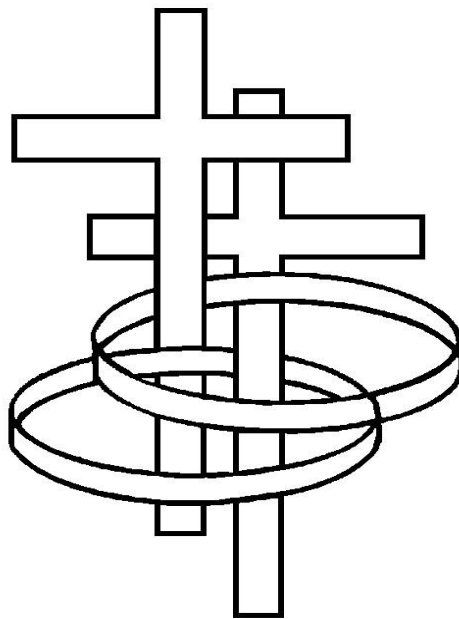


Wedding Guidelines



ST. CHRISTOPHER PARISH

20141 Detroit Road • Rocky River, OH 44116

Introduction

Congratulations on your engagement! Saint Christopher Church is honored to help you prepare for your wedding day, and the community welcomes you as you begin your new life together.

Your marriage and the celebration of your wedding are important events for you, your family and your parish. Your marriage, as it is lived out, is an expression of your love and commitment to one another. Your marriage is sacramentalized in the vows of your wedding ceremony. These vows express your faith and the reality that your marriage is a sign of God's love for all people. It is important that time be taken in preparing for your marriage. The following guidelines are meant to provide you with in depth preparation for this life commitment you will be making soon.

As you prepare for your wedding day, we pray that you will reflect well on the life you are beginning together and how your faith strengthens your marriage. God bless you on your journey!

Wedding Guidelines

Marriage as a Sacrament

A sacrament is an encounter with Jesus Christ. Every sacrament brings us into contact with the saving activity of the Lord. In every sacrament, we encounter the dying and rising of Jesus.

The ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage are the bride and groom. When two baptized persons exchange wedding vows, they share the life of Christ which they have received in baptism. The bride and groom extend the Lord's presence to each other and become a sign of the Lord's presence to others.

The visible sign of the Sacrament of Marriage is the exchange of the wedding vows. In order to have a true exchange of promises, both the bride and groom must be responsible adults and be capable of forming a community of life and love. The couple must honestly, and without reservation, declare to each other their willingness to assume the duties of marriage and parenthood according to the teachings of Christ and the Church.

Faith Commitment

Since Christ is the center of Christian marriage, the bride and groom should seriously review their relationship with the Lord. They should show signs of a positive commitment to Christ and should (if Catholic) regularly participate in the parish celebration of Sunday Eucharist.

Date and Time

The Diocese of Cleveland has established a policy that an engaged couple must contact the parish at least six months prior to the proposed date of the wedding. No date can be confirmed until the couple has first met with the parish priest or deacon. In the case of a previous marriage, no date may be given until the annulment process is completed and a decree of nullity has been granted.

The purpose of this six-month policy is to:

- Provide the priest or deacon time to assess with a couple their spiritual, personal and canonical readiness to marry.
- Allow for adequate marriage instruction and preparation.
- Allow the couple time to pray deeply and to reflect seriously upon their decision to enter into Christian marriage.

Saturday weddings are scheduled at 12:00 NOON or 2:00 PM. The time for a Friday evening wedding is flexible depending on the parish liturgical schedule. Weddings can be scheduled at any time of the year. You and/or your parents must be registered members of the parish.

