

# GETTING MARRIED IN THE CHURCH OF SAINT ANN



**Y**our wedding is a special event and is very important to us at The Church of Saint Ann, but it is not yours alone. Unlike all the other people who are involved in the preparation for your wedding (the photographer, the band or DJ, the caterer, the limo driver, the florist), *we are invested not only about your wedding day, but about your marriage and future life together.* For marriage is the reason we have a wedding! We are not just here to plan your event; we are here to celebrate a sacrament. In your beautiful act of commitment to one another we see the very face of God who is love, and so we wish to celebrate the beauty of that love in a way that builds up the community of the Church. This is why, on your wedding day, you make a solemn life-long promise, a covenant with each other and with God, witnessed by God's people, the Church, and your relatives and friends.

So, what exactly needs to be done in order to get married in the Church? This booklet will go through all the details that pertain to planning a Catholic wedding, and the kind of preparation that is asked of you to help build a foundation for the sacrament of marriage. But besides knowing the "what," it is always good to know the "why." The answers as to "why" the Church asks what it asks of you can be found in the profound questions which will be asked of you on the day of your wedding:

**Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?** This booklet will tell you about some of the documents you will need in order to prove that you are free to enter into this holy union.

**Will you love and honor one another as husband and wife for the rest of your lives?** Our booklet will describe the process of marriage preparation that we offer. This process will help you to live in your marital relationship with faithfulness and love.

**Will you accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?** On the day of your wedding, you will promise that your love will be fruitful. The fruitfulness of your marriage will not only be reflected in the children you will bring into the world, but also in the very manner in which your couple-love will bring hope and joy to those who feel barren and lifeless. This booklet will speak about making your marriage ceremony a true sacramental event that will communicate life and hope to all those who will be in attendance that day and those with whom you will be sharing your married life.

We hope that these three questions will be the source of your reflection that will guide you in the planning of your sacramental wedding to be celebrated here in our Church. The Pastoral Team and staff of our parish community would like to extend you whatever help we can offer to make this time, a time filled with joy and peace as you begin your journey together as husband and wife.

**Question: Have you come here freely  
and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?**

**BAPTISM CERTIFICATE:** All Catholics being married in the Church are asked to produce an updated Baptismal Certificate that has been recently issued (within the last six months) from the Church of Baptism. Your Church of Baptism has a record of your entire sacramental history (including previous valid marriages if there were any). We ask you to obtain a recently issued baptismal certificate because it provides an official proof that you are presently free to be married in the Catholic Church. Please contact the Church where you were baptized, giving them your name and date of birth, and they will send you an updated certificate. An original baptismal certificate (or photocopy) suffices for those who were baptized in a non-Catholic Christian Church.

**LETTER OF FREEDOM:** If both of the Catholic parties are not members of The Church of Saint Ann, you are required to obtain a letter from the pastor of your home parish acknowledging your intent to marry outside of the parish. In addition, if either party is under 21 years of age, a letter of parental consent is required.

**AFFIDAVITS OF FREEDOM TO MARRY:** You may receive a form called "Affidavit of Freedom to Marry." It is a document which we ask each of you to give to two people (family members or, in their absence, long-time friends) who attest that there are no impediments to your freely getting married in the Church (such as previous marriage, blood relationship to one another, or other impediments to freedom that they are aware of).

**SPECIAL SITUATIONS:** In certain special situations, other documentation will be necessary. These situations include: a previous marriage, or the death of a former spouse. We will gladly explain what documentation is needed in these special cases.

**THE MARRIAGE LICENSE:** Before you are married, it is necessary for the two of you to obtain a marriage license from the State of New Jersey. The marriage license can be obtained in (1) the municipality in which the woman resides (if she resides in N.J.), (2) the municipality in which the man resides (if the woman is a non-resident in N.J. and the man is a N.J. resident), or (3) the municipality in which the marriage ceremony will take place (if the woman and man are both residents of N.J.). It is no longer necessary to have a blood test prior to obtaining a marriage license in New Jersey. The license shall not be issued by the licensing officer sooner than seventy-two hours (3 days) after application has been made. The license, once granted, is good for thirty days. One witness, at least 18 years old, must accompany the applicants when applying. Required documents -- ID from applicants which includes name and address (ex. driver's license, or rental agreement, municipal tax bill, federal or state income tax papers, pay stub, current utility bill, certified copy of birth certificate for each applicant). If applicable, a divorce decree, or certified copy of a death certificate must be submitted at the time of the application. If any documents are not in English, notarized translations must be presented. Call before hand to check this along with what the current fee is. The vital statistics office for Lawrence Township is located in the health department at the municipal building, 2207 Lawrence Road (U.S. Route 206). Applications may be completed from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. **We ask you to bring the license to us at the wedding rehearsal.** After the wedding, we will send the license back to the town or city clerk's office.



