

PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

AT DIVINE MERCY (SACRED HEART) AND ST. BERNARD PARISHES

You must contact the parish priest 9 months prior to your desired date. No date may be set and you should not reserve your hall until you have met with the priest (and have obtained any necessary dispensations or annulments). Even if you have another priest or deacon preparing you, you still must meet with the pastor of Divine Mercy and St. Bernard before a wedding date may be scheduled at either parish. This should normally happen at least 6-9 months before the desired date.

Getting Married "*In the Lord*"

Because “*marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values,*”¹ the Catholic Church, in obedience to God, has laws concerning marriage and obliges her members to follow them. “*The Church is deeply convinced that only by the acceptance of the Gospel are the hopes that man legitimately places in marriage and in the family capable of being fulfilled.*”² 1Corinthians 7:39 speaks of our obligation to be married “*in the Lord.*” The Catholic Church understands this to mean a religious service according to the laws of God. Acts 15:28-29 speaks of our need to refrain from “*unlawful marriage*” as a requirement for salvation. Catholics who disregard the laws of the Church regarding marriage and get married without following them, place themselves in an invalid marriage and are therefore no longer able to receive the sacraments of the Church until this situation is reconciled.

Catholics who wish to have a Catholic Wedding, must first commit in writing to the faithful practice of their Catholic Faith. This includes going to Mass on Sunday. It would make no sense for a Catholic who is not intending to practice the Catholic Faith to seek to be married in the Catholic Church. Nor is this allowed.

The first step for those who want to be “married in the Lord” (have a Catholic Wedding) is to contact their parish priest or the priest where they want to get married. It is important to do this before renting your hall.

Getting Married in the Catholic Church

Because the Catholic Church wants couples to form strong, lasting marriages, it has a long history of helping couples to prepare for marriage. The Church has learned a great deal that can benefit any couple, regardless of religion.

The Meaning and Purpose of Marriage

Marriage is the intimate union and equal partnership of a man and a woman. It comes to us from the hand of God, who created male and female in his image, so that they might become one body and might be fertile and multiply (see Genesis chapters 1 and 2). Though man and woman are equal as God’s children, they are created with important differences that allow them to give themselves and to receive the other as a gift. Marriage is both a natural institution and a sacred union because it is rooted in the divine plan of creation. In addition, the Catholic Church teaches that the valid marriage between two baptized Christians is also a sacrament – a saving reality and a symbol of Christ’s love for his Church (see Ephesians 5:25-33). In every marriage the spouses make a contract with each other. In a sacramental marriage the couple also enters into a covenant in which their love is sealed and strengthened by God’s love. The free consent of the spouses makes a marriage. From this consent and from the sexual consummation of marriage a special bond arises between husband and wife. This bond is lifelong and exclusive. The marriage bond has been established by God and so it cannot be dissolved.

Permanency, exclusivity and faithfulness are essential to marriage because they foster and protect the two purposes of marriage – the growth in mutual love between the spouses (unitive) and the generation and education of children (procreative).

¹ Pope Saint John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* (1981), 1.

² Pope Saint John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* (1981), 3.

The mutual love of a married couple should always be open to new life. This openness is expressed powerfully in the sexual union of husband and wife. The power to create a child with God is at the heart of what spouses share with each other in sexual intercourse. Mutual love includes the mutual gift of fertility. Couples who are not able to conceive or who are beyond their child-bearing years can still express openness to life. They can share their generative love with grandchildren, other children and families, and the wider community.

The family arises from marriage. Parents, children, and family members form what is called a domestic church or church of the home. This is the primary unity of the Church – the place where the Church lives in the daily love, care, hospitality, sacrifice, forgiveness, prayer and faith of ordinary families.

As a result of their baptism, all Christians are called to a life of holiness. This divine calling, or vocation, can be lived in marriage, or in the single life, or in the priesthood or consecrated (religious) life. No one vocation is superior to or inferior to another. Each one involves a specific kind of commitment that flows from one's gifts and is further strengthened by God's grace. All vocations make a unique contribution to the life and mission of the Church.

Marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptized person requires a dispensation from the Bishop.