Required Documents

It is the responsibility of the couple to obtain the following documentation:

- **Sacramental Records:** Catholic parties are to obtain a baptismal certificate. These certificates may be obtained from the church in which baptism was celebrated. The documents are to be dated within the last six months. Non-Catholic parties are to obtain a baptismal certificate from their Christian denomination and/or church.
- **Previous Marriages:** If a person has been married before it is necessary to provide the following:
 - Certificate of Previous Marriage
 - Death Certificate of Former spouse (if widow or widower)
 - Declaration of Nullity (record of annulment)
- **Civil Marriage License:** It is necessary for the couple to obtain a civil license. This license is to be obtained within sixty (60) days of the celebration of the wedding. In Cuyahoga County, a license may be applied for at:

Probate Court

Marriage License Department
One Lakeside Avenue, N.E.
Cleveland, Ohio 44114
website: probate.cuyahogacounty.us

Preparation Process for Marriage

Marriage preparation must be taken very seriously by a couple who wish to marry. The Church's preparation for marriage is not just for a single day (the wedding day) but for a lifetime of love and commitment. It is hoped that couples recognize the importance of their preparation for Christian marriage. A number of meetings are required for the preparation process:

- **Introduction:** During the introduction, a couple will be interviewed (by phone or in person), setting a preliminary wedding date and filling out of necessary paperwork for marriage in the church. The priest establishes the couple's freedom to marry and explains to them the preparation process and the theology of marriage.
- **Evaluative Tool:** *Prepare and Enrich* or a similar evaluative tool will be used to assess a couple's readiness for marriage and to help encourage communication on topics related to marriage. Ordinarily this tool will be used by the priest in the preparation process.
- **Meeting(s) with Priest:** The couple will ordinarily meet with the parish priest for one or more sessions to review the results of the evaluative tool, give instruction on the basic theology of the sacrament of marriage and answer any questions a couple might have regarding their marriage in the church.
- **Pre-Marital Program:** Each couple is required to participate in **one** of the following pre-marital instruction programs:
 - Pre-Cana Day. These one-day sessions are held at many parishes in the diocese, including St. Christopher. You may attend at any parish. Each parish provides the details of its program upon request. The Jesuit Retreat Center in Parma also offers Pre-Cana Days on a regular basis.
 - Engaged Encounter Weekend. These weekends are held in the Diocese or surrounding dioceses on a regular basis.
 - Cana II. Cana II is a marriage preparation program which targets relationships in which one or both parties have been previously married. Specific areas of concern such as parenting issues, annulments, etc. are included.
- **Liturgy Planning:** Each couple will be asked to meet with the parish priest to prepare the wedding liturgy. Resources for planning the wedding liturgy are included

in this booklet. A meeting with the Parish Music Director is also part of the liturgy planning process.

- **Rehearsal:** A rehearsal is usually scheduled for the evening before the wedding. The exact time must be arranged in advance with the parish priest. Couples must bring the Marriage License and all Fees (Church and Musicians) to the wedding rehearsal.

Arrival at Church

The wedding party should plan to arrive at the Church no later than 30 minutes prior to the time of the ceremony. There is a room off the vestibule of the church where the bride and her attendants may wait. The groom and best man may meet in the sacristy or Gathering Area. The groomsmen assist by seating the wedding guests. The bride and groom are also encouraged to greet their guests as they arrive at the church.

Fees

The suggested offering for a wedding is **\$900**. This includes the use of the church, servers, organist, cantor and the priest. A deposit of **\$100** is requested at the time of booking the wedding. The balance of **\$800** should be brought to the rehearsal.

Environment

Aisle Runner

Primarily for safety reasons, aisle runners are not permitted at St. Christopher.

Flowers

Flowers may be placed in the sanctuary but should never obstruct or detract from the primary symbols of altar, ambo, tabernacle and presidential chair. Flower stands are available for your use. Flowers are never to be placed on the altar itself and sanctuary furniture and seasonal decorations are not to be rearranged. The dropping of flower petals by flower girls as they process down the aisle is not permitted.

Bows

Bows may be placed on the ends of the pews with clips or strings but should never be taped to the pew. They should be removed after the ceremony. Candles at the ends of the pew are not permitted.

The Throwing of Rice

The use of rice, birdseed, or confetti inside or outside the church is not permitted at St. Christopher. The throwing of these items can create a hazardous situation for walkers. Furthermore, the origin of this tradition is found in a pagan ritual for fertility and has never been considered to be a part of our liturgical tradition.

The Wedding Liturgy

The wedding liturgy should be understood as the public prayer of the Church that celebrates God's covenant in love. With this in mind, liturgy planning should strive for the full, active and conscious participation of the faithful in this prayer of the Church. Bearing in mind secular and cultural influences, a couple should use the experience of Sunday Eucharist as the model for preparation of their wedding liturgy.