**Question: Will you love and honor  
one another as husband and wife for the rest of your lives?**

Obviously, this is a time in your life when so much is happening. The preparations that go into planning this big event can seem overwhelming and time-consuming; as a result, your own relationship as a couple can easily get lost in the shuffle. Your wedding is a single day -- your marriage is a lifetime! Therefore, we have structured this time into your engagement, a time for reflecting, for listening, for sharing -- in short, a time to put your relationship (and not the wedding) ahead of any other concern. Other couples who have experienced our marriage preparation program have told us that this program was very helpful for them. We hope to be able to serve you in the same way. Our marriage preparation program begins with reading the information you received from the church, and viewing the DVD that was sent to you by mail, coming in to meet with a priest, deacon, or pastoral minister, discussing the expectations of marriage preparation, and answering any initial questions that you may have. You are expected to meet three times with the parish representative who is helping to prepare you for marriage (not including a meeting to plan the wedding), unless some special circumstance warrants a different approach. In addition to the three meetings, you are required to participate in a program called Pre-Cana and/or Engaged Encounter Weekend respectively. A description of these programs will be discussed with you. The Church of Saint Ann offers a Fall and Spring Pre-Cana. A listing of dates and times of additional programs can be found through the Diocese of Trenton. The Pre-Cana programs run by the diocese can be accessed through the diocesan website for faith formation: [www.drvc.org/faithformation](http://www.drvc.org/faithformation). A certificate of attendance to one of these programs must be on file before your wedding takes place.

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**Question: Will you accept children lovingly from  
God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?**

You may wonder, what does the promise of my bringing children into this world have to do with the celebration of my wedding? Quite simply, the answer is this: Your love is not just a private gift exchanged between "consenting adults" -- it is a creative action of self-donation that is meant to bring life into the world. Your wedding ceremony is more than just a "me-centered" (or "we-centered") event which places you in the spotlight. Right from the very beginning of your marriage, you stand ready to give life and to bring light into the lives of others in a Catholic ritual which we call a sacrament. **Thus your marriage is a public act as much as it is a private reality!**

**Having a Wedding Mass or a Wedding Ceremony -- What's the difference?**

When we speak about the celebration of your wedding as taking place within a Mass, we unite your sacramental, life-giving exchange of love to the life-giving words of Jesus, "This is my Body, given for you." In a sense, every celebration of the Eucharist is a moment in time when Jesus, the bridegroom, gives his body to his bride, the Church. What Jesus did for us on Calvary in his act of sacrificial love animates and gives life to every act of love or sacrifice you will make for each other in your marriage. Likewise, what you promise to do for each other on your wedding day -- to be generous and generative in your love -- makes your celebration a sacrament, a living sign of God's generous, generative love to the world. **A WEDDING MASS** (also in the tradition called a Nuptial Mass) has three parts to it:

**(I) Liturgy of the Word:** we listen to the Word of God who speaks to us about the true meaning and nature of human love.

**(II) The Marriage Rite:** The moment when, in your exchange of vows and rings, you promise to make that divine love real in your day-to-day living. You make a covenant with one another, forever.

**(III) Liturgy of the Eucharist:** We remember the covenant of love that God made with us, sealed in the sacrifice of His Son, given to us as nourishment and strength in holy Communion.

**A WEDDING CEREMONY** (apart from the Mass) consists of the first two parts outlined above: The Liturgy of the Word and the Marriage Rite. A wedding ceremony is approximately 45 minutes in length; a wedding Mass is approximately 60 minutes in length. In your considerations which will lead you to decide whether you want a wedding Mass or a wedding ceremony, please be honest and ask yourself if the Mass, at present, does play an important part in your own spirituality. Also, consider your invited guests: Are a majority of them Catholic or non-Catholic? Would most of your guests participate in the prayers and responses of the Mass? Would they be excluded from receiving the Eucharist? Ultimately, it is your decision to shape this event in such a way that all may be able to enter into the celebration prayerfully and reverently.

