

*St. William of York
Catholic Church*

*Wedding
Guidelines*

*St. William of York Catholic Church
3130 Jefferson Davis Highway
Stafford, Virginia 22554-4525
540-659-1102*

Congratulations On Your Engagement!

As Catholics, we fully believe that marriage is a beautiful gift of God intended to make the bride and groom holy and happy; not happy only, but *holy* and happy. As such, there will need to be a certain level of commitment, training and readiness **before** entering into such a sacred bond. In order to fully grasp the nature of this bond, this instruction has been prepared for you. Please read it thoroughly and feel free to ask the priest assisting you in your preparations any questions as you go through the process of preparation.

Wedding Or Marriage?

You are not simply setting up a wedding. You both are now seeking to be taught about God's plan for married life. You have come to the Catholic Church to be married in a sacred ceremony. As such, God cannot be excluded either in your wedding or in your marriage. Truly, it takes three to get married and thus three to sustain a marriage. So, the preparations for marriage should be both exciting and substantive. This is a time of in-depth self-reflection and mutual discernment. At this point, you have not yet made the absolute decision to marry. You have made the decision to pray and discern if this is truly God's plan for your life. It is important to remember that an engagement is **not** the same as marriage. You are not yet married! Nor are you ready for marriage yet. Thus, though your commitment to one another is much greater than before your engagement, it is not yet absolute and thus a certain propriety is in order. Now is the time to plan your life together, not begin living it.

Whose Wedding Is It?

Yours – and the Church's! There is no such thing as a private wedding. Every Sacrament is an encounter with the living Jesus Christ and an act of the universal Church. It is true that the bride and groom are the ministers of the marriage, but you cannot validly perform your vows without the official witness of the Church (i.e.- the priest or deacon) and representatives of the Church (i.e.- two witnesses). Finally, in this respect, it is also God's wedding, for He is the giver and creator of married life. Practically then, the wedding ceremony should reflect your Catholic faith more than any other consideration. Secular, sectarian or pagan practices, however emotionally meaningful, are not appropriate in the church. Lastly, this is your wedding, not your fathers' or mothers', aunts', uncles', friends', or neighbors'. Together, you need to plan your wedding with the priest. Any couple who is mature enough and ready for married life together is mature enough and ready to handle their own affairs. Please do not have mothers or other individuals call the parish. We cannot discuss your wedding preparations with anyone but you for obvious reasons.

What Does Marriage Preparation Entail?

The Diocese of Arlington requires at least a six (6) month preparation period prior to any wedding taking place. There will be three to five pre-marital sessions with the priest or deacon to discuss your relationship. These sessions will cover the basic teachings of the Catholic Church regarding marriage and the family. This should lead to a sharing of beliefs and feelings about yourselves and the essential elements of Christian marriage. These sessions may also uncover certain false or erroneous attitudes you may have inadvertently assumed from our society's misunderstanding of the marital relationship

and its purposes. Your attitude should be one of seeking the truth as taught by the Church. A spirit of humility and an open-minded quest for God's plan ought to be present. Any other disposition will make your preparations little more than paperwork sessions for you and will be unfulfilling. In this vein, the **FOCCUS** survey will be given which investigates your presuppositions, beliefs and attitudes about marriage and married life, your expectations and readiness. This tool helps you by identifying your strengths and weaknesses as a couple and gives you the opportunity to have substantive discussions regarding those principle areas of married life.

Also covered in these sessions are:

- A. The Pre-Nuptial Investigation – a short questionnaire to be taken under oath, which helps the Church to determine whether certain impediments to a valid Christian marriage exist and whether both parties have right intentions regarding marriage.
- B. Catholics are strongly encouraged to make use of the Sacrament of Penance before receiving the Sacrament of Matrimony. The graces of marriage intended by and given by God can only be received when the soul is in the state of grace.

What Are the Requirements?

- I. Weekend Conferences for the Engaged – this program entails a Friday evening and full day on Saturday designed to stimulate reflection, both individual and as a couple, on the truths about marriage and family life as revealed by God and taught by the Church. This program is presented by several married couples and a priest or deacon.
- II. Natural Family Planning Courses may be required as well. This is a series of four, two-hour classes designed to help couples recognize and interpret the natural fertility cycles of the woman in order that the couple may practice “responsible parenthood” as taught and defined in the Catholic Church’s official Document *Humanae Vitae*.
- III. Church Documents Needed:
 - a. Newly issued Baptismal Certificates will need to be obtained from the Church where you were baptized.
 - b. Catholic Confirmation Certificate. A notation on the back of the Baptismal certificate will suffice.
 - c. Certificates of attendance at the required courses mentioned above.
 - d. Two Affidavits of Freedom to marry are required for each party to the marriage. These documents are obtained from your priest and require the assistance of people who have known you for a long period of time (parents are the best for this) and can testify as to your canonical freedom to enter into the marriage covenant. These affidavits must be signed in the presence of a priest/deacon or notary public.

