



# Process for Receiving the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony



Roman Catholic Faith Communities of St.  
Bartholomew, Holy Cross, St. John the  
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Diocese of Portland  
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## Process for Receiving the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony

Thank you for inquiring about the possibility of being married in our parish. We wish you well at this important and happy time in your life, and we are pleased to be able to acquaint you with the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony as it is taught by the Catholic Church and practiced in our parish. Please review this process that we have established as policy for those couples planning to marry in our parish.

### 1. Initial Interview with Priest or Deacon

Once you have made the decision to marry in our church and before the wedding date can be finalized, you must contact the priest or deacon at the parish you wish your wedding to take place to setup an initial interview. This initial interview is a time for the priest or deacon to get to know you as a couple and as individuals, to inform you of the process to prepare for sacramental marriage, and to help you as a couple become more connected to the parish family and to God.

Typically your initial interview should take place as soon as possible after your engagement. The priest or deacon will want to meet with you to learn more about you and your relationship with each other, such as, how the two of you came to meet each other, your personal and family background, and your future plans together. This interview allows the three of you to talk about the issues and experiences of your relationship and your experience of God's presence in that relationship. Also in this interview, you will be required to complete a pre-marital questionnaire. Issues of prior marriage, a marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic, or the request of a Catholic to be married in a non-Catholic church will be fully discussed.

The priest or deacon who is preparing you for marriage will explain the need for the following documents:

- **Baptismal Certificate** (issued within the last six months – also required of a non-Catholic if he/she was baptized)
- **State of Maine Marriage License** (It is illegal for a minister to perform a wedding ceremony without this document in their possession. Please bring the license, which can be obtained from the Town Hall in the town where you reside, to the wedding rehearsal)
- **Permission for Mixed Religion** (when a Catholic marries a baptized non-Catholic)
- **Permission for Disparity of Cult** (when a Catholic marries an unbaptized person)
- **Dispensation from Canonical Form** (when the minister is non-Catholic)
- **Annulment Documents** (if a prior marriage ended in divorce, a copy of the Formal Decree of Nullity is required)
- **Death Certificate** (if a prior marriage ended in death)

Most of these documents will be procured by the priest or deacon preparing you for marriage. There is no need to bring any of these documents to the initial interview.

## 2. Marital Preparation

The decision to enter into a sacramental marriage is a lifelong commitment that a couple makes to each other and to the faith community of the Church. Serious and careful consideration must be given by those who enter into this very special covenant relationship that it is permanent, exclusive and open to life. In our cluster, our preference is that couples preparing for marriage attend the UNITAS program offered each year in the fall. Your priest/deacon will be able to give you the dates of the upcoming UNITAS sessions at your initial interview.

The UNITAS marriage preparation program is designed to deepen a couple's awareness of the sacramental nature of the marriage union and the challenges of living together in Christian marriage. Through a series of presentations given by married couples, participants are able to share in the rich experience of married life and to take part in discussions, activities and exercises. Topics covered include effective communication, conflict management, family of origin, intimacy and sexuality, finances, the sacramental nature of marriage, values, spirituality and commitment. Sessions are conducted by married couples in the parish who use real-life experiences. Sponsor couples help you to become more bonded to our church community.

The UNITAS program lasts for seven weeks. Sessions take place on Sunday evenings. The fee is \$50 per couple, which includes a workbook, information handout materials and dinner. The parish office will notify you of the upcoming UNITAS sessions in our cluster as they get closer so that you can register. If UNITAS is impossible for you to attend, you can discuss other options with the priest or deacon. At your initial interview, you will also be given a marriage readiness inventory called FACET, which you can complete and compare as you wait for your marriage preparation sessions to begin.