The celebration of your marriage is not only the moment when a bride and groom administer the sacrament of love to one another, it is also the opportunity for all present to experience a real and living sign of how much God loves us all. Your guests who are present in the Church on your special day can experience the most profound example of what God is all about; for God is love, and the clearest manifestation of love occurs when two people promise to cherish each other for the rest of their lives. As ministers of this sacrament, you are creating a special moment that will help others believe in the power of love, the power of God who renews all things. When a priest or deacon officiates your wedding, they stand as official witnesses of your sacramental exchange of love and fidelity. We will help you to create a beautiful celebration, following the guidelines of our Catholic ritual, so that those who are present will experience the life-giving power of your sacrament.

***"As ministers of this sacrament, you are creating a special moment that will help others believe in the power of love, and the power of God who renews all things."***

### **CHOOSE YOUR SIGNS AND SYMBOLS CAREFULLY**

All rituals, all sacraments, are made up of outward signs or symbols that communicate grace, the divine life that God wants us to enjoy even here on earth. The central sign of the sacrament of marriage is the loving couple. The most important words are the exchange of vows. Anything that takes away from the couple being the primary focus or their public exchange of vows should be minimized or eliminated.

**THE PROCESSION:** The traditional marriage ceremony has a lengthy procession of groomsmen and bridesmaids preceding the entrance of the bride and her father. The procession is a throw-back to the ancient practice where the bride left her home and, processing through the village streets, entered the home of the groom. The father "gave away" the bride, along with a dowry, and received the groom's promise, symbolized in the ring, that he would take care of her. In time, this procession has become so elaborate that it communicates something that is not really in keeping with the true spirit of Christian marriage. The lengthy number of bridal attendants cli-

maxing in the entrance of the bride can communicate "It's all about ME!" Perhaps you might consider allowing the procession to speak a more sublime truth. What if the bride were accompanied by both parents? What if the bridal party were limited in size? What if the groom was escorted to the altar by his parents followed by the bride and her parents? What if, in consideration of the guests in attendance, that toddlers not be part of the procession? It is our experience that little children, when part of the bridal party and, for the most part, unattended, can cause a major distraction during the liturgical celebration of your wedding. This can also be a traumatic experience for the young child. If it is your choice to include them, flower girls and ring bearers should be functional and not just cute additions that take away from the primary symbols of a wedding, that is, the bride and groom.



**THE READINGS FROM THE BIBLE:** All sacramental celebrations in the Church contain the Word of God. The readings in a wedding ceremony speak about God's covenant of love that he makes with us and ultimately the covenant of love sealed by the blood of Jesus. Secular readings or poems, as beautiful as they may be, are inappropriate in a Catholic ritual because they cannot speak the profound truth that is expressed in the inspired Word of God. You will receive a booklet which outlines the readings in the Catholic ritual. We want to take the opportunity to explain these readings as we help you to prepare for the ceremony. God's Word is a treasure -- let us help you to find the key to unlock that treasure so that God's Word can challenge and invite your heart to embrace the true meaning of Christian marriage itself. We ask you to make an appointment with the priest or deacon who is officiating your wedding at least four weeks in advance of the wedding so that together we may look at and reflect upon the Word of God, as well as all the other details that will be a part of your wedding. All couples receive the resource *Together for Life* by Joseph M. Champlin.

**YOUR EXCHANGE OF VOWS:** The most important words during the wedding are the exchange of vows between the couple. So many times, people are tempted to want to write their own vows. The intention is to make the celebration personal and meaningful. However, your vows are meant to be more than just an expression of affection ("I fell in love with you the moment I first met you and now I want you to share my dreams with you for the rest of my life."). They are meant to be a solemn expression of a covenant and vowed commitment of fidelity-- a love that is unconditional and forever, sealed in that sacred union of husband and wife. The vows of the Catholic ritual contain important words that cannot be altered. Great care should be taken to make sure these words are heard from the couple, and not from the priest or deacon officiating your wedding.

**OTHER SYMBOLS:** Over the years, other symbols have crept into the wedding ceremony: the lighting of the unity candle, presentation of roses to the Blessed Mother, giving roses to the mothers at the sign of peace, musical solos, etc. Some of these minor rituals are acceptable in the Catholic ritual; however, we want to make sure that there is a balance and that additional symbols do not overshadow the main sign of the sacrament, namely, you the couple and your solemn exchange of vows. Things that should be questioned are: giving away the bride, separating the women and men, the "hidden bride," and any sense of male dominance.