Ecumenical Considerations – Celebrating Marriage without Mass

Whenever a wedding liturgy involves an inter-religious couple, the church's preference is for the wedding ceremony to be celebrated without Eucharist. Since it is impossible for Eucharistic hospitality to be extended to the entire assembly, the wedding ceremony without Eucharist does not offend or exclude the family of the non-Catholic spouse. In some circumstances, permission may be granted for the non-Catholic spouse only to receive Eucharist on the wedding day provided that certain criteria are met. Please ask the Presider for your wedding liturgy if you are interested in pursuing this possibility.

Hospitality

The goal of the gathering rite is to gather the people into a praying community open and ready to hear the Word of God. A key element in creating that openness is hospitality. People should be welcomed warmly as they arrive. We suggest this role be extended to include the entire bridal party, the parent(s) of the bride and groom and even the bride and groom themselves since they are the reason the guests are there. It is not necessary to separate guests into the "bride's side" or the "groom's side" of the church.

Welcome

Weddings are not "spectator" events. The assembly should be welcomed, invited and encouraged to participate in the wedding liturgy. This welcome may be offered by the couple themselves, the presiding minister, family members or cantor. A brief rehearsal of sung responses prior to the wedding may encourage and help the assembly to participate. It also can help create a more hospitable climate and atmosphere of community.

Programs

A Worship Aid (or program) is not required, but may be helpful in encouraging the assembly to sing. If you are duplicating music (words and/or actual music) you **must** obtain copyright permission to do so. Contact the Music Director for assistance.

Gathering Rites

Entrance Procession

The practice of the bride being escorted down the aisle by her father is a carryover from ancient times when a father "gave away" his daughter and the dowry (a sum of money or goods) attached to her. This no longer being the case, the wedding procession is a symbol of "journey." The bride and/or groom are walked down the aisle by their parents at the beginning of the wedding liturgy to symbolize the journey parents have shared with their children to prepare them for a new journey in marriage. Bride and groom process out of the church together as a symbol of a new journey begun. As the book of Genesis reminds us, "*A man shall leave his father and mother, shall cling to his wife and the two become as one body*" (Genesis 2:24).

Processions should be structured to express the equality and mutuality of the couple and ought to be liturgical in nature. Therefore, the opening procession should include all involved in the liturgy: servers, cross bearer, lector(s), presiding minister, attendants, both sets of parents, and the bride and groom. Such a procession would look like this and should be considered the norm at St. Christopher:

- Cross bearer
- Server(s)
- Lector(s)
- Priest/Deacon
- Groom and Parents
- Attendants as Couples
- Maid of Honor and Best Man
- Flower Girl and Ring Bearer
- Bride and Parents

Wedding Party Members – Ushers and Bridesmaids

The church requires a priest or deacon and two witnesses in order for a marriage to take place with the blessing of the church. Additional wedding party members are possible, but not required. They perform no “official” role but are an extension of the hospitality of the bride and groom.

Flower Girls and Ring Bearers

Because the nature of a liturgical ministry is geared for adults, we highly discourage the use of small children in the role of flower girl and/or ring bearer. Often this creates an awkward situation at the wedding liturgy when the cooperation of such small children is unable to be obtained.

Music

Music is important to the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage. The music chosen should be religious in nature and appropriate for church use. Upon securing your date with your presiding priest or deacon, please contact our Parish Music Director at the earliest opportunity to discuss your wedding music preparation. The Music Director can be reached at **440-331-4255, ext. 201** or at **mnaramura@stchrisparish.com** (email preferred). Unless otherwise approved by the Music Director, one of our parish cantors will be at the liturgy to encourage the sung participation of the people gathered at your wedding celebration. Additional instruments such as violin, flute or trumpet are also welcome (but not required), and the Music Director will be able to assist you in finding suitable musicians who are experienced in playing for sacred liturgies. Please note that these additional instrumentalists are not covered by your wedding offering to the church and you are responsible for compensating them directly according to their fee schedule. Furthermore, should you choose to print any music in the program, copyright permission must be obtained from the publisher (you do not need copyright permission for printing the title of the music). Final decisions regarding the appropriateness of music selections are left up to the discretion of the Music Director and the Presider. The following list will assist you in noting the appropriate occasions for musical selections throughout the liturgy.

