

St. Mary, Mother of God Parish

Marriage Guidelines

Setting the wedding date

Marriages must be scheduled at least 12 months in advance, so that all paperwork and formation can be completed. To schedule the wedding date, you must [contact our parish office](#) to check for date availability.

However, if you or your intended spouse has been previously married, you must first make an appointment with the pastor to discuss your situation before a wedding date can be set.

Interfaith marriage: A marriage between a Catholic and non-Catholic

When a member of St. Mary Parish chooses to marry a non-Catholic, some initial questions naturally arise such as; whether or not the wedding must take place in the Catholic Church, or may non-Catholic clergy participate in the wedding.

In such cases, it is important to meet with the pastor early in your planning process to discuss these questions and options with the couple. Such a meeting will also allow the pastor to explain the required paperwork and permissions necessary, in order for the wedding to be considered as a Catholic sacrament, and valid in the Catholic Church.

Although the ordinary place of marriage will be in our parish church, this is not always the case. Permission may be granted for the wedding to take place in the church of the non-Catholic or another chapel, provided that all Catholic Church regulations are followed.

Catholic weddings are not permitted in secular places, such as gardens or hotels.

Formation process

One of the following Marriage Preparation Programs must be completed:

- a. Parish supported sponsor couple program.
- b. Engaged Encounter Weekend in Greensburg.
- c. Approved Marriage Preparation in another Catholic diocese.

Necessary paperwork

Once the couple has successfully completed the formation process, they will then meet with the priest to fill out necessary paperwork, and to discuss the actual wedding ceremony. This meeting is to take place three to six months prior to the wedding date.

Frequently Asked Questions

Time of wedding | Saturdays & Weekdays

Saturdays: Weddings at St. Mary, Mother of God Church may be scheduled to start no later than 2:30 p.m. An earlier start time can be scheduled.

Weekdays: Weddings can be scheduled any weekday, according to parish schedules.

Weddings are not permitted on Sundays or holy days. It is also advisable not to schedule a wedding during the season of Lent.

Rehearsal

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Rehearsals generally occur the evening before the wedding at 6:00 p.m. Please be prompt. Please provide attendants with a map and/or clear directions to St. Mary Church to avoid delays.

The rehearsal should be attended by not only the wedding party, but also by all those who are taking part in the wedding ceremony. This includes, parents of the bride and groom, all lectors, and those who may be bringing the gifts to the altar at presentation.

In addition, if a program will be provided to your guests, please bring a copy of your program to the rehearsal.

Alcoholic beverages, drugs and firearms are not permitted on church property. Do not arrive at the rehearsal or ceremony under the influence. It is also improper to eat or drink inside the church. Proper dress and conduct is required by all who are present at the rehearsal.

The celebrant

Normally, the pastor of St. Mary Parish conducts the wedding ceremony at the parish. If a bride or groom has a relative who is a priest, he is welcome to preside. Close personal friends who are priests are welcome to preside with permission from the pastor. Visiting priests must present proper letters from their bishop(s) or religious superior(s) along with proper clearances.

In the case of mixed religion marriages, and there is not a Mass celebrated, a non-Catholic minister is welcome to participate in the service. The parts of the liturgy, in which they can share, are governed by Catholic Church law. For example, he or she may read a Scripture passage, give an address, or offer a prayer or blessing. However, only a Catholic priest can carry out the marriage ritual itself in the Catholic Church.

The marriage license

A marriage license must be obtained from a county courthouse in the state of Pennsylvania. This should be done 10 to 30 days prior to the wedding date. Once the couple obtains the license they are to bring it to the parish office to be kept on file until the wedding.

Suggested stipends for the wedding

Your wedding at St. Mary Parish requires time and effort to plan, prepare, rehearse and celebrate with the support of your pastor, liturgist, organist, cantor, wedding coordinator and altar servers. You can expect the total amount of these services to be approximately \$400. If you are using additional professional musicians their professional fee is not included in this amount.

You will be given an itemized list of required stipends whenever you meet with the pastor to finalize your marriage liturgy. The stipends must be submitted to the parish office anywhere from 10 to 30 days prior to the wedding date. The marriage license needs to be submitted at the same time.

Guidelines for the wedding liturgy

Music

- It is the responsibility of the couple planning marriage to contact Peggy Skamai for an appointment to plan the wedding liturgy. Please [contact the parish office](#) to schedule this appointment.
- It is the policy of St. Mary Parish that Peggy Skamai will play the music for the wedding liturgy as outside organists are not permitted. In the event that she is not available, she will arrange for an organist for the occasion.
- Requests for cantors, soloists or any other kind of musical instrument, must be made to Peggy Skamai.