**MUSIC:** Music will play an important part in making your wedding a memorable event. So, in selecting music for the wedding celebration, care must be taken that the music reflects the heart of the Catholic liturgy. It needs to be selected with an understanding of the sacrament we celebrate. There is a difference between the liturgy and the reception that follows. That is why we



give you a breakdown of appropriate songs to help guide your decision. Songs are written for a particular purpose. Some love songs, beautiful and inspiring though they may be, were not written for liturgical celebration. Their purpose is not to point us towards the divine, life-giving love of Christ and his Church. If a song was not specifically written for liturgy, it is probably not appropriate for a wedding. Likewise, recorded music is never appropriate nor permitted in Church liturgies. In addition, the music selected should support the part of the wedding liturgy where it will be used. For example, music that is "eucharistic" in nature should accompany the Communion Rite. These hymns and the accompanying selection worksheet are offered to you at this time. The person you choose to provide music at your wedding will help you with the selection of appropriate songs and hymns for your wedding. We ask you to contact someone well in advance of the wedding (at least six to eight weeks before) so that they can help you with the selection of songs and hymns. We will supply you with a list of musicians who we recommend. Whomever you choose should be properly trained and of good quality, with experience in music ministry. Music fees are to be handled by the engaged couple directly with the musician or musicians.

### **MAINTAINING THE DIGNITY OF THE CELEBRATION**

Good liturgy, by its very nature, is uplifting and ought to maintain a certain dignity. While a wedding is an event attended by people who are close to you, there is still a certain formality to the moment (brides wouldn't get married in a sundress or grooms in a t-shirt and jeans). We do everything we can to maintain a balance between warmth and prayerful reverence. We want to see that balance carried through all aspects of the celebration so that it can be life-giving and uplifting to all.

**PUNCTUALITY COUNTS!** Not only is punctuality a courtesy to your guests, it is a courtesy to all who need to use our Church for other events on the day of your wedding. Please insist that your photographer and limousine driver keep this bigger picture in mind! We work hard to shape this moment so that it can be a prayerful event, a sacrament that reflects the mystery of God's life-giving love. If you arrive exceptionally late on the day of your wedding, the priest or deacon may be forced *on the spot* to shorten your ceremony (or even eliminate the liturgy of the Eucharist at Nuptial Masses) if he feels that we would otherwise excessively run over the time that was allotted for your wedding.

**PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS/VIDEOGRAPHERS:** We ask that those who will be taking pictures at your wedding (still and video) see the priest or deacon before the ceremony begins regarding our church policies concerning photography. We urge you to ask your photographers not to take away from the solemnity of your wedding celebration, or to become a distraction from the solemnity of the ceremony by entering the sanctuary (altar area) or stopping or hindering those in the wedding party once the ceremony begins—for example, continually stopping the bride to fix her gown. Posed photographs may be taken after the ceremony in the sanctuary or on the outdoor grounds as time allows within the one and one-half hour time allotment. Please inform your photographer of these this time limit.



**FLOWERS, DECORATIONS AND AISLE RUNNERS.** For safety reasons, aisle runners are no longer permitted. In addition, the throwing of any item (rice, birdseed, rose petals, confetti) is not permitted. Pew bows and/or flowers may be used. Please notify your florist (or whomever is providing your pew bows or flowers) that nothing is to be taped to the pews as tape can damage the pew. Ties and pew clips are permissible. There are specific holidays and feasts during the year

when the church will be decorated. Altar cloths and the décor of the current liturgical season will remain in place and should be taken into consideration—green during Ordinary Time, purple during Advent, red and gold during Christmas, white and yellow during Easter, and purple during Lent. Appropriate, festive, tasteful flowers to match seasonal colors may be in place. You may add flower baskets/arrangements to the church; these can be removed at the end of the ceremony and taken with you or left in the church.

**YOUR BRIDAL PARTY:** The members of your wedding party serve a very important purpose in setting a tone for your celebration. It is our hope that the people whom you select will maintain a prayerful dignity throughout your celebration. No one in your wedding party should consume alcoholic beverages before the ceremony that day. Toddlers and young children may feel intimidated in walking down the aisle of a church in the bridal procession. We ask that you consider not having any children under the age of kindergarten in your bridal party; while exceptions may be made, we ask that you make the arrangements that might be necessary should young children need assistance during the course of the wedding.

