

## ❧ WEDDING GUIDELINES ❧

### Marriage—A Holy Sacrament

The Bible makes it pretty clear: as long as there have been men and women on earth, there has been marriage (cf. Genesis 2:18-25). From the beginning, God designed this intimate, exclusive, lifelong partnership of husband and wife as part of his plan for creation. By its very nature, this communion of life and of love is intended both for the good of the couple and the procreation and raising of children.

A “church wedding” is much more than one that *happens* to take place in a holy place or before a religious leader. In the Catholic Church, the marriage of a baptized man and woman is recognized as a Sacrament—a sacred sign established by Christ as an instrument of God’s grace. It is the Lord himself who unites husband and wife: “They are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate” (Mark 10:8-9). The Sacrament of Marriage makes this loving and permanent union a living image of the enduring and self-giving love that Christ has for his bride, the Church (cf. Ephesians 5:21-33).

### Place of the Ceremony

The usual place for the celebration of marriage is the **parish church of the Catholic party** to the marriage. If both the bride and groom are Catholic, the marriage may be celebrated in the parish church of either party.

For *special reasons*, the Catholic party may ask his/her pastor for **permission to celebrate the marriage in another Catholic Church**. The spiritual and pastoral reasons for moving the celebration from the proper parish will be carefully evaluated. Reasons such as proximity to a reception facility, the location or architecture of the church building, etc., are normally **not** sufficient reasons. The question to be asked by yourself, and that will be by your pastor and the pastor of the church at which you desire to celebrate your marriage; is there truly a pastoral/spiritual need for *this* church? Couples should weigh carefully this decision and be prepared to explain the *pastoral* need for changing churches.

Should your pastor grant permission to celebrate your marriage in another church, it does not create an obligation for another pastor to have the celebration in his parish. **The Diocese of Ogdensburg does not permit the solemnization of marriage outside of a sacred space or building. Under no circumstances will permission for an outdoor marriage ceremony be granted.** (*Marriage Preparation Guidelines for the Diocese of Ogdensburg, p. 21*)

## Preparing For Marriage

Engaged couples are required to contact your parish at least six months before they wish to be married. This is only partly because there is a certain amount of paperwork and planning which must be completed before the ceremony. Rather, this is meant to be a period of preparation not just for a wedding day (which lasts but a brief time), but for a marriage (which is to last a lifetime). You will minimally be expected to meet with your parish priest (or someone he appoints) and to attend a brief marriage preparation program. Be sure to fulfill all requirements, but also try to take advantage of other opportunities provided to enrich your wedding and strengthen your marriage. With that in mind, the Catholic Bishops of the United States sponsor a very helpful website for married and engaged couples: [www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org). It has many articles, links, and additional resources. You may wish to visit it as part of your marriage preparation.

**Asking to be married in the Church presumes that those to be married are already actively participating in the life of the Church.** If you are not regularly attending Mass on Sundays and Holydays, now is the time to return to the Eucharist. If you have not received the Sacrament of Penance (“gone to confession”) in a while, it is important to get back to it as you prepare for the Sacrament of Matrimony. If you have questions or concerns about returning to the practice of the faith, do not hesitate to bring them to your parish priest.

## Celebrating Your Marriage

The priest or deacon who will officiate at your wedding will guide you in preparing the ceremony. Generally, a wedding takes place during Mass when both the bride and groom are Catholic. (This, of course, assumes that the couple is already attending Mass on a regular basis.) When either party is not Catholic, the wedding usually takes place outside of Mass. In addition to your personal decisions about gowns, tuxedos, and flowers, you will be guided in making choices about scripture readings, music, and special roles that are part of the Church’s wedding ritual.

## Necessary Documentation

The following documents will be kept on permanent file at the parish where you are married and must be acquired in advance of your wedding day:

1. Catholic parties must obtain a “new” copy of their baptismal certificate, dated within six months of the wedding. To do so, contact the parish where you were baptized. Other Christians must produce some similar proof of baptism.
2. If one or both parties were previously married—whether it was in a civil or religious ceremony—a number of further documents will be required. No date can be set until these are obtained and the couple’s freedom to marry is verified.
3. If both parties currently live outside of the parish, they must obtain written permission from their current pastor to be married here. They need also to convey some pastoral connection to

the Church in which they wish to marry (see: *Place of the Ceremony*, above). No date may be set until this is received. Also, in this circumstance the exchange of paperwork between dioceses is necessary for the granting of a *nihil obstat*, and may also include the granting of necessary permissions or dispensations.

4. If one party is not Catholic, special permission from the bishop must be sought for the wedding. The necessary application will be provided.
5. A “Pre-Nuptial Investigation” form must be completed and signed by the pastor (or his delegate) of the proper parish of the Catholic party to the wedding or of either proper parish if both parties are Catholic. A Copy of this is to be forwarded to the parish church where the marriage will be celebrated.
6. A certificate indicating completion of a Pre-Cana program or its equivalent (e.g. Engaged Encounter) must be provided. A Copy of this is to be forwarded to the parish church where the marriage will be celebrated.
7. A New York State Marriage License is required. You may apply for this up to 60 days prior to the ceremony; the application must be filed a minimum of 24 hours before the ceremony is to take place.

## **Some Practical Matters**

1. In the Diocese of Ogdensburg, Catholic weddings must take place in Catholic churches. Permission to do otherwise (e.g. in another church /chapel) must be sought directly from the diocesan bishop and is very rare.
2. Visiting Catholic deacons or priests are welcome to officiate or assist at weddings. A letter from their diocese, verifying their faculties and good standing, must be sent to the chancery in Ogdensburg.
3. Because of the parish’s regular weekend schedule, weddings cannot be scheduled later than 1:00pm on Saturdays. Also, due to annual parish events Weddings cannot be scheduled on July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend. In the Diocese of Ogdensburg, weddings may not be scheduled on Sundays (after 4pm Saturdays through Sunday).
4. Wedding rehearsals are generally scheduled for the evening before the ceremony. Please be sure to set the time with the parish in advance.
5. Photographs and videos may be taken during the ceremony, though those taking them should be discreet and must never enter the sanctuary. Ask the photographer to speak with the priest or deacon prior to the ceremony.

6. Flowers used within the church should be real rather than artificial, in keeping with the dignity of the sacrament. No flowers may be placed upon the altar table itself, nor should they be placed in such a fashion as to block the view of the altar (cannot be higher than the altar). The parish greatly appreciates it when some or all of the flowers are left at the church. Pew decorations must be removed after the ceremony and must not leave any marks on the pews. **No rose petals, confetti, rice, or birdseed may be tossed within or outside the church. No aisle runners are permitted.**
7. Although commonly used, the “Unity Candle” is not actually part of the Catholic wedding ritual, thus it is not appropriate to *insert* it into the liturgy. Some couples have chosen to make the “Unity Candle” a part of grace before the meal at their wedding reception, with the candle burning at the head table throughout the celebration.
8. Ordinarily, one of the parish organists will perform the music for your wedding. Contact information will be provided. Visiting musicians are welcome, but must be familiar with Catholic ceremonies. Only liturgical music is permitted for the ceremony. Recorded music is not allowed.
9. No alcoholic beverages may be consumed on parish property—including within limousines or other vehicles—either before or after the ceremony.

