

THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE GUIDELINES

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ST. CLARE & ST. THOMAS CHURCHES

One Faith Community, Two Worship Sites.

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on your decision to marry! We hope the preparations for the celebration of the sacrament of Marriage will deepen your love and your commitment to each other and strengthen the church.

Marriage is one of the seven sacraments, which are at the heart of our Catholic Faith. Sacraments are not the prayers of individuals alone, but of the whole church. Your wedding is the celebration of a sacrament and thus belongs to the whole church, not just the bride and groom. In this context, we invite you to prepare for your wedding. Please know that the faith communities of St. Clare and St. Thomas will keep you in prayer.

REQUIREMENTS

As Marriage is a sacrament of the Catholic Church, the following requirements must be met.

- At least one of you must be an active member of the Catholic Faith. In addition to regular participation at Mass, one or both of you should be registered members of St. Thomas or St. Clare Parish. In an interfaith marriage, the Catholic party is required to make a promise to continue living the Catholic faith and doing all in his/her power to have children baptized and raised as Catholics.
- Recent Baptismal Certificates are required of both Catholics and other Christian Denominations. These can be obtained by contacting the Church in which you were baptized.
- Both of you must be free to marry. If one or both of you have been married previously, you must speak to the pastor about your situation.
- There must be enough time for us to help you prepare for the sacrament. The Catholic Common Policy for the State of Wisconsin requires a minimum of six months. It is not uncommon for couples to contact us a year or more in advance.
- Both must be willing to make a permanent commitment to each other, which will be open to having children and will include a promise of marital fidelity. You will be asked to make these promises during the wedding ceremony.

The Sacrament is celebrated in the parish church in the presence of a priest or deacon and at least two witnesses. It can be a very simple ceremony and does not have to be elaborate or expensive.

ASSESSMENT & INSTRUCTION

1. **Requesting a date for the wedding:** Please contact the parish office to request a date for the wedding before making arrangements or commitments with caterers, photographers and venues. Weddings can be scheduled on any day except Sundays and Holy Days. On Saturdays, the latest a wedding can be scheduled at St. Clare is 1 PM and 1:30 at St. Thomas. Weddings are discouraged during the seasons of Advent and Lent. No dates are finalized until the couple has successfully completed the assessment and instruction phase.
2. **The initial meeting with the pastor or deacon:** Set up a meeting with the pastor as early as possible, but at least six months prior to the wedding. He will explain the preparation process and fill out the initial paperwork. If one or both of you have not been practicing your faith, or if one or the other has not received the Sacrament of Confirmation, you will be asked to participate in an RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) or adult Confirmation program to aid in the growth of your faith and to deepen your spirituality.
3. **The FOCCUS Inventory:** FOCCUS helps to identify strengths and challenges in your relationship. A trained married couple will walk you through the process and help you identify places you can grow and develop in your relationship.
4. **Enrichment Day for the Engaged:** Visit the Archdiocese of Milwaukee website, click on Ministries & Offices, then click on Marriage and Family to register for the Enrichment Day for Engaged Couples sponsored by the Archdiocese. Once completed, you will be e-mailed a certificate. Please download, print and bring it to the next session with the priest or deacon. This will be kept in your wedding file at the parish.
5. **Additional Instruction:** The pastor/deacon will meet with you to discuss the readings and the details of the ceremony. You will meet again shortly before the wedding to finalize your plans.
6. **Meeting with the Music Coordinator:** You will also meet with the Parish Music Coordinator at least two months prior to the ceremony. The Coordinator will help you choose appropriate music for your wedding. The Parish Musician is responsible for playing the organ or piano at your wedding and receives a fee for his/her services.

SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

With all the excitement of preparing for your wedding, please remember that you are really preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage. The most important element of your preparation is the spiritual, because this is what will be important in the years to come.

- We recommend, and strongly encourage you to pray together often and regularly.
- Attend Mass together every weekend. If this hasn't been your practice, now is a good time to start. Studies show that couples who actively practice a faith have happier and longer lasting marriages and better values to pass on to their children.
- Finally, receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before your wedding. This will help you have a wonderful and spiritually new beginning.

FEES

A free-will offering can be made to the parish for the use of the church and the services provided by the pastoral staff.

The fee for the Parish Musician is normally \$150. If the Parish Musician also cantors, it is an additional \$50. All outside musicians and cantors must be approved by the Music Coordinator. There are additional charges for any music related rehearsals. There is no set fee for the pastor or deacon, but an offering is usually made. In cases of need, most of these fees can be waived.

THE REHEARSAL

Rehearsals are usually scheduled the evening prior to the wedding. The average length of a rehearsal is one hour. Rehearsals may be scheduled on other days of the week depending on the availability of the church and parish personnel.

Be prepared to begin on time. You will practice what has already been decided, so everyone should know their positions and responsibilities. Be sure to invite anyone who is assigned to read at your Mass.

The wedding is a religious ceremony in a sacred place. Proper dress and behavior are expected during the rehearsal and the wedding. No smoking is allowed in church; no consumption of alcohol or other behavior-influencing chemicals are allowed anywhere on the parish grounds before, during, or after the rehearsal or wedding. **Please be sure to bring the marriage license, all fees for the musicians, etc. and wedding programs.**

THE WEDDING CEREMONY

Please make certain that everyone is on time. No alcohol or behavior-influencing chemicals are allowed on church property or consumed before the wedding ceremony. If the bride, groom or other attendants are involved in such actions, the pastor or deacon has the right to postpone the marriage. Such a marriage could be considered invalid because of the lessening of one's freedom to give full consent.

Photos are to be taken in a reverential manner. Photographers and videographers must discuss with the priest or deacon their movement during the ceremony. Flash pictures are allowed during the processional and recessional, but not during the ceremony itself. Photos can be taken before and after the ceremony and must be finished by 3 PM at St. Clare and 3:30 PM at St. Thomas.

The exchange of vows and rings are profound symbols of unity. The Unity Candle is not part of the Church's liturgy.

Flowers serve to add color and festive atmosphere to the celebration of a wedding. They should not so overwhelm the space that the sense of it being a church is lost. Flowers may not be placed on the altar itself or in such a way that obstructs the priest's movement around the altar. Flowers cannot be placed in the aisles, it is considered a fire hazard. The seasonal décor of the parish cannot be moved or removed.

If flowers or bows are placed on the ends of the pews, do not use tape or any type of adhesive to attach them. Do not apply tape to any wood surface in the church. Dropping flower petals, throwing rice or bird seed, and aisle runners are not permitted.

After the wedding, the florist and/or the wedding party must remove all flowers and decorations before the next service begins. Be sure to check the pews, sacristy, vestibule, basement, etc. Clean-up should be completed by 3 PM at St. Clare and 3:30 PM at St. Thomas.