

Matrimony in the Catholic Church

A PRIMER FOR COUPLES PREPARING FOR THEIR WEDDING DAY

PREPARATION & WEDDING GUIDELINES

For all Weddings celebrated by Clergy from the Parish Church of St. Edward the Confessor

HEAVENLY FATHER, in your great love, you established marriage as blessing and grace for your people: bless and guide this Couple who are preparing to celebrate their marriage. Give them patience during times of stress. Give them reassurance in times of doubt and give them increased peace and joy as their wedding day draws near. Strengthen their love for one another, for their families, and for You. May the prayerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Families and wedding guest at Cana, be theirs all the days of their lives, together with the intercession of St. Edward the Confessor, our patron. Through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

I. WHY PREPARATION & WEDDING GUIDELINES?

THE MAIN concern of the Church is that you understand the depth and significance of the commitment you intend to make. This commitment is based on your deep love for each other, which is a love rooted in God Himself. The question the Church asks is: “Are you ready to make this kind of God-centered commitment?” The following process exists in order to allow you the time and assistance necessary to answer that question.

II. BASIC REQUIREMENTS

WHILE many engaged couples focus on preparing for the wedding day, the Catholic Church expects them to spend their engagement preparing for a strong, lifelong marriage — and the responsibilities and challenges that come with it. To facilitate this, St. Edward Parish has these basic requirements (note that there may be additional requirements to these):

1. Couples must allow for a minimum of six months for the marriage preparation process (the period begins from the first appointment with one of the clergy at St. Edward to the wedding date).
2. Marriage must take place in the church at St. Edward Catholic Church. Attire must be suitable for church.
3. The Couple must meet with clergy from St. Edward on at least five occasions for pre-marital counseling:
 - a. First meeting (2 hours);
 - b. Three “topical” meetings to discuss various aspects of Matrimony in the Catholic Church, including the Theology of the Body (about 1 hour each); and
 - c. Third meeting (1 hour) to plan wedding Mass and other details (this is in addition to the rehearsal for the Wedding itself).
4. Couple must attend Natural Family Planning classes (there are both in-person classes and online classes available).
5. Couple must attend *Three to Get Married Retreat* (held twice per year; may not be substituted by a different retreat).
6. Rehearsal time for night before wedding must be set with the celebrant of the marriage before it is scheduled (in case the clergyman has a conflict).
7. Newly-issued (within six months of the wedding date) Baptismal certificates “with notations” for each person must be submitted from the parish of origin to the parish office of St. Edward Church (to request your Baptismal certificate, please call or email the parish where you were baptized and ask for a newly-issued Baptismal certificate with notations; they are accustomed to getting this request). If the Baptismal Certificate does not include a notation listing the Sacrament of Confirmation, it will be necessary to submit a Certificate of Confirmation. If a Catholic Christian has not been confirmed, this will need to be discussed with the Clergyman preparing the Couple. All Certificates must be submitted to:

St. Edward Church Marriage Preparation
188 Thompson Lane
Nashville, Tennessee 37211

8. If one of the parties of the Couple is a non-Catholic Baptized Christian, they must submit a Baptismal certificate or letter from the church or ecclesial community of their Baptism, stating when and where the Baptism occurred, and, if it is not a liturgical church, whether the ceremony was conducted “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (or “Holy Ghost”). The non-Catholic party will also need to submit a sworn Affidavit, signed by a parent or close relative stating that the non-Catholic has never been married before.

III. WHO MAY BE MARRIED AT ST. EDWARD CHURCH?

REGISTERED parishioners may be married here. Parishioners from other parishes must have special permission from the Pastor of St. Edward Church and from the Pastor of their own parish in order for the marriage to take place at St. Edward.

IV. WHAT IF ONE OR BOTH PARTIES HAVE A PRIOR MARRIAGE?

IF EITHER party has prior marriage, the Clergy will inform the couple what additional information and documentation is required. If one of the members of the couple has Prior Bond, the Couple is advised to contact their Pastor at least one year in advance. IMPORTANT: the Diocese of Nashville does not permit a wedding date to be set if one of the parties to the marriage is seeking a Declaration of Nullity from the Diocesan Tribunal.

