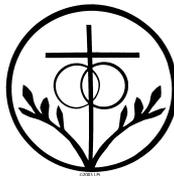


**Saint Thomas More
Parish**



*Marriage
Information Booklet*

**THE CELEBRATION OF
MARRIAGE**

at

**Saint Thomas More
Parish**

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

INTRODUCTION

Your interest in celebrating a wedding at Saint Thomas More Parish is a source of happiness for our entire community because it is a sign of life and growth in our midst. We pray that God will bless you abundantly during your engagement and as you prepare for your wedding.

This booklet has been prepared to assist you in planning your wedding by presenting wedding procedures observed at Saint Thomas More Parish.

Saint Thomas More Parish wants your wedding be a joyful celebration for you and your families, and also an expression of faith with a ceremony appropriate for a church setting.

Finally, it is our hope that your preparations for the wedding which lasts a day not overshadow your commitment to marriage which lasts a lifetime.

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Days and Times for Weddings:

Weddings may take place on any day of the week except Sundays. Weddings at St. Thomas More are typically celebrated on Friday at 3pm or Saturday at 1:30 p.m. Only one wedding is celebrated on a given day. One hour is set aside for your wedding ceremony and one half hour for a pictures after the ceremony.

2. Inquiries

Requests for marriage should be submitted to the priest or deacon. Only after a priest or deacon has conducted the required pre-marriage assessment will a date and time be confirmed in the parish schedule book. Before that, any questions answered or information obtained about availability of our church does not insure permission for the wedding to take at St. Thomas More.

PREPARATION FOR A WEDDING IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. Introduction

Since the Catholic Church believes that marriage is a commitment made for life, the preparation for marriage must clearly recognize the significance of that commitment. Preparation for marriage in the Catholic Church is provided to insure that both parties are capable of making such a commitment.

2. Pre-Marriage Assessment

At least six months before your wedding, you should contact one of the parish priests or deacons to discuss your intention to marry in the Catholic Church. **No date or time for a wedding may be confirmed until this meeting takes place.**

At that meeting, the priest or deacon will conduct the required assessment to confirm your freedom and ability to enter marriage within the Catholic Church. His questions will deal with such matters as previous marriages, age, maturity, knowledge about marriage, intentions, the Catholic theology of marriage, etc...

In order for the priest to conduct an accurate assessment, please be prepared to discuss fully any previous marriages. This includes those which took place before a Justice of the Peace or other civil official. Please note, generally the marriages of non-Catholics before civil officials (including Justices of the Peace) are considered valid by the Catholic Church. Thus, these parties are

not free to enter marriage again in the Catholic Church without some disposition of that previous marriage (e.g. through a formal process of annulment).

During the assessment process, the priest may also ask you to complete some pre-marriage inventories or instruments to assist in improving a couple's readiness for marriage within the Catholic Church. The assessment process may require more than one meeting.

3. Special Circumstances

In the course of the pre-marriage assessment, it may become apparent that a particular couple find themselves in special circumstances. One of these circumstances is a pre-marital pregnancy. Formerly, it was assumed that a pregnancy was ample justification for marriage. Today, however, the divorce rate for such couples is so high that a pregnancy is an indicator of a need for special pastoral sensitivity. In these instances, the priest may want to meet with the parents of the couple or seek the assistance of an independent evaluation. Once again, the goal is to aid the couple in arriving at a mature decision based upon all the factors involved, and not to be pressured by an outside influence or circumstance.

There are several other circumstances which may become apparent during the course of the initial interview. These include: a lack of readiness for marriage as assessed by the priest; a lack of appreciation for the spiritual and sacramental aspects of marriage; non-practice of the faith; cohabitation (living together); the decision to permanently exclude children in a marriage; refusal to take part in counseling. When one or more of these circumstances is encountered, the issues must be resolved satisfactorily before the wedding can be scheduled.

4. Required Documents and Pre-Nuptial Forms

Since marriage is recognized both by the Church and the state, it necessarily involves the gathering of information. This normally involves the completion of a standard set of forms by the priest/deacon who will be the official witness of your wedding.