## 3. Preparation for the Wedding Ceremony

Planning for your wedding day is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Many preparations are necessary and require your attention. The reception, the band, the photographer, the dress are all important; however, planning the wedding ceremony and your marriage preparation sessions are probably the most important preparations you, as a couple, will do. In our experience, couples who spend a lot of time and effort on their wedding ceremony are the most satisfied with their wedding day and those who spend a lot of effort in their marriage preparation sessions are the most aware of themselves as a couple and of each other as individuals. Statistics show that couples who spend a lot of time and effort on their marriage preparation tend to stay together in their marriage. The church offers the following four insights as foundation stones or basic principles upon which you can design a beautiful, prayerful, and personal wedding ceremony.

### ➤ **"You are the ministers of the Sacrament at your wedding."**

The bride and groom are the ministers of the Sacrament at the wedding ceremony. The maid of honor, the best man, the wedding party, the congregation and the priest witness what the bride and groom do. Therefore, plan a ceremony that makes it evident that you, the bride and groom, are the active participants, not the passive spectators to something the priest is doing for you or to you. There are many options (prayers, readings, etc.) in the wedding ritual that you can choose. Please invest some time in exploring these options and making the best choices for you. Participate in your wedding ceremony rather than just attend.

### ➤ **"A wedding is a symbolic action."**

Your wedding is a public and symbolic action. All the symbols convey meaning: words, the joining of hands, exchanging rings, a kiss. You want this public action, your wedding, to say something to each other, to your

friends, to the Church and to God. You must decide what you want your wedding to express. Why are you getting married? Why are you getting married in the Church? What do you want your marriage to mean? Talk now about the meaning of your marriage. Together you can agree on a sentence or phrase that focuses on what you want your wedding to say, for example: "we want our love to be as firm and lasting as God's love for us" or "we two are now one" or "this is a new creation". No phrase or sentence can totally say what your wedding means. That is why it is symbolic, it can often say more than words.

➤ **"The heart of the ceremony is prayer."**

Your wedding has many components: the rehearsal and rehearsal dinner, the wedding ceremony, the reception, the photo session, the receiving line, the first dance. Each component has a different focus. At the wedding ceremony the focus is that you want everyone to pray. Therefore, you will want to make prayer the focus of the ceremony. Do the things that will help people pray and avoid anything that prevents prayer from taking place.

➤ **"Catholic wedding is a liturgical ceremony"**

A Catholic Wedding is a liturgical ceremony and a sacrament. Those things which make a good liturgy are the same ones which make a good wedding ceremony. Therefore, think of a time when you really enjoyed going to Mass - a time when you really prayed, when you felt close to God. How can you plan your wedding so that it will have the same effect on your guests? Invest your time and energy in your wedding ceremony in order to bring that communion with God that you experience as a couple to your family and friends gathered to pray for you and with you. Before we go to the specific guidelines here are some questions to help you focus on your wedding ceremony:

- Which prayer texts do we want the priest to use?
- Who will be the lectors to proclaim the readings?
- Which religious songs and hymns express the meaning of our wedding?
- How are we going to say our vows?

To help answer these questions we will provide you with a **"Wedding Liturgy Planning Guide"**, a booklet entitled **"Together for Life"** and another **"Wedding Music Guidelines for Couples"**. As you answer these questions, review your answers with these texts. As you do this, you will deepen your understanding of the ceremony in which we celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony and your role in that ceremony. Please also use the following guidelines to help you plan your wedding ceremony:

**a. Reserve the church for your wedding date**

At the time of your initial interview with the priest/deacon, you will discuss a wedding date and time with rehearsal date and time. The reservation of the church for your wedding will be communicated and confirmed by the parish secretary. Weddings can be scheduled any day of the week including Sundays provided that it is scheduled, at the regular Mass times of the parish; however typically, most weddings are held on a Friday evening or Saturday morning or early afternoon with the rehearsal set for the day before. Wedding dates are subject to the priest/deacon and sanctuary/chapel availability. If you schedule your wedding for a regular weekend Mass time, you must use the readings for the day, the assigned liturgical ministers, and be aware of the limited seating for your guests.