V. WHAT IF WE HAVE ALREADY RECEIVED MARRIAGE PREPARATION OR PRE-MARITAL COUNSELING?

IN ORDER to be Married in the Catholic Church, the Couple must receive Marriage Preparation from an approved program. Ordinarily, this means the Couple must receive Marriage Preparation, as already outlined, from one of the Clergy at St. Edward Church. If the Couple has already received some form of Marriage Preparation, they must provide documentation that will satisfy the Pastor of St. Edward Church that the Couple has received their preparation from an approved program, and that they are truly prepared for Marriage as the Catholic Church understands it. No marriage will be celebrated unless, prior to one week before the wedding, a Certificate of Completion of a pre-approved marriage preparation program is submitted to the Pastor of St. Edward Church.

VI. WHAT ABOUT SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES?

IN LIGHT of special circumstances, such as a pregnancy or if one of the parties is under eighteen years of age, or for other reasons in the Church’s *Code of Canon Law* and the Diocese’s *Norms*, the Couple may be required to participate in further evaluation to help determine their readiness for Matrimony as it is understood by the Catholic Church.

VII. IS THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE & RECONCILIATION A PART OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION?

FOR CATHOLICS, the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation — Confession — is part of the Preparation for receiving Matrimony in the Catholic Church. The Sacrament will be offered at the Wedding Rehearsal, and Catholics are strongly encouraged and recommended to participate.

VIII. HOW CAN WE COMPLY WITH THE REQUIREMENT TO ATTEND A NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING CLASS?

AS ALREADY noted, St. Edward Church requires couples to participate in a Natural Family Planning class with one of the instructors approved by the Diocese of Nashville. There are three currently available:

- Diana Kendrick, dkendrick@onlifehealth.com
- Heather Honeycutt, hehoneycutt@gmail.com or 615-308-7722
- Kim Derrick, kimjohnderrick@comcast.net

IX. WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR USE OF ST. EDWARD CHURCH FOR A WEDDING?

THE MOST BASIC criteria is that one of the parties of the Couple must be either (a) a Catholic in good-standing¹ who is a registered parishioner²; or (b) a Catholic in good-standing who is both approved by the Pastor of St. Edward Church and by the Pastor of his or her own parish.

1. *Weddings between Catholics & Non-Catholics.* If one of the parties is not a Catholic, is customary not to celebrate the Holy Mass, but rather a Liturgy of the Word alone. This is principally because the Catholic Church requires that those receiving Holy Communion be Catholic Christians in the state of grace. In other words, the Catholic Church does not permit inter-communion. In order to avoid embarrassment or awkwardness, a Liturgy of the Word with Rite of Matrimony is normally celebrated for a marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic. Please note: it is forbidden to celebrate a Wedding Mass if one of the parties is not a Baptized Christian; instead, the Liturgy of the Word will be celebrated.

¹ For the purposes of these Guidelines, a “Catholic in good standing” is a fully initiated Catholic Christian who observes the Precepts of the Church (as defined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ¶¶ 2041-43).

² For the purpose of these Guidelines, a “registered parishioner” is a Catholic Christian in good standing who has registered online or in person with the parish offices at St. Edward.

2. *Setting the date and time for the wedding.*

- a. *Restrictions on prayers & readings due to feast- and fast-days.* There are certain days in the Church's Calendar when the prayers and readings for the Wedding Mass may not be used; in that case, the prayers and readings for the Mass of the day would be used, with the Rite of Matrimony inserted into the Mass at the proper place. Alternatively, it may be permitted to celebrate the Liturgy of the Word with Rite of Matrimony instead of a Mass. **IMPORTANT:** no wedding may be scheduled on (a) a Holyday of Obligation or its vigil; (b) All Souls Day; or (c) during Advent or Lent.
- b. *Times available for weddings.* At St. Edward Church, weddings may be scheduled on Saturdays at 11:00 a.m., 2:00 p.m., and 7:30 p.m. They may be scheduled on weekday evenings at 7:30 p.m. Normally, weddings are not scheduled for Sundays, but the Pastor may authorize an exception for a serious reason.

