

# BUTLER AREA CATHOLIC PARISHES

*St. Andrew*

*St. Fidelis (St. Conrad)*

*St. Michael the Archangel*

*St. Paul*

*St. Peter*



## *Policies and Procedures For The Sacrament of Marriage*

*Revised November 18, 2020*

# Part One: General Information

## Days and Times for Weddings

While weddings may take place on any day of the week except Sundays, most are celebrated on Saturday or Friday evenings. The **Saturday availability** of our churches is as follows:

St. Andrew: 2pm or 4pm

St. Fidelis (Meridian or Lyndora): 1pm or 2:30pm

St. Michael the Archangel: 1pm or 1:30pm

St. Paul: 2pm or 4pm

St. Peter: 2pm or 4pm

## Priest or Deacon as Celebrant

Your wedding may be officiated by a priest or deacon – a priest may officiate at a Mass or nuptial ceremony. A deacon can only officiate at a nuptial ceremony, not a Mass.

# Part Two: A Wedding in the Catholic Church

## Introduction

The Catholic Church believes that marriage is a commitment made for life, a covenant made with God between one man and one woman. To prepare for this sacrament, you must undergo a pre-marriage assessment.

## Pre-Marriage Assessment

At least six months before your wedding, you must meet with the parish pastor or deacon to discuss your intention to marry in the Catholic Church. **Please remember, no date or time for a wedding can be confirmed until this meeting takes place, or at least before you speak/communicate with the priest or deacon by phone or email.**

At that meeting, the priest or deacon will conduct the required assessment to confirm your freedom to enter into marriage within the Catholic Church. His questions will deal with such matters as previous marriages, age, maturity, knowledge about marriage, intentions, etc.

To ensure an accurate assessment, please be prepared to discuss any previous marriages. This includes those that took place before a Justice of the Peace or other civil official. ***Generally, the marriages of non-Catholics before civil officials (including Justices of the Peace) are considered valid by the Catholic Church. Thus, these parties are not free to enter marriage again in the Catholic Church without some disposition of that previous marriage (e.g. by death or through a formal process of annulment).***

During the assessment process, the priest or deacon may ask you to complete a pre-marriage inventory to assist in determining one's readiness for marriage within the Church. The assessment process may require more than one meeting. Once the priest or deacon is certain that nothing made known to him would prevent the marriage from taking place within the Catholic Church, he will confirm the day and time of your wedding. It is only then that formal plans should be made.

## **Special Circumstances**

In the course of the pre-marriage assessment, it may become apparent that a particular couple finds themselves in special circumstances. One of these circumstances is a pre-marital pregnancy.

Formerly, it was assumed that a pregnancy was ample justification for marriage. Today, however, the divorce rate for such couples is so high that a pregnancy clearly indicates the need for special pastoral sensitivity. In these instances, the priest or deacon may want to meet with the parents of the couple or seek the assistance of an independent evaluation. Once again, the goal is to assist the couple in arriving at a mature decision based on all the factors involved.

Several other circumstances may become apparent during the course of the initial interview, such as:

- a lack of readiness for marriage as assessed by the priest or deacon;
- a lack of appreciation for the spiritual and sacramental aspects of marriage;
- non-practice of the faith;
- cohabitation (living together);
- the decision to permanently exclude children in a marriage;
- refusal to take part in a pre-marriage program or refusal to participate in the pre-marriage assessment, evaluation or counseling.

When one or more of these circumstances is encountered, the issues must be resolved satisfactorily before the Initial Assessment Form can be signed by the priest or deacon.

## **Required Documents and Pre-Nuptial Forms**

Since marriage is a step recognized both by the Church and the state, it necessarily involves the gathering of information. This normally involves the completion of a standard set of forms by the priest or deacon who will be the official witness of your wedding.

If you are a Catholic who was baptized or confirmed in a parish other than St. Andrew, St. Fidelis, St. Michael the Archangel, St. Paul or St. Peter, you must provide us with recent baptism and confirmation certificates. The couple is responsible for obtaining these certificates (by phoning or writing the parish where you were baptized). All documents submitted will remain on file in the parish office as a permanent record.

If you were baptized in a faith community other than Catholic, you will need a copy of your baptismal certificate. A certificate of whatever age will suffice.