Marriage within Mass or outside of Mass

When two practicing Catholics marry, the norm is to celebrate the Rite of Marriage within the context of a Mass. However, the Catholic Rite of Marriage does not have to take place within a Mass and there are situations where this may be the better option. A Catholic Marriage outside of Mass consists of the Liturgy of the Word and the Marriage Rite but no celebration of the Eucharist or Holy Communion. A Catholic Wedding outside of Mass is appropriate for situations where one party is not Catholic, or when either the bride or groom would not be receiving Holy Communion, or when a large number of those attending would not be able to receive Holy Communion. If a couple is already living together prior to getting married, a simple Wedding outside of the context of the Mass would be the more appropriate form, since their living situation prior to the wedding contradicts the words of Jesus. While they are commended for wanting to reconcile their marital status by being properly married in a religious service, this would not happen in the context of the Mass.

Choosing a church for your wedding & a parish for your marriage preparation

The first step in preparing for your wedding is to choose the church where you want to be married and contact them to see what they require. It is important to do this before renting a hall for your reception. They will begin your Catholic marriage preparation process. If you live in another city, the parish where you live can help you to begin this process. If you wish to be married at Divine Mercy (Sacred Heart) or St. Bernard, you will need to meet with the pastor (or have your pastor call him) before a date can be set.

Church law requires weddings to be held in the parish church of either the bride or groom, although the pastor (where you reside) or bishop may give permission for the wedding to take place in another parish (Canon 1115). Normally, you would receive marriage preparation from the parish where you will be married, or from the priest who will marry you, but this too can vary, depending on the circumstances.

Days when you can't select all your own readings for your Wedding Mass

The full wedding Mass is not permitted on Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, on Solemnities, on the days within the Octave of Easter, on All Souls' Day, on Ash Wednesday, during Holy Week (GIRM #372), and on Holy Days of Obligation.* It is still permissible to celebrate Marriages on these days within the context of a Mass (except on Good Friday and Holy Saturday), but the assigned prayers and readings of the day's Mass must be used. Things such as the nuptial blessing, solemn blessing, and one substitute reading exception would be incorporated as outlined in The Order of Celebrating Matrimony #56.

Note that on many of these days, the The Order of Matrimony without Mass may be used with no restrictions.

*The holy days of obligation in most dioceses in the United States are: January 1, the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God; Thursday of the sixth week of Easter, the feast of the Ascension; August 15, the solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary; November 1, the feast of All Saints; December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception; and December 25, Christmas.

Getting Married in the Diocese of Covington, KY

Couples who wish to marry in the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Covington, KY must:

1. As soon as you are engaged, contact and meet with your parish priest, register for a marriage preparation program, and register for a Natural Family Planning course.
2. Take a significant period of time (at least six months recommended) to intensively prepare for your marriage. This goes beyond choosing a date and church, reserving a place for the reception, and picking out dresses. It means using this time to delve more deeply into your relationship and approach this momentous day with prayer and reflection. (Some parishes in the Covington Diocese ask couples to take a marriage preparation inventory [such as FOCCUS]. This is not a “test” to determine whether you can get married in the Church, but rather a discussion starter to assess what issues you already agree on and what you might need to discuss further.)
3. Attend an approved marriage preparation program. There are three different marriage preparation programs available in the Covington Diocese, ranging from intensive weekends (Engaged Encounter), a two concurrent Saturday series (Living Marriage as Sacrament), and an “in home” mentor couple program (Evenings for the Engaged). For more information about these programs and for a registration form, please visit our website, <http://www.covdio.org/catechesis-formation/programs-for-engaged-couples> or just go to www.covdio.org and click on “Marriage Prep” under “Ministries.” Catholic marriage preparation programs are usually presented by a team of lay married couples and a priest or deacon. They are not restricted to Catholics, but they are always in keeping with Church teaching.
4. Attend a certified Natural Family Planning course.³ The “online” version of this course may not be used. Attendance at the sessions is required. Visit our diocesan website at: www.covdio.org for details.
5. Please also read the newly published Diocesan Marriage Guidelines, which can be found at <http://www.covdio.org/worship>.
6. Catholics who desire to have a Catholic marriage must affirm that they intend to practice their Catholic faith. Additional preparation may be asked of Catholics who have not been practicing their Catholic faith.