3. *Wedding rehearsal.* Rehearsals are scheduled the evening before the wedding at 6:30 p.m. sharp. The rehearsal will last about 45-minutes and will begin promptly at the scheduled time. If any member of the wedding party is not on-time, the rehearsal will begin without him or her. Important: only members of the wedding party should attend the rehearsal; other guests of the rehearsal dinner should go directly to that location. No one in the wedding party should consume alcoholic beverages prior to or during the rehearsal. Confessions will be heard at the end of the rehearsal.

4. *Fees.*

- a. *For registered parishioners.* If the Bride, the Groom, or one of their parents is a registered parishioner in good standing of St. Edward Church, there is no fee for use of the Church; there is only a \$250 refundable deposit, payable at the time the wedding date is set.
- b. *If not parishioners.* If neither the Bride, the Groom, nor their parents are registered parishioners, including if they attend St. Edward but are not registered and in good standing, then a non-refundable fee of \$1,000 is payable when the date of the wedding is scheduled. A refundable deposit of \$250 will also be due then. One must be a registered parishioner in good standing prior to scheduling the wedding in order for this fee to be waived.

5. *Dress & attire.*

- a. *Picking out dresses, etc.* Brides are to bear in mind the necessity of Christian modesty in dress appropriate for both a sacred occasion and a place of worship. Keep in mind when selecting a wedding gown and bridesmaids' dresses that St. Edward Church will require the use of a shawl or wrap to cover exposed cleavage or bare shoulders of members of the Wedding Party.
- b. *At the rehearsal and wedding.* Proper attire must be worn by all at the wedding rehearsal and wedding day by all in the Wedding Party. This includes: no shorts, halter tops, tank tops, or mid-drifts, baseball caps, hats (for men), torn jeans, sunglasses, flip-flops, or other attire inappropriate in the judgment of the Clergy for wear inside a Church.
- c. *Dressing facilities.* St. Edward Church has no dressing room facilities. All members of the Wedding Party are to arrive fully dressed no more than sixty (60) minutes prior to the wedding. Arriving in robes, petticoats, or other forms of undress on the grounds of or inside St. Edward Church is strictly forbidden and is considered indecent exposure in a church.

6. *Liturgical norms.*

- a. *Generally.* The liturgical norms of the Roman Catholic Church must be followed precisely as set down in the *Roman Missal* and the *Order for Celebrating Matrimony*. All readings must be selected from the *Lectionary for Mass* (which uses the New American Bible translation). A list of approved readings may be found at www.foryourmarriage.org.
- b. *Celebrant.* The celebrant of the wedding must be a Catholic deacon, priest, or bishop in good standing. If he is not Clergy from St. Edward Church, he must receive Delegation from the Pastor of St. Edward. This permission must be sought in writing at least four (4) months prior to the wedding date, and must include: (i) *Celebret* (for bishop or priest) and (ii) Letter or Certificate of Suitability for Ministry from the Diocese or Religious Institute in which he is incardinated (for a deacon, only the Suitability Letter is required).
- c. *Altar servers.* Altar servers are provided for weddings at St. Edward Church. Whether the celebrant is Clergy from St. Edward or from another Catholic Church, any arrangements for altar servers must be approved by and coordinated with St. Edward Church staff to avoid duplication. Family members may only serve as altar servers if they have been trained to serve at St. Edward Church prior to the wedding rehearsal and approved by the Clergy of St. Edward Church.
- d. *Lectors.* Lectors ought to be Roman Catholic Christians in good standing who have served as lectors at a Catholic Mass prior to the wedding rehearsal and who understand their obligation to read from approved Scriptures, as given in the *Lectionary for Mass*. Lectors must attend the wedding rehearsal to practice their part in the ceremony. Documentary evidence may be required of their standing as Catholics and experienced lectors. If, for an extraordinary reason, the Clergy approves a non-Catholic, Baptized Christian to serve as a Lector at the wedding, this person must schedule an appointment with clergy from St. Edward Church prior to the day of the wedding rehearsal in order to be trained to act as a Lector in the liturgy of the Catholic Church.
- e. *Ushers.* Ushers should attend the Wedding Rehearsal and be given specific instructions as to what is expected of them.

