

*GUIDELINES FOR THE
CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT
OF MATRIMONY*



THE BASILICA OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST
279 ATLANTIC STREET
STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT 06901
203-324-1553

INTRODUCTION

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that marriage, “by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.”

For many couples, this will be the most important event in their lives, and we, the priests of the Basilica of St. John’s want to help you prepare for this solemn and joyful occasion. To that end, we have composed this booklet with the essential guidelines, rules, and procedures to be followed in order to be married at St. John’s. Please understand that some of the regulations in this booklet have been laid down for us by the legislation and guidance of the Church herself. We cannot change them. Other directives have been reached by the agreement of the priests and staff, after years of experience.

You must speak with one of the parish priests at least nine months in advance of your proposed wedding date.

We understand the difficulty of setting dates for wedding ceremonies and receptions, especially in these increasing hectic times. Because the most important aspect of your wedding day will be the church ceremony at which you will celebrate this sacrament, we need adequate time to prepare you both spiritually and intellectually, so you will understand clearly what Catholic marriage is. Marriage preparations consist of both intellectual and spiritual preparation: learning, understanding, and accepting the Church’s teaching on marriage and family life, and spiritually preparing for that life.

General Considerations:

You must be an active, registered parishioner to marry at the Basilica of St. John's. Either the bride or the groom **must** be a practicing Catholic and registered at the Basilica for *one year* prior to contacting us regarding scheduling the wedding here. The bride/groom must be an active parishioner, regularly attending Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation and using the envelope system in regular support of the parish. *All requests for a wedding time, input into the ceremony, and contact with the clergy are to be handled by the future bride and/or groom personally. The clergy will not be able to speak with parents, wedding planners, or other interested parties due to the confusion this generates.

You must be free to marry in the Catholic Church.

If either of you has been married previously, in the Catholic Church or in any other church, in a synagogue, or before a justice of the peace, please tell the priest immediately.

Depending on the circumstance you may not be free to marry in any Catholic Church.

What documents do you need to provide to the priest?

To prove you are free to marry, the priest will ask you each to provide him with a **new** copy of your baptismal certificate. The certificate must be dated no more than **six** months prior to your wedding date and issued by the parish in which you were baptized.

Other documents he will require are:

(1) Baptismal certificates for any non-Catholic Christians; (2) First Holy Communion certificates; (3) Confirmation certificates. The last two, of course, are for the Catholic parties only, and need not be new. If either of you received any of your sacraments at St. John's, there is no need to provide the certificates, since the priest will secure the sacramental

information himself from the parish records. (4) You must attend a pre-cana class or Engaged Encounter workshop given by the Diocese (www.bridgeportdiocese.org – Ministries – Marriage Prep) and provide the priest with the certificate you receive upon completion. (5) A marriage license is required by Connecticut state law. It must be a license recently issued by the City of Stamford. For information, contact the Town Clerk's office at: 203-977- 4054 or townclerk@stamfordct.gov. It is your responsibility to obtain a marriage license and provide to the priest two weeks before your wedding. The church cannot perform the ceremony with out one.

Catholics must be privately and publicly living your Catholic faith.

The Catholic faith is lived privately and publicly in very practical and concrete ways. Both of you must be attending Mass at St. John's on all Sundays and holy days of obligation. We would like to see you regularly receiving the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion, to be active in the parish, and to contribute regularly by being registered at St. John's and using the envelopes weekly or online giving for your donations.

You should be living a Catholic moral life.

Practically speaking, if the two of you are living together, with all which that normally implies, then there is a serious moral problem. We know that living together is very common, and often done for economic reasons, but the Church's teachings is clear that fornications is a grave offense, a sin against the Sixth Commandment (cf. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, art 2353). Couples ought to be living a moral and chaste life pleasing to God, as should all Christians.

Practical Details

The priest will give you a booklet with all the readings and vows for your wedding. You will both be asked to choose those you prefer.

Weddings at St John's are determined in accordance with the parish calendar and, in general, can be scheduled throughout the year except for Sundays, all Holy Days of Obligation, Holy Week, the day before Easter, Christmas, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and civil holidays. On Saturdays, the times available are: 1:00, 1:30 or 2:00 p.m. Although Saturday is the traditional wedding day, any weekday may be selected, contingent upon the parish schedule.