Prior to the ceremony	usually instrumental or solo piece
Processional music	usually instrumental
Responsorial Psalm.....	led by cantor with congregational participation
Offertory (during Mass)	instrumental, solo piece or congregational participation
Communion Hymn (during Mass)	sung by congregation
Visit to Holy Family	usually solo piece
Recessional music	usually instrumental

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Introductory Address

After the liturgical greeting, a few words of introduction and welcome are offered by the Presider. Then the Presider asks the bride and groom to state their "intentions" regarding their freedom of choice, faithfulness to each other and the acceptance and upbringing of children. The bride and groom respond "Yes" to each of the questions and then the Presider prays the opening prayer, asking God to look lovingly upon the couple gathered here as they join their lives together as one.

Liturgy of the Word

After the Greeting by the Presider and an Opening Prayer, the Liturgy of the Word begins. Non-biblical texts may not be used during the Liturgy of the Word. Ordinarily, the readings for the wedding liturgy include an Old Testament (Hebrew Scripture) reading, an Epistle (New Testament Reading) and a Gospel Reading. Readers may be selected from among family, friends or lectors from the parish. The Lector(s) should be given the readings well in advance of the liturgy. They are also encouraged to attend the wedding rehearsal to learn the church's protocol, acoustics and sound system prior to the wedding liturgy. The following texts are ordinarily used for wedding liturgies; however, other Scriptural texts may be used.

Please refer to the list of prescribed Scripture Readings on our website.

Old Testament Readings (Hebrew Scriptures)

The first reading is always taken from the Hebrew Scriptures or the "Old Testament." Please select one of the following readings and indicate your choice on the planning form. You may choose a reading not listed as long as it can be found in the Old Testament.

Responsorial Psalm

*The Responsorial Psalm is ALWAYS sung and is taken from one of the **150** Psalms in the Old Testament. The refrain is sung by the congregation; verses are sung by the cantor. The Music Director will assist in the selection of the Psalm for your wedding liturgy.*

Second Reading (New Testament – Epistle)

The second reading is always taken from the New Testament and is often one of the epistles (letters) of St. Paul. Please choose one of the following readings and indicate your selection on the planning form. You may choose a reading not listed as long as it can be found in the New Testament and is not one of the Gospels.

The Gospel Reading

The Gospel reading (chosen from one of the four Gospels) is proclaimed by a Priest or Deacon only. It may be chosen by the Bride and Groom or selected by the Presider for the liturgy. A homily by the priest or deacon follows the Gospel.

The Marriage Rite

The Vows

The proclamation of vows, when done prayerfully and meaningfully, expresses the unity and intimacy of a couple joining together as one. It is highly recommended that the vows are MEMORIZED by the bride and groom, or that they at least be very familiar with the words, and that they are visible to the assembly when the vows are spoken. The vows should be audible to the assembly as they are witnesses to the promises the bride and groom make. Vows may never be composed by the couple but they can be added to if deemed appropriate by the Presider. The text of the vows is as follows:

I, (N.), take you (N.), to be my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.

I, (N.), take you (N.), to be my husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.

Exchange of Rings

The rings are first blessed by the Presider. The bride and groom place the rings on each other's finger while saying the following words:

(N.), take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Nuptial Blessing

The Nuptial Blessing is the official prayer of the church for the bride and groom. If recited, the Presider speaks the prayer on behalf of the assembly. If sung, the assembly responds with an acclamation repeated throughout the prayer.

Universal Prayer (General Intercessions)

These prayers may be offered by a family member or friend. Suggested intercessions are listed here. The entire congregation responds "Lord, hear our prayer," to each intercession. The Presider introduces the intercessions and concludes the intercessions with a prayer.

For the Church throughout the world. For unity among the Body of Christ.

And for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We pray to the Lord.

For a healing of the nations. For the leaders of governments.

And for peace and justice in our world.

We pray to the Lord.

For all married persons. For the grace to love and to forgive.