**b. Contact Music Minister to select music for your wedding**

About 3 months prior to your wedding date, please contact the parish secretary to explain whether you will be using the parish music minister or another organist/musician to serve at your wedding. If you will be using another musician to play at your wedding, they should schedule a time to familiarize themselves with the equipment (i.e. sound system, microphones, organ, etc.) if needed. Please use the **“Wedding Music Guidelines for Couples”** to familiarize yourself with how to select music for church liturgical celebrations of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. Ongoing communication between you and the parish music minister or your preferred musician will help in the music selection for your wedding liturgy. At least 1 month before your wedding date, the selection of music for your wedding should be completed. Please use the **“Wedding Liturgy Planning Guide”** to help communicate your choices to the parish music minister or your preferred musician.

The fee for the services of our music ministers vary. Please contact them for fee information. Their fee is paid no later than 10 days prior to the wedding date. Other musicians and cantors will charge their own fees, which varies depending on the musician or singer. It is your responsibility to contact them for their fee information.

**c. Meet with priest/deacon to select readings/prayers**

You will receive a copy of **“Together for Life”** from the priest or deacon, which gives the different options for readings, vows, blessings, and prayers at the wedding liturgy. Well in advance of your wedding, the priest or deacon will want to meet with you again to go over the details of your wedding liturgy. If you have not come prepared with music, reading and prayer selections, then these choices will be made as a part of this meeting. Please have an idea of how the processional and recessional will happen in order to make the rehearsal go smoothly. If you have a wedding program prototype created, this is a good time to go over it for any changes that might need to be made before they are printed.

**d. Rehearsal**

Usually the rehearsal is held the day before the wedding day. Members of your wedding party, family, and any other active participants in the wedding ceremony will gather to rehearse the rituals of the wedding liturgy including the processional and recessional. Typically, the music is not played or rehearsed at this time. The actual rehearsal of the wedding liturgy takes very little time (about 30 minutes) assuming that you have met with the priest/deacon before to go over the details of your wedding ceremony and that everyone in your wedding party arrives on time. **Punctuality to the rehearsal is extremely important and is your responsibility to ensure your wedding party arrives on time. Please respect your President’s time as he may have other appointments after your rehearsal. It is also extremely important to bring your Marriage License to the rehearsal.**

**e. Fees**

In order to support the mission and the ministry of the parish, and to defray the expenses of your wedding (heating, lighting, preparation, etc.) we require a church use fee of \$350. (Make this check payable to your parish). In order to reserve your date, a 50% non-refundable deposit on the church use fee must be paid at the time a wedding date is reserved. The balance of the church use fee must be paid no later than one month in advance of your wedding.

In the past it was often the custom to make an offering to the parish priest for his services. Today, priests see witnessing weddings is part of their ministry in the parish for which they receive a salary. Some couples may still choose to give the priest a stipend, but that is entirely left to your discretion. The only exception to this general principle is when the priest or deacon who presides at your wedding is not

a priest or deacon assigned to the parish but someone you have asked to assist from outside the parish where the wedding is taking place. Deacons in this parish serve entirely as volunteers. It is therefore wholly appropriate to make an offering to a priest from outside the parish where the wedding is taking place or to a deacon who has volunteered to assist at your wedding.

See section b above regarding payment of musicians.

#### 4. Wedding Ceremony

Your wedding ceremony may well be one of the most important 60 minutes in your life! You want happy memories of this hour. You want the wedding liturgy, the ceremony in which you exchange vows, to be the high point of your wedding day. In order for that to happen, you will have to plan that hour very carefully. In your planning, keep in mind that the church is sacred space and that everything that happens in the church: use of flowers, photographers, videographers, etc. should be respectful of God's presence and enhance the sacredness of the space. We have found that a few customs and guidelines work well within our parish for wedding ceremonies. Please remember to observe the following customs when using the sacred space of our church for your wedding ceremony:

➤ **Punctuality**

Punctuality to the wedding ceremony is extremely important and is your responsibility to ensure your wedding party arrives on time. Please respect your Presider's time as he may have other appointments and the church may be needed for another function after your wedding.