- e. If either party had previously attempted marriage, ecclesiastical proof that such bonds have been officially declared null by the Catholic Church; or in the case of the death of a former spouse, an official copy of the death certificate.

IV. Civil Documents Needed:

The only required civil document needed is a marriage license – please note that a marriage license is valid only for sixty (60) days. Thus it must be obtained closer to the wedding date.

V. Witnesses

Catholics must be married in a sacred place, in the presence of a priest (or deacon) and two witnesses (commonly referred to as the “best man” and “maid/matron of honor”). The witnesses do not need to be Catholics (though if Catholic, they should be regularly practicing Catholics). If married, they must be validly married and not living together outside marriage in order that they will not cause scandal.

VI. Mixed Marriages (Catholic and non-Catholic)

Experience has shown that there can be certain inherent dangers in a marriage between people of differing religious belief systems. Statistics show that approximately 50% of the people in mixed marriages fall away from the regular practice of their faith. Usually this is due to a lack of support for the faith within the marriage. Often a certain indifferentism crops up in mixed marriages which at first seems not so significant, but *always becomes more important later on in the marriage*. Unfortunately, it is the children who become the victims of such spiritual sloth and error. In order to assure that such problems are clearly defined and discussed before the wedding takes place, the Catholic party must promise to continue a regular and faithful practice of their Catholic faith and do all in his or her power to make certain that each and every child of this marriage will be given the gift of the Catholic faith by having them baptized and reared as Catholics. The non-Catholic party must be made fully aware of the Catholic party’s obligations in this matter. **Catholics must receive specific permission of the local bishop or his designee to be married to a non-Catholic. Permission will not be granted without assurance that all children will be baptized and reared as Catholics.**

VII. Requisite Intentions For Marriage:

There are three principle goods of marriage that must be intended, otherwise the marriage would be invalid.

1. **Permanence** – Each partner must have the positive intention to remain in this marriage until death. No divorce and remarriage may be entertained even as a possibility. This commitment, though ridiculed in modern society, is an absolute, required by Jesus Christ Himself in Sacred Scripture and cannot be understated in our times.

2. **Fidelity** – Each partner must intend and vow to be faithful to this one spouse and no other for the rest of their natural lives. Included in this is the intention to form a community of love and life.
3. **Children** – Since one of the natural consequences and designs of God for marriage is the propagation and education of children, there must be an honest openness to children in the marriage. Artificial contraception and the rejection of the good of children are contrary to the plan and thus the will of God, and thus frustrate one of the purposes of marriage. To fail to have an openness to children invalidates the marriage.

VIII. Age Limit

The Commonwealth of Virginia requires both parties to have reached their eighteenth year.

What About The Ceremony?

The parish is blessed to have wedding coordinators to assist you on your wedding day. While these persons work on a volunteer basis, it is appropriate to present them with a gift or stipend of your choosing at the conclusion of your wedding rehearsal.

- A. **First**, it must be remembered that this is a sacred event, not a social one. Thus we must follow Catholic rites for any and all weddings. Secular practices which may have significant emotional worth may be appropriate for the reception, but are not to be performed in the Church.
- B. **Mass** should be celebrated for two Catholics. Mass may be celebrated in the case of a mixed marriage, after the couple considers all the relevant factors, including family concerns, preserving the Sacred Species from being received by non-Catholics, etc.
- C. **Decorations** must be tasteful and not overdone. If there is more than one wedding on the day of your wedding, you must share flowers with the other party. Flowers are to be left in the Church. Brides will be given the telephone numbers of the other bride scheduled that day for coordination purposes.
- D. **Aisle Runners** are allowed, but strongly discouraged. Runners are the greatest cause of falls and injuries at weddings. If you insist on using a runner, you assume any and all risk. St. William of York Catholic Church, the celebrant (priest or deacon) and pastor of the parish and the Diocese of Arlington will not be held responsible or in any way liable for any injury. The aisle at St. William is 75 feet long. The wedding party is responsible for removing any runners from the Church after the wedding.
- E. **Parking** is available in the Church parking lot. We cannot be held responsible for any loss incurred while on our parking lot.
- F. **Photographers** are an important part of recording for your keepsakes and memories. We warmly welcome photographers into the Church, provided they operate with professionalism and decorum. The sanctuary is holy ground, appropriate only for worship. Please note this well so that there will be no misunderstanding on your happy day. Photographers should consult with the priest/celebrant before the ceremony and must adhere to all directives given by the priest celebrant. Once the wedding has ended, you have 30 minutes to have your pictures taken in the church, so

that the staff has ample time to prepare for the next wedding. The celebrant retains the right to prohibit photographers that are difficult to work with from photographing your ceremony.