And for happiness, joy and peace always.

We pray to the Lord.

For N. & N. married today. For God's grace in good times and in bad.
And for Divine assistance at every moment of life,
We pray to the Lord.

For the poor and the infirm. For all who call upon God's mercy and healing grace
(especially:..) And for all who care for others who are in need.
We pray to the Lord.

For those who have died especially : N.
And for all the deceased members of N. & N. families,
We pray to the Lord

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is only celebrated when the wedding liturgy is celebrated "with Mass."

Preparation of the Gifts

The procession of offertory gifts symbolizes the offering of our gifts: bread and wine, an offering for the poor as well as the offering of our very selves to the Lord. A gift for the poor (basket with non-perishable items) is highly recommended as a symbol of the couple's love reaching out and embracing others in need.

Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer is the prayer of the entire assembly with the priest leading and reciting the prayer. The full, active and conscious participation of the assembly is enhanced as the cantor leads them in these acclamations (Holy, Holy, Holy; Memorial Acclamation; and the Great Amen).

The Lord's Prayer (Our Father...)

The entire assembly should sing or recite the Lord's Prayer. It is never appropriate for a soloist to sing this prayer alone. The entire assembly joins in this prayer together.

Sign of Peace

The Sign of Peace is a symbolic action of offering the peace of Christ to those around us. It is not a receiving line! The Bride and Groom offer a sign of peace to each other, to the Presider and other ministers and (when appropriate) to the bridal party and immediate family.

Communion

Only those sharing full unity of faith, life and worship may receive Communion during Mass. Under specific conditions, a bride or groom from another Christian church may receive special permission to receive Communion at their Wedding Mass. However, permission can never be extended beyond the bride or groom. If a large number of non-Catholics are anticipated at a Wedding Mass, the following explanation should be printed in the wedding program:

*Catholics believe Communion is a sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ that signifies a full unity of faith, life and worship. This full unity is not yet a reality for the Christian churches. While we cannot invite all to receive Communion, we do invite you to worship in song and pray for this newly married couple and for the unity of the Church.*¹ (*Liturgical Guidelines for the Sacrament of Marriage*, Diocese of Cleveland, 1998)

Blessing

After the closing prayer, the priest asks the bride and groom and the assembly to bow their heads and pray for God's blessing.

Devotional Customs and Practices

The Unity Candle

The lighting of the unity candle has never been an official part of the Rite of Christian Marriage. Therefore, it is not used during a celebration of Marriage at St. Christopher Church.

Visit to the Holy Family Shrine

A visit to the Holy Family Shrine is often included as a devotional time of prayer in the wedding liturgy. When included, it takes place after the final prayer and before the blessing. The couple processes *together* to the shrine and spend time in prayer asking for help and inspiration in their married life.

Ministers for the Wedding Liturgy

Presider

A priest or deacon assigned to St. Christopher ordinarily presides at the weddings of our parishioners. The couple should request the priest they prefer when setting the wedding date. A priest who is relative or good friend of the bride or groom may also be involved in the celebration of the wedding. In such a case the priest should contact one of the parish priests to clarify responsibilities in regards to preparing the couple and planning the liturgy.

Lectors/Readers

Those chosen to read the Scripture texts and/or the General Intercessions should have a good reading voice and be able to proclaim the Word prayerfully and appropriately according to the nature of the celebration. It is never permitted to add one's own words or reflections to the liturgical texts.

Eucharistic Minister(s)

If there are family members who have been trained as Eucharistic Ministers, they may assist the Presider in distributing communion to the Assembly. Please ask the Presider about this possibility.

Photographers/Videographers

We ask that photographers and videographers be respectful and reverent throughout the wedding liturgy. Their presence must **never** distract or divert the attention of the assembly away from the prayerful celebration. The processions (Opening, Offertory, Communion, and Recessional) must **never** be halted or stopped for the photographer to get a “still” photograph. We ask that the photographers and videographers never enter the sanctuary of the church throughout the wedding liturgy. The Church is available to you for photographs **after** the wedding liturgy, but please note that reverence and proper decorum is expected while in the church building. Picture taking should conclude in a timely manner, respectful of whatever services or event may follow your wedding.

July 2023