Often couples of different faith backgrounds decide to marry. There should be time devoted to discussing how each partner will contribute to the spiritual growth of children who might be born in their marriage.

Among the forms to be completed before marriage in the Catholic Church is one signed by the Catholic partner marrying a non-Catholic. This form confirms the intention of the Catholic "... to continue practicing the Catholic faith and to do all in my power to share that faith with our children by having them baptized and raised as Catholics."

In instances where one or both of the parties to be married is under the age of 21, there may be a need to interview a parent or guardian to corroborate statements made regarding maturity and readiness for marriage.

## **Marriage Instructions**

Preparation for Marriage in the Catholic Church involves a program of listening and discussion. The stated policy of the Diocese of Pittsburgh requires that engaged couples participate in a pre-marriage program best suited to their needs. The content of these programs centers on the areas of sacramentality, spirituality, communication, financial responsibility, family life, responsible parenthood, sexuality and continuing formation within marriage. There are a variety of ways in which this may be accomplished. Among these are the following:

### **Pre-Marriage Programs**

Various pre-marriage programs are offered through the Diocese of Pittsburgh and by local parishes. St. Michael the Archangel hosts pre-marriage programs in the fall and spring. For more information, go to: <https://www.diopitt.org/marriage-preparation>

## **Wedding Invitations**

When invitations are printed, please use the name and address of the church as follows:

Saint Andrew Roman Catholic Church, 1660 North Main Street Ext., Butler, PA 16001  
Saint Fidelis of Sigmaringen Roman Catholic Church, 125 Buttercup Road, Butler, PA 16001  
Saint Michael the Archangel Roman Catholic Church, 432 Center Avenue, Butler, PA 16001  
Saint Paul Roman Catholic Church, 128 N. McKean Street, Butler, PA 16001  
Saint Peter Roman Catholic Church, 127 Franklin Street, Butler, PA 16001

## **Marriage Announcements**

Our parishes announce weddings in the parish bulletin.

## **Fees**

Church Fee for Registered Parishioners = A donation to the church is appreciated.

The couple decides what is a reasonable amount that they can afford.

Church Fee for Non-Parishioners = \$1,000

\$500 due when wedding is scheduled and \$500 due at time of wedding (can pay at rehearsal)

*A parishioner is defined as one who attends Mass regularly and actively participates in the life of the church through their time, talent and treasure. This person must be officially registered at the church.*

Organist fee = \$150

Cantor fee = \$75

Altar server(s) fee = \$10 each

Wedding Coordinators = \$75 each (usually two coordinators per wedding)

# Part Three: The Marriage Ceremony

Sacraments are always celebrations of the entire Body of Christ. Therefore, your wedding liturgy has special meaning for the entire parish community and should be celebrated with the joyful dignity that this implies.

*It is a time of prayer, promise, joy and hope.*

This special celebration should be carefully planned with the mutual cooperation of the priest or deacon and the couple. Your wedding will take place within the context of a ceremony that includes: questions regarding intent, the marriage vows, and the blessing and exchange of rings.

Traditionally, the wedding ceremony of two Catholics takes place within the context of the Eucharist (Mass). However, the Eucharist is not something that should be taken lightly or assumed as a “nice background for our wedding vows.”

If the couple to be married is not active in their Catholic faith, serious questions need to be asked. If they do not regularly attend Mass each weekend, then how important do they consider the Mass in their lives? Why would they expect to celebrate their wedding in the context of Mass when they celebrate nothing else in that context?

Therefore, at our parishes, if a couple expects to celebrate their marriage vows in the context of Mass, they should be prepared to demonstrate that the Mass is important to them by their regular attendance at Mass long before their wedding takes place.

If this is not the case, then they will likely celebrate their vows in the context of a wedding ceremony. This includes readings from Sacred Scripture, the wedding ceremony (vows and exchange of rings), prayers, and presenting flowers to the Blessed Virgin Mary, as well as the sign of peace, the Lord’s Prayer and special blessings.

Scripture readings may be chosen by the couple in consultation with the priest or deacon who will witness the marriage. Readers may be chosen from family or friends to read the first two Scriptural passages. Any person who is doing a reading in church should be a good speaker, familiar with Catholic liturgy and feel comfortable in a church building. Remember, this is the proclamation of the Word of God.