7. **Conduct and behavior.** The Bride and Groom will be required (as noted above) to place a refundable deposit of \$250 and sign both the Preparation & Wedding Guidelines Acknowledgement and the Code of Behavior and Conduct Acknowledgement on behalf of themselves and their guests, including the Wedding Party.
8. **Decorations.** Couples will be required to sign the Flowers & Decorations Guidelines and submit a copy to any and all florists they engage.
9. **Music.** Couples who wish to have music at their wedding must contact Nick Rankin (nrankin@stedward.org), director of sacred music at St. Edward, to arrange music. Couples must sign the Music Guidelines and submit them to any musicians Mr. Rankin approves.
10. **Photography & Videography.**
 - a. *Photography.* Pictures are a pleasant way to remember experiences, but we do not want the photographer to destroy the experience. Couples are required to sign the Photography Guidelines and submit a copy to the photographer they engage.
 - b. *Videography.* Video photography of your wedding is strongly discouraged. If, for a serious reason, videography is nonetheless desired, the Couple must sign the Videography Guidelines and submit a copy to the videographer they engage.
11. **Other important guidelines**
 - a. *Introduction of professionals to clergy.* All florists, photographers, and videographers must introduce themselves to the Clergy or other representative of St. Edward Church upon their arrival. They should bring with them the guidelines submitted to them by the Couple when they come to St. Edward Church to render their services.
 - b. *Furniture & shrines.* Sanctuary furniture, other furniture, and devotional shrines are not to be moved or disturbed; the refundable deposit may be forfeit if this is violated.
 - c. *Animals and novelties.* No animals or wildlife are permitted inside or on the grounds of St. Edward Church, including: horse-drawn carriages, caged doves, family pets, or other living creatures). In addition, no novelties — such as bubbles, rice, flowers, bird-seed, petals, or other things to throw are permitted inside or on the grounds of St. Edward Church. No fireworks or sparklers are permitted.
 - d. *Unity Candles, Sand, and other secular customs.* The Bishops of the United States of America have taught that a distinction must be made “between time-honored wedding customs derived from a host of cultural and ethnic traditions, and those of a more fleeting or even commercial nature from the secular wedding industry, such as the use in recent years of ‘Unity Candles’ and even ‘Unity Sand.’”³ Therefore, unless an extraordinary, serious reason suggests otherwise in the judgment of the Pastor of St. Edward Church, no additional ceremonies or customs will be admitted to the Wedding Mass or Liturgy.
 - e. *Security.* Neither St. Edward Church nor the Clergy or staff of the Church, are responsible for the security of persons, articles, or vehicles. The Couple and their guests assume all risk. Because of the Church’s location, care should be taken for vehicles, personal articles, and gifts.

AGREEMENT TO AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GUIDELINES

Whereas, in consideration of the Use of the Church and grounds of St. Edward Church, and other valuable consideration hereby acknowledged, the undersigned man and woman (the “COUPLE”) agree with the undersigned representative of St. Edward Church that:

1. they have read and understood the foregoing Preparation & Wedding Guidelines;
2. they agree to adhere and abide by them; and
3. they warrant and guarantee that they will ensure any and all guests of theirs, including professional service proviers, relatives, friends, and their guests, will also adhere and abide by them.

In witness whereof, the undersigned COUPLE and representative of St. Edward Church have hereunto set their hand on this the _____ day of _____, in the year of our Lord, 20____, at Nashville, in Davidson County, Tennessee.

Groom Signature: _____ Groom Name: _____

Bride Signature: _____ Bride Name: _____

For St. Edward Church: _____

³ Cmte. on Divine Worship, U.S. Conf. of Catholic Bishops. *Newsletter*. vol. LII. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Conf. of Catholic Bishops, August 2016. p. 28, no. 10.