If you are a Catholic, baptized in a parish other than Saint Thomas More, we must have a recent baptism certificate. This can be obtained by phoning or writing the parish where you were baptized. These recent certificates will verify that you are baptized and free to marry within the Catholic Church. All the documents submitted will remain on file in the Parish Rectory as a permanent record.

If you were baptized in a faith community other than Catholic, you too will need a copy of your baptismal certificate. A certificate of whatever age will suffice. It will be returned to you after the appropriate information is recorded.

Often couples of different faith backgrounds decide to marry. There should be time devoted to discussing how each partner will contribute to the spiritual growth of the other and any children who might be born in their marriage. Among the forms to be completed before marriage in the Catholic Church, is one signed by the Catholic partner marrying a non-Catholic. This form confirms the intention of the Catholic "...to continue practicing the Catholic faith and to do all in my power to share that faith with our children by having them baptized and raised as Catholics."

5. Marriage Instructions

The specific preparation for Marriage in the Catholic Church involves a program of listening and discussion. The policy of the Diocese of Pittsburgh requires that engaged couples participate in a pre-marriage program best suited to their needs. The content of these programs centers on the areas of sacramentality, spirituality, communication, financial responsibility, family life, responsible parenthood, sexuality and continuing formation within marriage. There are a variety of ways in which this can be accomplished. Among these are the following:

Parish weekends for the engaged: Programs are conducted locally whereby married couples treat various topics dealing with married life. Included with the presentations is the opportunity for questions and discussion. Various parishes conduct these programs at different times of the year. The Diocesan Office for Family Life (412-456-3000 or diopitt.org) maintains a listing of many of these programs.

Engaged Encounter Weekends: A Diocesan program whereby married couples, along with a priest/deacon, present various topics dealing with married life. This program consists of an entire weekend, from Friday evening at 8:00 p.m. until Sunday afternoon at 5:00 p.m. is conducted at various sites in the Diocese. The Diocesan Office for Family Life (412-456-3000 or diopitt.org) maintains a listing of many of these programs.

Diocesan Pre-Cana Series: A series sponsored by the diocese. This program consists of four 2 hour presentations on either Tuesday or Thursday evenings. The Diocesan Office for Family Life (412-456-3000 or diopitt.org) maintains a listing of these programs.

In addition, any other recognized program sponsored by the Diocese of Pittsburgh, another diocese, parish, deanery or campus ministry will suffice provided that the participants receive a certificate of participation and successful completion of the program.

THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY

Your wedding liturgy has special meaning for the entire parish community and should be celebrated with the joyful dignity that this implies. It is a time of prayer, promise, joy and hope. This special celebration should be carefully planned with the mutual cooperation of the priest/deacon and the couple, for it is meant to deepen your love while praising God in the midst of a parish community of faith.

The Liturgy of the Word: Readings from the Scriptures (one from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament) may be chosen by the couple in consultation with the priest/deacon who will witness the marriage. Readers may be chosen from family or friends to read the Scripture and the Prayers of the Faithful. Any person who is proclaiming a reading in church should be a Catholic in good standing, a good speaker, familiar with Catholic liturgy and feel comfortable in a church building. Remember, this is the proclamation of the Word of God.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist: Every wedding in the Catholic Church is celebrated with the Liturgy of the Word and the rite of marriage. Two Catholics who marry must be married within the context of the Eucharist (Mass). If one of those to be married is not a Catholic, the couple may request that the Mass be celebrated at the wedding, but it is an option. It is important for these couples to seriously consider this matter. There are compelling reasons why an interfaith couple may not choose to request Mass. Among these is so that non-Catholic family and friends may fully follow and participate in the celebration of marriage. Because it would not be appropriate for any non-Catholics present, including the bride or

groom, to receive Holy Communion, it is appropriate that at a celebration of unity our divisions not be highlighted.

Other Considerations:

The Entrance Procession: There can be an entrance procession similar to that observed at Sunday Mass whereby the congregation is asked to stand and sing an entrance song while the wedding party and ministers enter, usually in pairs (including the parents and bride and groom). Some brides are escorted down the aisle by their mother and father. At some weddings, the attendants are escorted down the entire aisle, at others only part way, meeting the groomsmen at the center. In any case, the matter of an entrance is left to the discretion of the couple after consultation with the priest/deacon.