**VISITING CLERGY:** We are very happy to accommodate a visiting priest or deacon whom you wish to officiate at your wedding. Visiting clergy need to write a letter to the pastor of Saint Ann requesting delegation (permission) to officiate the wedding. Please let us know well in advance if you are considering this option.

#### **SOME ADDITIONAL ITEMS:**

**THE WEDDING REHEARSAL:** The priest, pastoral minister, or deacon who has been assisting you with the Church arrangements will schedule the wedding rehearsal at a time and date which is convenient for all. The rehearsal is usually scheduled in the church for the evening before the marriage. However, it can be scheduled on other evenings if need be. The rehearsal lasts about forty-five minutes in duration. The bride and groom, best man, maid/matron of honor, ushers and bridesmaids are asked to be present for the rehearsal. Parents of the bride and groom, readers at the Mass/Ceremony and any other children who will take part in the ceremony should be present if convenient. We ask bridal parties to be on time in case there are multiple rehearsals. At the rehearsal, we ask you to bring the following items which have been referred to above:

- ◆ Unity candle, programs or other items to be used in your celebration
- ◆ Marriage License

**FIRST COMMUNION AND CONFIRMATION CERTIFICATES:** These can be copies obtained from the church in which these sacraments were celebrated or copies that you have available from home. Please send these into the church or give them to the priest, deacon or pastoral minister who is helping you to prepare for your marriage as soon as possible.

**CHURCH DONATION:** The donation given to the Church of Saint Ann on the occasion of the Sacrament of Marriage is \$350. Please give this to the priest, deacon, or pastoral minister who is helping you to prepare for your marriage well in advance of your wedding. This covers the marriage preparation sessions, the use of the church building, janitorial services for preparing the church ahead of time and any cleaning afterward, any diocesan fee required, and any materials given out. The donation does not cover the cost of the Pre-Cana or Engaged Encounter Program. The donation should never be an obstacle to your celebrating your marriage in the Church. Talk to the priest, deacon, or pastoral minister assisting you if this presents a hardship.

**GIFT TO THE POOR:** Weddings, unfortunately, can be very expensive. Almost every choice you make adds another expense to your celebration. We encourage you, at this time, to make wise choices that reflect your faith and lifestyle. Many guests can feel uncomfortable with extravagance. It is a long-standing Christian tradition to remember the poor, even in the midst of a great celebration. We encourage you to make an offering (the cost of one setting at your reception) to the poor. Envelopes for the parish St. Vincent de Paul Society are available at the doors of the church, but you can choose any charity you wish.

**STAY CONNECTED:** Remember the Church has stake in your marriage and family. Never hesitate to call us for assistance, especially during those early years.

**PARISH REGISTRATION:** It is important that you are a registered member of the parish in which you will reside. If you are living in another parish outside of Saint Ann, we recommend that you call or visit the parish to complete a parish registration form. If you are not already registered at Saint Ann and plan to live within its boundaries, please make sure you fill out and return one of our registration forms as soon as possible.

**PRAY AND PARTICIPATE IN SUNDAY MASS (WORSHIP) TOGETHER:** The Church rejoices with you on this special occasion. You are remembered in the prayers and Masses of this parish community. A couple that prays together regularly and attends Sunday Mass (or Christian worship) lays the groundwork for a successful, joy filled, fulfilling life together. Our hope is that God will bless you abundantly! Sunday Mass nourishes us with the Eucharist. It helps us to remember the grand Christian story, and God's role in your marriage, strengthening your commitment and fidelity to one another.



**THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION:** All Catholics are asked to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation in preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage. Please make every effort to do this sufficiently in advance of the evening of the wedding rehearsal. The parish offers the Sacrament of Reconciliation every Saturday from 4:15 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and anytime by appointment.

**NOTES TO PARENTS AND FRIENDS** Well meaning parents and friends often interfere with a couple's intention to have a simple, meaningful marriage celebration by placing expectations, and by suggesting all kinds of extras that overburden the day with trivia. Nothing is without cost, not just financial cost, but more importantly, the cost of time and effort to coordinate and ensure that all goes well. The more little "extras" added, the more there is to worry about. Simple is best. The couple should be able to enjoy the day and celebrate with family and friends without the many distractions marketed for weddings.

We at The Church of Saint Ann look forward with great joy to celebrate this wonderful moment in your lives. We sincerely hope that the information in this booklet will be helpful to you as you prepare for your celebration. Please be assured of our prayers for your future together, that the Lord may enrich your lives with all his blessings and favors.