Most importantly at the time of your engagement, the Church welcomes you to this sacrament of marriage in the spirit of Jesus who said, “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:12-13)

The Art of Natural Family Planning (NFP) with CCL (Couple to Couple League)

The Catholic Church has historically recognized the unmistakable link between contraception and abortion and teaches that “fecundity [fruitfulness] is a gift, and end of marriage, for conjugal [married] love tends to be fruitful. A child does not come from outside as something added on to the mutual love of the spouses, but springs from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfillment. So the Church, which is “on the side of life,” teaches that “it is necessary that each and every marriage act remain ordered per se to the procreation of human life.” (The Catechism of the Catholic Church) Natural Family Planning is fertility awareness, the knowledge of a couple’s fertility. It is a means of reading a woman’s signs of fertility and infertility. The Couple to Couple League teaches three basic signs of fertility – temperature, mucus and cervix – and how to apply this knowledge through the SymptoThermal Method (STM) of NFP, which can be used both to achieve or postpone pregnancy.

With the Couple to Couple League, the art of Natural Family Planning goes beyond the method as couples are taught about NFP within the moral constructs of the magisterium (teaching authority) of the Catholic Church, with an emphasis on the teachings of Pope John Paul II, especially his teaching on the “theology of the body.” Couples learn of God’s vision and plan for marriage and family, and how to live out their sexuality while

³ “This requirement is not fulfilled by attendance at a one-time lecture on natural family planning. It is fulfilled only by full participation in a certified course.” Gospel of Life/Respect Life, Diocesan Synod document (2006)

upholding and respecting the dignity of each other and their union. A married couple's virtuous application of their fertility awareness, either to try to achieve a pregnancy or to postpone a pregnancy, is called responsible parenthood.

Getting Married at Divine Mercy or St. Bernard

No date may be scheduled, even tentatively, until the couple has met with the pastor. This should happen at least 9 months before the desired date.

Catholics who seek to be married in the Catholic Church will normally need to be registered in a Catholic parish. Additional preparation sessions may be asked of Catholics who have not been practicing their faith.

Active parishioners are defined as those who have already attend Sunday Mass here on a regular basis and who contribute to the parish according to their means, as evidenced by monthly usage of their envelopes.

Wedding Mass or Simple Wedding (outside of Mass): In some circumstances it may be appropriate to use the Rite of Marriage outside of Mass. This means you would have the prayers, readings, homily, rite of Marriage without the celebration of the Eucharist (no Holy Communion). A deacon could officiate at a simple wedding outside of Mass.

Priest or Deacon Stipend and invitation: The priest or deacon who officiates at your wedding should be given a stipend to thank him for his ministry. The customary amount is \$100. As they will be leading your wedding rehearsal and officiating at your wedding, it is also customary to invite them to your rehearsal dinner and wedding reception. As weekends are a busy time for priests, please clarify these invitations with him well in advance so he can arrange his schedule accordingly.

Active, Registered Parishioners

For active, registered parishioners there is no charge for the use of the church, but there is a \$75 fee for the sacristan who opens up the church, sets up, puts things away, tidies up and closes the church. There are also fees for the musicians (see below) and a small stipend for the servers.

Non Parishioners (or those who have not been "active" parishioners)

For those who are not already active, registered parishioners of our parish, the fee to use the church is:

\$1,125 for Divine Mercy (\$950 for church & marriage prep, \$100 for officiant, \$75 for sacristan)
\$925 for St. Bernard. (\$750 for church & marriage prep, \$100 for officiant, \$75 for sacristan)

If you live outside our parish boundaries, you must have the permission of your local Catholic pastor. A down payment of \$250 is required to reserve your date and the balance is due prior to the rehearsal. If you provide your own priest or deacon to officiate, and pay for his stipend, you may subtract \$100 from the total due. If you do your marriage preparation through another parish, you may subtract another \$100, but both must be approved well in advance.

Music: Only church hymns may be used (even for the prelude songs). Traditional classical instrumental pieces like Canon in D Major are allowed but not instrumentals of popular romantic songs. All music must be approved by our music director Sue Rahali. If you use our musicians, there is a fee of \$75 for the organist and \$60 for the cantor.

