO KEEP IN MIND

Decorating the Church for Your Wedding

- Church Availability – Be sure to consult with the priest or deacon having your wedding regarding when the church will be available on the day of your wedding, not only for decorating, but also music rehearsals, photography, etc. Sometimes there will be a parish Mass or funeral or other event in the church on the same day.

- The main aisle of the church is 80 feet from the first sanctuary step to the inner vestibule doors and 94 feet to the outside doors. Please use only masking tape, not double-sided tape to secure the runner. There are 19 pews on each side of church, 7 pews from the front to the break aisle and 12 pews from the break aisle to the back.

- In addition to corsages, boutonnieres and bouquets, many couples desire to place floral arrangements in the church. This is fine. Please observe the following arrangements with your florist –
 - Floral decorations work well in front of the altar and ambo (pulpit) and/or on either side of the tabernacle. They should not be in the way of the approach to the altar, nor in the way of any actions or ritual movements around the altar.
 - Candelabras may be used on either side of the tabernacle if desired.
 - We welcome any floral arrangements you may wish to leave in the church after the celebration of the wedding. Your flowers would then continue to enhance parish worship and be a fine gift to St. Paul Church. But they are yours; you are also

completely free to bring these arrangements to your reception hall after the wedding.

- All liturgical decorations are to be left in their proper place. Please get the approval of the celebrant of the wedding before moving any church decorations already in place.
- If you would wish to use any decorations that the church owns beyond the liturgical season, please contact our Environment Coordinator, Paula Hackathorn (419-681-2444) to see what is available and arrange for her committee to get them, set them up and take them down. We ask a fee of \$100 for these extra services.
- If anything that belongs to the church – candles, vases, wood or ceramic pillars, etc. – is broken, it will need to be replaced. Thank you.

Throwing Rice, Confetti, etc.

- The custom of throwing rice at weddings was a Roman fertility ritual that has persisted to modern times without people realizing what they are doing and why. Here at St. Paul's it is not permitted to throw rice, birdseed, confetti, or strew petals at weddings. These tiny pieces are messy and we have no one to clean them up before the Masses that follow. Furthermore they are slippery and can become quite dangerous underfoot, especially for parishioners who are a little older and less steady on their feet. If it rains they create a gelatinous mass, and finally, the last thing we want to do is encourage pigeons! For all these reasons we ask, please, do not throw any such items in or around the church or on the church grounds.

Alcohol

- Please be aware that no alcoholic beverages are permitted in any of the parish buildings or on the church grounds.

Facilities

- The Bridal Room – The bride and her attendants are very welcome to use the Upper Room as a dressing room for the wedding; it contains a large mirror for this purpose. We ask that afterwards someone be given the responsibility of cleaning up all dry-cleaning bags, makeup kits, etc. because this room is used for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and other programs over the weekend. This room will be shown at the rehearsal to those interested. Please inform the celebrant at what time you want the room to be opened, as all doors on the church grounds are locked every night.
- Reception Hall – The St. Paul Social Hall, School Cafeteria and Convocation Center are not available for wedding receptions.

Clean-up Afterwards

- It is the responsibility of the wedding couple to see to it that anything extra brought into the church is removed at the end of the celebration, including all programs from the pews. This must be done in time for any scheduled liturgies later in the day. The areas that will need special attention are the vestibule, the main aisle, the pews, the sanctuary, the Gathering Space, and the dressing areas.

VII. PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOTAPING

The liturgy during which marriage is celebrated is a sacred moment of rejoicing in prayer, song and gesture; it is first and above all an act of worship on the part of the Church community. The cardinal principle to keep in mind is simply that photographers and videographers should not distract from that sacred action. Some corollaries of that principle would be:

- Photographers and videographers should be discreet and as far as possible, unnoticed once the liturgy has begun.
- That makes the balcony the preferred location for all photography during the liturgy. Photographers may also shoot from the open space near the ramp entrance as long as they remain largely stationary.
- There is no photography from the center aisle during the liturgy. It is permitted for photographers to station themselves in the break aisle to get photos of the procession coming up the center aisle.
- Any close-up that is not possible due to the respecting of these principles can be staged after the ceremony for perfect, non-distracting placement.
- Only the lighting already available in the church may be used during the liturgy. Additional lighting may of course be used in the church before or after the liturgy.
- Please plan to have all photography completed prior to the beginning of confessions on Saturday afternoon so as not to distract those who are praying and preparing for that sacrament. In effect that gives an

hour for photography, which should be plenty of time.

BECAUSE THE PHOTOGRAPHERS /
VIDEOGRAPHERS NEED THESE INSTRUCTIONS
THEY ARE REPEATED ON A SEPARATE SHEET AT
THE END OF THIS BOOKLET SO THEY CAN BE
GIVEN TO THEM.

QUESTIONS

If you should have questions about your wedding ceremony not covered here, please speak to the priest or deacon who is helping you prepare the wedding. He can be reached at the parish number, 419-668-6044.

CONCLUSION

Overall, engaged couples should find in our parish a wealth of assistance, encouragement and talent to help in preparing for the celebration of their wedding. These guidelines, based on the experience of previous couples, are simply intended to ensure a reverent and joyful celebration of marriage within the context of the church's worship.

God bless you!