## **The Liturgy of the Eucharist (Mass)**

Every wedding in the Catholic Church is celebrated with the Liturgy of the Word and the actual wedding ceremony. Two Catholics who marry must be married within the context of the Eucharist (Mass). If one of those to be married is not a Catholic, the couple may request that the Mass be celebrated at the wedding, but it is an option. It is important for these couples to seriously consider this matter. There are compelling reasons why an interfaith couple may not choose to request the Mass. Among these are:

- so that non-Catholic family and friends may fully follow and participate in the celebration of marriage,
- that the symbols be those of unity and not disunity when non-Catholics are not permitted to receive Communion,
- and that the Eucharist not be celebrated amid a group of people who may lack an understanding of its meaning or lack faith in what is taking place.

## **The Entrance Procession**

In recent years, several options have emerged for this aspect of the wedding. There can be an entrance procession similar to that seen at Sunday Mass whereby the congregation is asked to stand and sing an entrance song while the wedding party and ministers enter, usually in pairs (including the parents and bride and groom). Some brides are escorted down the aisle by their fathers (and/or their mothers). At some weddings, the attendants are escorted down the entire aisle, at others they walk alone and are met by the groomsmen at the front of the church. In any case, the couple's preference regarding the entrance should be discussed with the priest or deacon presiding at the wedding.

## **A Symbolic Offering for the Poor**

Another wedding custom is for the bride and groom to present symbolic gifts for the poor. This custom usually takes the form of a basket of canned goods or non-perishable items being carried with the bread and wine at the offertory procession (at Mass) or other appropriate time within a ceremony. This custom is encouraged as a sign that the bride and groom recognize their wedding is taking place within a wider community about whose needs they and this parish are rightly concerned. You may consult the parish priest regarding the availability of baskets for this purpose.

## **Offertory Procession**

If the Mass is celebrated at your wedding, you may choose to ask family members or friends to bring the bread and the wine to the altar. This may include as few as two and as many as four people.

## **Exchange of Peace**

Before the Lord's Prayer (at the Liturgy of the Word or at Mass), a sign of peace is exchanged. At that time, some couples choose to present flowers to their parents (and grandparents).

## **Flowers to the Blessed Virgin Mary**

An ancient Catholic wedding custom is the presentation of flowers at a statue of the Virgin Mary shortly before the conclusion of the ceremony. The bride may perform this gesture accompanied by her new husband, her maid (matron) of honor, her mother or the mothers of the bride and the groom.

## **Guest Celebrants**

Some couples ask a priest or deacon (relative or friend) other than ones assigned to our parishes to be the official witness at their wedding. When initial contact is made with the parish, please indicate your intention to do so. That priest will then be contacted by a priest from the Butler Area Catholic Parishes. The guest priest or deacon, then, is expected to handle all the details of the wedding, including completing the Initial Assessment Form, obtaining the required documents, completing the other required forms, ensuring the couple is properly instructed, conducting the rehearsal and the wedding and submitting the papers to the parish following the wedding.

## **Photography**

You are welcome to have a photographer take pictures and/or make a videotape of the wedding provided there are no distractions during the liturgy. Taking pictures in the sacristy (before the ceremony) or in the altar area during the ceremony is not permitted. The operative principle is that the church is a house of prayer and not a photography studio. Photographers should be advised not to step onto the altar during the ceremony.

## **Music at the Wedding Ceremony**

Music is an important part of the celebration of marriage. It should not, however, overshadow the essential element of the commitment of the bride and groom to each other. Please contact the parish office for the name of the music director, who will be able to provide the music for your wedding. If you choose to obtain someone else, please ensure that they contact the parish so we can be assured that the musician(s) is capable of providing the appropriate music for a Catholic wedding and is familiar with the ceremony and the parish's musical instruments. Appropriate, liturgical hymns are to be used.

## **Flowers**

Flowers have traditionally been a part of the wedding ceremony. They are, however, optional. If you choose to have flowers purchased for use at your wedding, arrangements should be made with the florist of your choice. Please inform the florist that no arrangements may be placed on the altar of sacrifice. Flower stands should be obtained through the florist. It is customary to leave flowers in the church following the wedding as a gift to the people of the parish.