➤ **Flowers & Pew Bows**

Floral decorations are most appropriate for weddings. These should be in good taste and reflect the liturgical season. During the Ordinary Time of the Church's Liturgical Year, couples are welcome to adorn the altar area with flowers for their wedding. Couples who schedule their wedding during the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent are asked to keep floral arrangements modest and respectful of the season. Couples who choose wedding dates that fall within the first two weeks/weekends after Christmas day or Easter Sunday may add to our special altar flower and potted plant arrangements during that period of time, but the church's Christmas and Easter flower arrangements will not be moved in order to be replaced by wedding flowers. Couples who choose to be married during this period of time, and who wish to purchase altar arrangements should consult the parish secretary to discuss wedding flower arrangements that will blend with our existing floral arrangements during these periods of time.

Please be aware (and ensure that your florist is aware) of all of the following:

- ❖ Decorations and flowers may be delivered anytime after 9:00 am.
- ❖ **Bouquets, corsages and boutonnieres must be labeled** with each wearer's name or position in the wedding party e.g. groom, best man, groomsman, usher, father, grandfather, reader, mother, grandmother, offertory, ring bearer, etc.
- ❖ **Real or artificial loose flowers, flower petals or other objects may not be carried or dropped** inside or outside of the church.
- ❖ **PEW BOWS**, when used, must be tied to the pews with elastic, lace, tulle or wireless ribbon. **Pew clips may not be used.** Pew bows may not be taped to the pews.
- ❖ **Altar-area flower arrangements may be placed on the floor** in the sanctuary in front of the altar and lectern. No flowers may be placed on the altar itself. Sanctuary flowers should be arranged so as not to restrict the movement or visibility of the priest/deacon or the wedding party. Arrangements that are placed in front of the altar may not be taller than the altar (40 inches tall), including the height of any stands/pedestals on which they may be placed.

- ❖ **Couples are encouraged to leave a flower arrangement at the church** after the wedding as a way to allow our whole parish community to join in your wedding celebration. Our parish community is very appreciative of this thoughtful gesture which adds beauty to our weekend Masses.
- ❖ **Florists expecting to pick up their vases and urns** the following week need to make arrangements with the parish secretary.

➤ **Wedding Carpets or Runners**

We discourage the use of runners or wedding carpets down the aisle because they present a tripping hazard.

➤ **Confetti**

The throwing of rice, confetti, flower petals, or birdseed in the church, or on church grounds is absolutely forbidden.

➤ **Cleanup**

There is no maintenance staff person assigned to the parishes on evenings and on Saturday. Therefore, please ask someone within your circle of friends to be responsible for removing bows, empty floral boxes, and programs that may have been left in the pews at the conclusion of the ceremony. Please keep in mind that the church will need to be ready for a Mass shortly after the conclusion of your ceremony.

➤ **Photography and Videography**

Photographs and video provide wonderful mementos of your wedding. We encourage you to take photographs/videos that will help recall this wonderful day for you. Please use only one designated photographer/videographer during the ceremony. Please keep in mind the religious nature of the wedding ceremony and ask that the photographer/videographer use good judgment when moving about the Church so as not to distract the minister, the bridal party, or the guests. The photographer/videographer should refrain from impeding the ceremony in any way and is not allowed in the altar area. To the extent possible, video cameras should be positioned on a tripod and in a stationary position within the church. We recognize that the camera may have to be moved to video the procession. Photographs may be taken in the church after the ceremony, but only if there is sufficient time to do so before the next scheduled function. Please ask your photographer or videographer to consult with the priest or deacon for best positioning before the ceremony.

## 5. Marital Enrichment

Taking time to renew and deepen your relationship with your spouse builds a much happier and longer marriage. We want your marriage to stay as blessed as the day you said, "I do." Therefore, we offer several resources ranging from where to get advice on your marriage or where the two of you can attend "ten great dates" focusing on such aspects as increasing intimacy, enhancing personal growth, mutual fulfillment, and family wellness. Consult the parish bulletin to find out when a marriage enrichment program is offered in our area.

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