

Frequently asked Questions about having your Wedding at SS. John and Bernard Parish Benton Harbor, Michigan

Congratulations on your upcoming marriage! God instituted marriage when he created us male and female (Genesis 1:27, and 2:24) but, for the baptized, Christ the Lord has raised it to an even higher level, the level of a Sacrament! Sacraments are ways of making God's presence known this side of Heaven. Over the centuries, the Church has developed means of preparing for and celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage that uphold its great dignity and honor. We hope these FAQ will help you prepare for your marriage while keeping with the great respect the Church has for men and women and the covenant of Marriage.

Getting Started

Can we get married in the Catholic Church?

If one of you is Catholic, and both of you are free to marry, you can be married in the Catholic Church. If one or both of you were married and divorced before, even in a civil marriage and even if not Catholic, Jesus' high regard for marriage itself (Matthew 19:4-6) means that an annulment must take place before you can be validly married in the Catholic Church. Contact the parish to begin this procedure if necessary.

Can we get married at SS. John and Bernard Catholic Church?

The Church has a great respect for the community and family aspects of marriage. That is why it presumes that weddings will take place in the parish church of either the bride or the groom. Exceptions can be made, for instance, if your parents are long-standing parishioners, or if one of you is a graduate of our parish school, Lake Michigan Catholic. In such cases, however, you will still need to obtain your own pastor's permission to be married outside of the parish where you live whether or not you are registered there. While we do like a connection to the Parish, we understand certain circumstances might exist where a wedding in your own parish would not be feasible. We also understand couples wanting to have the Sacrament of Marriage in the Church. In such cases, we would get an approval from our parish priest.

How and when should a wedding be scheduled at SS. John and Bernard?

The bride or groom needs to contact the parish office at least 6 months before your proposed wedding date. Since your choice of date may not be available, you will need to contact us before you reserve any other elements of your wedding.

On what days and at what times can we schedule our wedding?

Typically, weddings are on Saturday, but weekdays are possible. Weddings are not celebrated on Sunday. Diocesan policy is that no wedding can be celebrated later than 2:00 pm on Saturday. There are some dates that are either discouraged or prohibited by the liturgical calendar: the Triduum, Lent and Advent unless permission is granted from the Bishop. The priest working with you will be able to discuss any issues regarding conflicts with the liturgical calendar.

Preparing for your Marriage

What does marriage preparation include?

Marriage requires a commitment from both of you and the Church tries to make sure you know the many aspects of that commitment well before it is made. Aside from helping us complete the necessary paperwork, we use the FOCCUS survey which stands for “Facilitating Open Couple Communication Understanding and Study” which you complete online and discuss with the priest. There is also the *Joy Filled Marriage* program offered by the Diocese of Kalamazoo that is required in the preparation process.

Can we prepare for marriage at another Catholic parish?

If you have an established connection with SS. John and Bernard Parish, but live in a different area, we recommend that your preparation be completed at your parish so that you are able to strengthen the connection you have with your home parish. Contact us for details.

Can a priest or deacon from another parish preside at our wedding?

Yes, but please let us know as soon as possible as there are additional forms to be processed. We will need a letter of good standing from their diocese.

What paperwork is required?

Both the Church and the State of Michigan require paperwork. Requirements for your preparation will be discussed at your meetings with the priest.

What fees are there for a wedding at SS. John and Bernard Parish?

Although there are no fees for a sacrament, there are some costs. The fee for the music director and cantor will be covered in your meeting with the music director. There are fees and stipends depending on your connection with SS. John and Bernard Parish and any other liturgical ministers you may request. For parishioners the fee is \$100; for non-parishioners the fee is \$500.

The Liturgy

How do we plan the music for our wedding?

The music director will contact you to set up a meeting 6-8 weeks before your ceremony. Together, you will be able to discuss your music selections for your wedding.

Who can take part in the liturgy?

A liturgy inside the Mass has the opportunity for the following liturgical ministers: 3 Readers, and 3 gift bearers. Plan to speak with the celebrant about who may participate during the Mass.

How can we help our guests follow the Catholic ceremony?

We will provide a participation aide for the ceremony. This is an easy way to let your guests know the hymns that will be sung, the order of the Mass and the common responses that will be used. If you would like to include an additional sheet or program to introduce your wedding party, please email it to the parish office no less than two weeks in advance.

Additional Considerations

Do we need a wedding planner?

It is not necessary to have a wedding planner; your priest will be able to help you with everything involved with the Rite of Marriage.

Can we decorate the church ahead of time?

We will only be able to guarantee you access to the church 1 hour before the liturgy. However, if you feel you need more time, please call the parish office 2-3 days before the wedding date to see if the church may be available.

Do we need flowers for the church?

You do not need to have flowers at the Church. However, if you want to have flowers at St. John Church, you may plan for two small arrangements for the back altar that are no more than 30" tall. At St. Bernard, an arrangement could be placed in front of the ambo, about 12" wide by no more than 36" tall.

How much time can we have access to the church before and after the ceremony?

We can only guarantee 1 hour before and 45 minutes after the ceremony. The bride and her attendants will be able to wait in the basement at St. John or the classroom at St. Bernard. The groom and his attendants will be able to wait in the altar servers sacristy. There could be other

events for which we would need to prepare the church, such as Confession or Mass, so please be mindful of your time in the church.

Will we be able to change at the church before the wedding?

The bride and her attendants will be able to change in the basement at St. John or the classroom at St. Bernard. At St. Bernard we have a second classroom for the groom and his attendants. St. John Church does not have additional rooms for the groom and his attendants to change.

Do we need a photographers or videographer?

A photographer or videographer is not needed, but we understand that you want to capture every moment of your wedding. Because of this, please remember that it is a Sacrament held in a church. We ask that your photographer and videographer are dressed appropriately for the liturgy. There will be some areas in the church that they will not have access to during the ceremony so that they do not interrupt the liturgy. Please have your photographer check with us prior to the ceremony if he or she is unsure of what to do at a Catholic ceremony.

There are so many things that seem ‘traditional’ for a wedding, do we need them?

Remembering that you will be celebrating the Rite of Marriage, please understand that there are some ‘wedding traditions’ that are no longer widely used in the Catholic Church. Some of the more common ones are (but are not limited to) aisle runners, flower girls tossing petals, and guests tossing rice (or other items) at the couple as they leave the church. Please talk to the priest about these traditions at your initial meeting.