## **Crash**

Our parishes do **not** permit the use of a "crash" -- a long white strip of cloth or plastic that is unrolled at weddings immediately before the wedding party proceeds down the aisle. The crash can be a tripping hazard, especially for elderly guests.

## **Unity Candle / Unity Sand**

The use of a "unity candle" (a set of three candles) or "unity sand" has become popular within the wedding liturgy. The strong preference at the Butler Area Catholic Parishes is **not** to permit a unity candle or sand because it only adds anxiety and not any value to the ceremony itself. Couples may wish to light a unity candle or pour together unity sand at their rehearsal dinner or at the reception.

## **Post-Wedding Customs**

Please ask those attending your wedding **not** to throw rice, confetti, birdseed, rose petals or anything else in the church or anywhere on church property. In addition to being a safety hazard, it is a superstition ill befitting the celebration of Christian marriage. The parish does not have sufficient maintenance personnel for extra cleaning on weekends to get the church ready for the weekend Masses. The use of bubbles is acceptable outside the church.

## **Receiving Lines**

Receiving lines are better placed at the location of the reception than at the back of church.

## **Additional Aspects**

If you would like to include any other features in your wedding, they must be discussed with the priest or deacon beforehand.

## **Altar Servers**

Altar servers will be provided by the church unless the couple has a specific choice.

## **Rehearsal**

Usually a rehearsal is conducted the evening before the wedding. The time is set after consultation with the priest or deacon who is to be the official witness for the ceremony. It is the couple's responsibility to ensure that the wedding party is on time for the rehearsal. The marriage license and offerings for the parish should be brought to the rehearsal and given to the priest or deacon. Altar servers should attend, if possible.

## **Confessions**

The bride, groom and wedding party may wish to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) before the wedding. Please arrange for a time to do so well before the rehearsal because there is usually little time to celebrate this sacrament appropriately after the rehearsal.

## **Reception of the Eucharist**

It is the directive of the Catholic Church that only Catholics may approach the table of the Lord to receive Holy Communion. If Mass is being celebrated as part of your wedding ceremony, please make this directive known to non-Catholics who may be attending.

## **Wedding Party**

The couple needs to choose one maid/matron of honor and one best man. Ushers for the wedding (usually the groomsmen) should arrive at the church no later than 30-45 minutes before the scheduled time for the wedding. They should be prepared to seat or otherwise assist guests. The groom and best man should go directly to the sacristy. Please do not bring any food or beverages into the church. ***No consumption of alcoholic beverages by any member of the wedding party on parish property will be tolerated either at the rehearsal or wedding.*** Any violation of this policy or any public display of intoxication may result in the priest or deacon not being able to conduct the ceremony. No pets are allowed in the wedding ceremony.

## **Seating of Guests**

Because the church is a house of prayer, talking and conduct in the church should be in keeping with the sacred character of the surroundings. Ushers should promptly escort guests to their seats. The mother of the groom and then the mother of the bride should be seated a few minutes before the wedding is scheduled to begin. This should not be delayed to seat those who arrive late (they may seat themselves after the entrance of the wedding party). In fairness to others who use the church after you, weddings must begin at the scheduled time.



## **Wedding Coordinator**

The Butler Area Catholic Parishes will provide a Wedding Coordinator at the church for the rehearsal and on the day of the wedding. The coordinator will contact you two weeks before the wedding. There is no need for your own wedding coordinator to be at the church.

## **Marriage License**

A Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Marriage License is required for any marriage taking place at a Butler Area Catholic Parish. This license may be obtained from any county license bureau within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania within 60 days prior to the wedding.

# **Part Four: Parish Life Before & After the Wedding**

Catholics relate to Christ's universal Church as members of a parish. Such membership is important for many reasons. If you are not currently a member of a parish, please formally register in one as soon as possible. Following the wedding, it is also important to formally register in the Catholic parish nearest to your new home.

The Butler Area Catholic Parishes strive to be of support to their newly married parishioners in various ways. You are valuable to the life of our parishes. Please become a part of all that occurs here. If the parish priest or staff can be of assistance to you in any way after your wedding, please do not hesitate to contact us.

***Congratulations!***