Offertory Procession: If the Mass is celebrated at your wedding, you may choose to ask some family members or friends to bring to the altar the bread and the wine, or any gift you are giving to the parish. This may include as few as two and as many as four people. Those bringing the gifts need not be Catholic.

A Symbolic Offering For the Poor: A praiseworthy custom at weddings is for the bride and groom to present some symbolic gift for the poor. Since Saint Thomas More Parish participates in the St. Winifred Food Pantry, this custom usually takes the form of a basket of canned goods or non-perishable items being carried with the bread and wine at the offertory procession or other appropriate time within the ceremony.

Exchange of Peace: Even If the Mass is not celebrated at your wedding, you may wish to include some exchange of a sign of peace. If this be the case, some couples choose to present flowers at that time to their parents (and grandparents).

Flowers to the Blessed Virgin Mary: An ancient Catholic wedding custom is the presentation of flowers at an image of the Virgin Mary. This is because Mary had a wedding day as well, and the first miracle of Jesus was performed at a wedding through Mary's intercession. If Mass is part of the wedding, this custom is observed following Communion. If Mass is not part of the ceremony, it may be included shortly before the conclusion of the ceremony. The bride usually performs this gesture accompanied by her new husband.

Guest Celebrants: Some couples ask a bishop/priest/deacon (relative or special friend) other than ones assigned to the parish to be the official witness at their wedding. When initial contact is made with the parish, please indicate your intention to do so. That bishop/priest/deacon should then contact Saint Thomas More Parish. The guest bishop/priest/deacon, then, is expected to handle all the details of the wedding including obtaining the required documents, completing the required forms, insuring that the couple is properly instructed, conducting the rehearsal and the wedding and submitting the papers to the parish following the wedding. The bishop/priest/deacon must be in good standing with the Church and if not from the Diocese of Pittsburgh must present proper documentation of good standing.

Photography: You are welcome to have a photographer take pictures and/or make a videotape of the wedding provided that there are no distractions during the liturgy. The operative principle is that the church is first and foremost a house of prayer and not a photography studio. Please ask that the photographer introduce him/herself to the celebrant before the wedding and become familiar with any local restrictions that may apply. Taking pictures in the sanctuary following the wedding is permitted provided that the church is able to be prepared for the parish Mass.

Music at the Wedding Ceremony: Music is an important part of the celebration of marriage. It should not, however, overshadow the essential element of the commitment of the bride and groom to each other. The director of the music ministry here at Saint Thomas More Parish is Mr. Nathan Bellas. Mr. Bellas should be contacted (at 412-833-0031 x242) a few months in advance of the wedding to arrange appropriate music for the ceremony. Mr. Bellas is fully aware of the music selections appropriate for liturgical usage and expression of the Christian vision of marriage. A parish cantor well-versed in proper liturgical singing will be provided. A guest soloist is permitted to sing one or two pieces in consultation with Mr. Bellas. The organist does not regularly attend the wedding rehearsal. If a guest soloist or instrumentalist is involved, one rehearsal with that person may need to be scheduled prior to the wedding day. Every effort will be made within the boundaries of good liturgy to make the musical part of your wedding both beautiful and memorable.

Crash: Wedding crash can often be a tripping hazard, especially for the elderly. Wedding crash are not permitted at St. Thomas More.

Flowers: Flowers have traditionally been a part of the wedding ceremony. If you choose to have flowers purchased for use at your wedding, arrangements should be made with the florist of your choice. Two large floral arrangements are permitted in the sanctuary. Please inform the florist that no arrangements may be placed on the altar of sacrifice. The couple must leave flowers in the church following the wedding because once used in the liturgy they cannot be used elsewhere, and as a gift to the people of the parish. The church will be available for florist preparations one hour prior to the time of the wedding. Because of other parish activities, this time frame needs to be maintained.