- G. **Music** for your wedding is to be of a sacred nature and never will a secular tune be permitted. Music is to be arranged with our music director, Mrs. Ashleigh Messer. Her number is (540) 658-1776.

Musicians & Fees:

For a Wedding Ceremony Within the Mass: \$400. This fee includes organist for the wedding day, a thirty-minute consultation meeting with the music director/organist to coordinate/select music and a soloist to sing up to three songs before the wedding processional, the Responsorial Psalm, the Gospel Acclamation, the Mass parts, the Offertory Hymn, Communion Hymn, and (if selected) the meditation to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Extra rehearsals will be charged a rehearsal fee of \$50 per hour/per musician.

For a Wedding Ceremony only: \$300. This fee includes organist for the wedding day, a thirty minute consultation meeting with the music director/organist to coordinate/select music, and a soloist to sing the Responsorial Psalm, the Gospel Acclamation, and up to three songs before the wedding processional. Extra rehearsals will be charged a rehearsal fee of \$50 per hour/per musician.

Should you choose to hire musicians who are not employed by St. William of York, the music director should be contacted as soon as your wedding date has been set.

All fees are payable in full at the consultation meeting. All music will be selected no later than four (4) weeks prior to the wedding date.

- H. **Altar Boys** may be requested when a wedding Mass will be offered. It is customary for the altar boys to be paid \$10.00 each for a wedding Mass.
- I. **Rice, Flowers, Confetti or Birdseed** are not to be thrown in or around the Church.
- J. **Dates and Times** for your wedding are to be set with the individual priest or deacon. Weddings are held only on Saturdays at 11:30 AM and 1:30 PM. Rehearsals are Friday evenings after 7 PM, except on first Fridays of the month when the rehearsal must take place and conclude by 6:00 PM. Please have all of your wedding party at the rehearsal. No other people are needed at the Church for the rehearsal and should not gather here (e.g., before going to the rehearsal dinner), since extra bodies usually cause confusion at a time when you will need to be focused on the coordination of your ceremony. Remind your wedding party that only those who are appropriately attired will be permitted in the Church. Shorts, immodest dresses, and tee shirts are not appropriate and persons wearing them will not be admitted to or allowed to participate in the rehearsal.
- K. **Participants** in the wedding ceremony will be fully instructed as to their individual roles by the wedding coordinator at the rehearsal. The number in your wedding party is not to be excessive and no young children under the age of five will be permitted to walk down the aisle. Participants in your wedding do not have to be Catholic, except for those participating in specifically liturgical roles such as lectors. Per the parish dress code for lectors and those performing other liturgical roles, such as gift-bearers, the parish dress code for men is coat and tie or suit. Women may wear either a dress or skirt and blouse but plunging necklines, high slits, form-fitting designs, backless

dresses and hemlines above the knee are strictly forbidden. Neither pant suits nor strapless dresses are permitted.

- L. **Fees** are *never* charged for use of the church, the priest's services in preparing you for your married life together, or for his work in setting up and performing your wedding ceremony. **Though there is no set amount, a typical free will donation to the priest for his services is around \$200.00.**
- M. **Receiving lines** after the ceremony are prohibited.

IX. Special circumstances

For couples seeking to marry at St. William of York Catholic Church but are receiving their preparation at another parish or chaplaincy, the following requirements are mandatory:

1. Attendance at a one day session of Conferences for the Engaged, sponsored by the Diocese of Arlington. A registration form for this program may be obtained from the parish office St. William of York Catholic Church.
2. Participation in Natural Family Planning Classes. A registration form for this program may be obtained from the parish office St. William of York Catholic Church.

These requirements allow the priests of the parish to ensure that couples are receiving sufficient preparation for marriage, pursuant to canon 1063 of the Code of Canon Law.

X. Attire

Last, but not least, and very importantly, attire should be appropriate for the celebration of a sacrament in church. Therefore, a strapless dress, should a bride choose to wear one, **MUST** be covered with a wrap or shawl for the duration of the ceremony and time spent in the church building. The same principle would apply for bridesmaids. Backless dresses and dresses with plunging necklines, high slits, and hemlines above the knee are strictly forbidden. Please plan accordingly when selecting attire for the wedding.

Similarly, attire for the wedding rehearsal should also be appropriate. Shorts, athletic gear, hemlines above the knees or women's clothing with low necklines are not permitted. At the very least, clothing should be "dress casual" for rehearsals.

Chewing gum is not permitted in the church and all persons must turn off cell phones while in church. Wedding coordinators reserve the right to bar inappropriately dressed persons from entering the church. Please remind your wedding party and guests of this rule.

As a final note, please be sure that all arrangements for your wedding should be finalized and completed by the time of the rehearsal so that your wedding goes smoothly. All donations, musician and altar boys' fees should be given at or before the rehearsal. It is our prayer that your wedding be a happy day, full of the grace and love of Jesus Christ.