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- Recorded music is not permitted.
- Only liturgical music may be played, or sung, in the worship space before, or during, the liturgy of marriage. If there is any question as to whether a piece of music could be used, consult Peggy Skamai.
- The placement of music within the marriage liturgy is set by liturgical norms. Peggy Skamai will know this liturgical law and so will the priest. They will help you plan your liturgy.

Unity candle

The unity candle is not a part of the Roman Catholic Rite of Marriage. It will not be used in the worship space; however, a unity candle lighting ceremony could be very effective for a prayer at the reception.

Decorations

The worship environment may be decorated for wedding ceremonies. There are liturgical norms for decorating worship spaces:

- Flowers can be used if they do not hinder movement, but enhance the liturgical symbols (altar, pulpit, presider's chair, etc).
- All flowers in the sanctuary must be live.
- No flowers may be placed on the altar surface.
- It is expected that flowers remain in the church as a gift from the couple for the parish celebrations.
- Aisle flowers or bows may be used, but cannot be attached to the chairs with tape or pins, and must be removed immediately following the celebration.
- The use of a crash (white aisle runner) is prohibited. The crash is a potential tripping hazard to the wedding party and guests.

Throwing of rice and other items

Absolutely no rice is to be thrown after the wedding ceremony. Practically, it dirties the worship space and can be a safety hazard. Substitutes (i.e. bird seed, rose petals, etc.), are also not permitted. Balloon launches are discouraged as well. Please advise your guests.

Flower girls are not permitted to drop flower petals in the church aisles.

Limousines and other vehicles

Parking is not permitted at the main entrance of the church. All vehicles associated with the wedding must be clear of the main entrance at all times. Please be sure to inform the limousine service of our policy regarding alcohol.

Dressing room

The lower level of the church is available to us as a dressing room for the bridal party. No food is permitted. Non-alcoholic beverages are permitted. Please dispose of trash accordingly.

Programs

If a program is desired for the congregation's use during the wedding liturgy, it is the responsibility of the couple to provide one. The program should include all music selections, which will be sung by the congregation.

It is important that any reprinted music has copyright permission. To assist you in this preparation, Peggy Skamai will provide you with a sample program, which will include the details and order of worship for your wedding liturgy.

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It is the responsibility of the couple to pick up programs after the ceremony. All programs must also be reviewed by the pastor prior to final printing.

Photography and videography

Professional picture taking inside the church of the bridal party prior to the wedding is not permitted. Following the ceremony, 30 minutes will be allowed for picture taking inside the church. Only official photographers may conduct picture taking at this time.

The altar area may not be rearranged for picture taking. The worship space is a sacred symbol and must be treated as such. The photographer should speak to the presiding priest before the ceremony.

The use of video equipment is permitted for the taping of the wedding ceremony, however the videographer must speak to the presiding priest prior to the ceremony.

Excessive movement during the ceremony is not permitted by the photographer or videographer. Neither are allowed in the sanctuary.

Decorum

It is improper to eat or drink inside the church. There is to be no loitering inside the worship space or on the church grounds. It is prohibited to drink alcoholic beverages on church property. Please notify all members of your wedding party of this restriction.

Closing

Communication

It is our desire that your marriage preparation and wedding ceremony goes as smoothly as possible. Good communication is critical in assuring your positive experience through this entire process. Therefore, at any time, if you have any questions, concerns or need a clarification, do not hesitate to [contact the parish office](#).

Timeline and checklist

One year prior to the wedding:

- Schedule the wedding date.
- Establish a plan for marriage preparation program.

Six to twelve months prior to the wedding:

- Complete one of the following marriage preparation programs:
 - a. Parish supported sponsor couple program.
 - b. Engaged Encounter Weekend.
 - c. Approved marriage preparation in another Catholic diocese.

Three to six months prior to the wedding:

- Meet with pastor to complete necessary church paperwork.
- Obtain recently prepared baptismal certificates from parishes of baptism.
- Schedule rehearsal time.

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One to three months prior to the wedding:

- ❑ Meet with pastor to finalize marriage liturgy and receive list of stipends.
- ❑ Meet with Peggy Skamai to plan the music and liturgy for the wedding. [Contact the parish office](#) to make an appointment.
- ❑ If a wedding program is being made, submit the final draft to the pastor for review before printing.

10 to 30 days prior to the wedding:

- ❑ Obtain a marriage license from any county courthouse in the state of Pennsylvania and bring it to the parish office.
- ❑ Submit stipends for the wedding to the parish office.
- ❑ Confirm all details.