Servers: If you have servers, it is suggested that you give them a small stipend. If the parish needs to provide servers for you, please have an envelope with \$15 ready for each server.

Parish Halls: Charity Hall or Garvey Hall are usually available to rent for an additional amount. Please contact the parish secretary for details.

Unity Candle: Unity candles are not part of the Catholic Rite of Marriage and, as a rule, are not used at a Catholic Wedding. Also, especially during the summer months when the AC is on, they can become a fire hazard due to the draft created by the AC fan(s).

General: If you want to do anything out of the ordinary at your wedding, please clear this with the pastor well in advance.

Here are a few things to remember for both the rehearsal and the wedding:

- No food, drink (for adults), gum or smoking in church (non-Catholics may not be aware of this).
- Music for the Mass must be church music/hymns/songs (no secular, pop or country songs for the liturgy). Our Music Director is Sue Rahali (431-3223). Our cantor is Peggy Stull (581-8788).
- The bride and bridesmaids must wear modest dresses with their shoulders covered (no sleeveless or strapless). A shawl, sweater or jacket can be used to fulfill this requirement (or a veil for the bride). The dresses should not have plunging necklines or display “cleavage.”
- As our church is locked during the day, Florists should call the parish office before 11:00 AM on Friday to set up a time for delivery.
- No flowers may be brought up in the offertory procession.
- Please see that after the wedding the church is put back the way it was and tidied up.
- The Bride and Groom may not drink alcohol before the wedding as it will invalidate their vows.
- No Flash (or noisy or distracting) photography during the Liturgy.
- For Weddings on Saturday or Friday:
 - ✦ Saturday Weddings: only Masses that begin after 4:00 pm will count to fulfill the Sunday obligation.⁴
 - ✦ Divine Mercy: In order to not disturb our Sat. eve. Confessions and Mass, Saturday Weddings must begin no later than 3:00 pm (you must be out of the church by 4:30 pm) or after 7:00 pm (please wait till 6:45 pm before you come in). Friday Weddings should wait until 6:30 pm to begin prelude music (the evening Mass goes till 6:00 pm and we hear confessions after Mass, sometimes up until 6:30 pm). Please wait until 6:15 to come into church.
 - ✦ St. Bernard: Saturday weddings must begin after 5:30. Please wait until 5:15 to come into church. Friday weddings can take place any time.

⁴ “A person who assists at a Mass celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the feast day itself or in the evening of the preceding day satisfies the obligation of participating in the Mass.” Canon 1248.1

TIMETABLE & CHECKLIST

At least 9 months before wedding

- Initial meeting with the priest or deacon.
- Set the date and time for the wedding and rehearsal (rehearsal date could be set later).
- Make your deposit (if you are not already an active registered parishioner).
- Sign up for Diocesan Approved marriage prep course.
- Sign up to attend an approved NFP course.
- Listen to the CD you were given and browse through the book.

A month or two after the first meeting – at least 5 months before the wedding

- 2nd meeting with the with the one preparing you for marriage (at least 5 months before wedding)
- Possible additional materials/videos/meeting for those who have not been active in their Catholic Faith.
- Choose your musicians and confirm this choice with the one preparing you for your marriage.
- Ask the one preparing you for marriage for the wedding planner booklet.

To be done ideally at least a couple months before your wedding

- Completion of Diocesan approved marriage prep course.
- Give Marriage Prep certificate to priest or deacon preparing you for marriage.
- Completion of diocesan approved NFP course.
- Give NFP course certificate to priest or deacon preparing you for marriage.
- Obtain Bride's Baptismal Certificate from church of baptism (dated no earlier than 6 months prior to wedding) and give to the priest or deacon preparing you for marriage.
- Obtain Groom's Baptismal Certificate from church of baptism (dated no earlier than 6 months prior to wedding) and give to the priest or deacon preparing you for marriage.

Ideally 2 - 3 months before the wedding

- Meet with one preparing you for marriage to review the FOCCUS inventory.
- Turn in the wedding planner booklet form.
- Review program with one preparing you for marriage.
- Pay any balance of fees due.

At the Rehearsal

- Give marriage license to priest or deacon who will officiate at your wedding.