Unity Candle: The use of a "unity candle" (a set of three candles) has become popular within the wedding liturgy. Two of these candles are lit before the ceremony, at times by the mothers of the bride and groom. Within the Rite of Marriage, the bride and groom light one large "wedding candle". The symbolism is that two candles (*representing the baptism of the bride and groom*) are now joined into one (*representing the Sacrament of Marriage*). If you choose to utilize this rite, please bring the unity candle to the church at the time of the rehearsal. The parish will provide the stand and the smaller candles. If each of the couple still have their baptismal candle, these work very well as the smaller candles.

Post-Wedding Customs: The throwing of rice, confetti, bird seed or rose petals in the church or anywhere on church property is not permitted. Neither are bubbles permitted, or dove releases.

Receiving Lines: Due to time constraints, receiving lines should be held at the location of the reception rather than at the back of church. The parish Mass is scheduled following your wedding and you must leave the church in time for preparations for this celebration.

Additional Aspects: If you would like to include any other features in your wedding, they must be discussed with the priest/deacon beforehand.

Suggested Offerings: The following should be used as a guideline for use of the church and staff:

Donation to Church	\$500.00 – Check payable to STM
Donation to Priest/Deacon	\$100.00 – Payable to celebrant
Altar Servers (2)	\$20.00/each - cash please
Wedding Coordinator	\$60.00 - cash please

Fees:

Music Director	\$250.00 – Payable to Nathan Bellas
Parish Cantor	\$150.00 – Payable to Cantor

If you are not a registered active member of the parish an additional fee of \$500 is requested for the upkeep and care of the parish facilities.

PLEASE submit all offerings to the Parish Office
2 weeks before the wedding in order that they may be
distributed the day of the ceremony.

Altar Servers: Altar servers will be provided by the church unless the couple has a family member or family friend who they wish to do this. If so, please advise the parish office.

Rehearsal: Usually a rehearsal is conducted the evening before the wedding at 5:30pm. The time is set after consultation with the priest. It is the couple's responsibility to insure that the wedding party is on time for the rehearsal. The marriage license and rings should be brought to the rehearsal and given to the priest/deacon to be kept in our sacristy safe.

Reception of the Eucharist: It is the directive of the Catholic Church that only Catholics may approach the table of the Lord to receive Holy Communion. We look forward to the day when all Christians will unite around one table.

Wedding Party: The attendants should arrive at the church no later than one half hour before the scheduled time of the wedding. The groom and best man should go directly to the sacristy. Please do not bring any food or beverages into the church. **The consumption of alcohol is prohibited on church property. Any member of the wedding party who consumes alcohol on the day of the wedding prior to the ceremony cannot participate as a member of the wedding party.**

Seating of Guests: Ushers should promptly escort guests to their seats. Because the church is a house of prayer, please be respectful in the vestibule. The mothers of the groom and then the bride should be seated a few minutes before the wedding is scheduled to begin. This should not be delayed to seat those who arrive late. Any guests arriving late will be directed toward the side aisles.

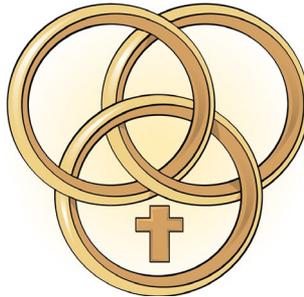
Marriage License: A Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Marriage License is required for any marriage taking place in Saint Thomas More Church. This license can be obtained from any county license bureau within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Pew Bows & Accessories: Pew bows are permitted. They must be secured with ribbon or rubber bands only. No thumb tacks, tape or clip on holders are permitted. Please inform the wedding coordinator if any pew bows, flowers, or other accessories that are to be kept as keepsakes. Any items left behind after a wedding will be disposed of immediately.

LIFE AFTER THE WEDDING

Catholics relate to Christ's universal Church as members of a parish. Saint Thomas More Parish strives to be of support to its newly married parishioners in various ways. If you will be living within the Saint Thomas More Parish area after your wedding and are not currently registered as a parishioner, we would love to have you join our faith community. Please stop by the Parish Office or visit stmpgh.org to register.

You are valuable to the life of Saint Thomas More Parish. If the parish priests or parish staff can be of assistance to you in any way after your wedding, please do not hesitate to contact us at the Rectory at: 412-833-0031.



Notes