Fees

The Basilica, while it is a beautiful church, does not maintain itself. Thus, there are fees involved in order to get married here. Parishioners are offered a low-cost fee because they are part of the faithful that contribute to the monthly expenses of keeping the Basilica functional. This is to help make up the cost of keeping the building maintained, air conditioned, heated, and open.

Church: \$300

Organist: \$300

Cantor (if used): \$250

Priest Stipend: \$250

Additional Music Fees may apply.

All fees must be paid two weeks before the wedding at the parish office, along with your Marriage License.

Music at Your Wedding

Any wedding in a Catholic church- whether a ceremony or a Mass is a sacramental event, and all the music must reflect this sacred function. No secular music, such as popular, Broadway, or film music, is permitted.

Organist: Mr. Nicholas Botkins is the *Organist and Choirmaster* of the Basilica and shall be the organist for all weddings unless he is unavailable. Guest musicians are not permitted.

The couple is responsible for contacting the Organist to arrange an appointment to discuss the music for their wedding. He can be reached at choirmaster@stjohnbasilica.org or 203-324-1553 ext 4.

A **Cantor (soloist)** is not required, but adds greatly to the beauty of the service, particularly when it is a Mass.

Instrumentalists- Additional instruments are available upon request and will be contacted by the Choirmaster. Each of these musicians charge his or her own independent fee that the couple will be responsible for.

The Rehearsal

The rehearsal is normally scheduled when the date for the wedding is being set. The rehearsal is usually the evening before and should take a half hour at most. Only the members of the wedding party itself, parents and readers are to attend the rehearsal. We encourage couples to go to Confession sometime beforehand, the better to prepare spiritually for the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Attire for the Wedding Day

We ask that you carefully consider the virtue of modesty when selecting your wedding dress and the attire of the wedding party. Gowns and dresses with low-cut necklines, exposed shoulders, backs, and revealing slits (whether on the bride or the bridal party) are not appropriate for a church wedding. If there is any doubt whether the dresses you have chosen will meet these guidelines, then please consult the priest before making your final decision and investment.

Visiting Priest

Any Catholic priest in good standing is welcome to celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony here at St. John's. Since he is to be the minister witnessing and blessing the wedding, our policy is that the visiting priest normally conduct the rehearsal. Of course, the visiting priest is bound to follow the guidelines of the parish. Priests outside of the Bridgeport Diocese must provide a "Letter of Good Standing" from their Diocese.

Flowers

The kind of flowers you choose to have at your wedding is your decision, but the flowers are considered a donation to the church. Flowers are normally placed on the high altar and are not removed after the ceremony. During Advent (four Sundays before Christmas Day) and Lent (forty days before Easter), flowers are not to be used. Nothing is to be attached by tape or glue to the church walls, pillars, pews, or any other structure of church furnishing. These include bows, ribbons, candles. Please check with the priest, since quite often the parish will have floral arrangements on the altar. This might prove helpful by saving you some money.

The Runner

Runners are not allowed!

Photography

Photography and/or video are arranged with the professional of your choice. We ask, for the comfort of all concerned, that only professionals be permitted to photograph or video the ceremony. Video and photographers are not allowed on the altar and should consult with the priest just before the ceremony to determine other areas which should be avoided. Video and still photographers must be appropriately dressed, e.g., jacket and tie for the men, and appropriate dress for women. The use of

flashes, strobes, or floodlights is not permitted. The photographer must not detract from or interfere with the sacredness of the ceremony.

“Unity Candles”

Unity candles are not envisioned in the Rite of Marriage and are not allowed. Those wishing to use one should do so at the reception.

Confetti

Confetti, rose petals, bird seed, rice, bubbles, balloons, jellybeans, etc., are not to be used either inside or outside of the church. There are absolutely no exceptions to this rule.

Conclusion

Please feel free to discuss any other considerations or questions you may have with the priest who will prepare you for your wedding.

Weddings are beautiful acts of worship of almighty God, asking His blessings on your married life. We hope that these guidelines will help you plan a beautiful and prayerful wedding- a fitting way for you to begin your married life by dedicating yourselves to each other and to Christ in His Catholic Church.