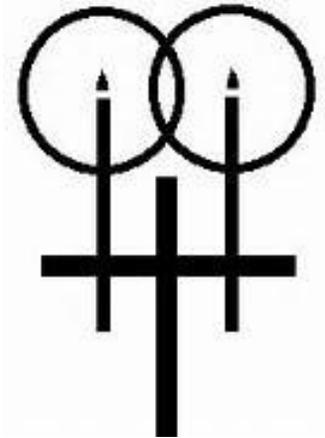


CELEBRATING THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

POLICIES & GUIDELINES



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MOTHER OF SORROWS CHURCH
MURRYSVILLE, PA

Preparing for Marriage

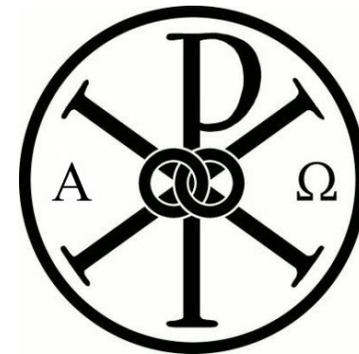
The Catholic Church traditionally has had a great concern that engaged couples have the opportunity to grow in God's gift of love that they pledge to each other on their wedding day. Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage aims to assist couples in developing a fuller understanding of the unique nature of the marriage covenant.

Marriage is one of the seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church, a "sacrament of vocation." It celebrates God's summons to the engaged couple to form a permanent "community of life and love" together, patterned on the love of Christ revealed in the Gospel. Marital love is a sharing in Christ's total and unconditional love for His Bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:25). Christ's fidelity to us is expressed in His suffering, death and resurrection. It is love without limits.

Marriage preparation at Mother of Sorrows Church aims to help engaged couples reflect upon their marriage commitment as a part of God's unique plan for their life together. Time is therefore required to consider the various aspects of marriage, to better understand the profound meaning of the marriage vows, to complete the necessary marriage forms and records, and to plan the wedding liturgy. Ideally, marriage preparation should begin at least one year from the date of the wedding.



- **Marriage License.** A Pennsylvania Marriage License is required by state law. The license is issued by the County Clerk of the Orphan's Court Office and is valid for 60 days. **The couple should present the marriage license to the parish office before the rehearsal so that it can be completed and given to the married couple after the wedding.**
- **Sacrament of Penance.** Catholics who come to the Church for Sacramental Marriage should be in the "state of grace," i.e. be free of serious sin. Therefore, couples and the wedding party are encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) prior to and in preparation for the wedding day. Plan to take care of this before the rehearsal.
- **Wedding Fees.** Mother of Sorrows Church provides the Church facilities without charge for registered parishioners who marry at the Church. It is customary, however, to provide a stipend (or "fee for service") for parish staff persons who assist the couple to prepare and plan for marriage and/or who assist in the marriage ceremony. This information will be given to the couple when the wedding date is confirmed



Requirements for Marriage

- **Altar Decorations.** The couple ordinarily provides flowers for the altar. These altar flowers are then left after the wedding as a gift to the Church. Special arrangements for aisle bows or flowers should be made with the wedding coordinator.
- **Throwing rice, etc.** Objects such as rice, rose petals, confetti, birdseed, oatmeal, bubbles, balloons etc., may not be used on Church premises. Please plan and advise all guests accordingly.
- **Use of Church after the Wedding.** The wedding party has use of the Church for 1½ hours from the scheduled time of the wedding. Thus, 2:30 p.m. wedding parties should plan to leave the Church premises by 4:00 p.m. The couple has the option of using the time following the wedding either for a receiving line or for taking pictures.
- **Aisle Runner.** The use of an aisle runner for the main aisle of the Church is not permitted.
- **Unity Candle.** The use of a Unity Candle is not a primary Catholic liturgical symbol in itself and is not necessary during the liturgy. However, it is permitted.
- **Wedding Rehearsal.** The Wedding Coordinator will conduct the rehearsal. All those participating in the wedding ceremony should be present for the rehearsal, unless special circumstances apply. They should be present early enough so that the rehearsal can begin and end punctually.

Before a date is confirmed for a wedding, the following matters are thoroughly reviewed:

- **Freedom to marry.** Each party must establish that he/she is free to marry, i.e. that neither party is bound by any previous marriage bond. (For those who have been previously married, the priest will review the documentation of any previous marriage to determine whether or not the marriage bond is valid according to Church law.) Freedom also means that there is no force or coercion on either party to enter into marriage.
- **Church affiliation and practice of the Catholic faith.** At least one of the Catholic parties must belong to Mother of Sorrows Church. A Catholic party from another parish must have his/her pastor's permission in order to be married at Mother of Sorrows Church. It is assumed that engaged couples are practicing their faith and seeking to grow spiritually as they approach the Sacrament of Marriage.
- **Intention and Maturity.** The vows of marriage express an unconditional love and commitment to a life-long and exclusive marital covenant. The couple must demonstrate an understanding of the meaning of fidelity and sufficient maturity to enter into a permanent marital bond.
- **Parenting.** Children are the natural outgrowth of the love of husband and wife. Both parties must express their openness to the procreation and nurturing of children as part of their marriage covenant. In the case of an inter-faith wedding, the Catholic party is asked to assume responsibility for baptizing and raising the child in the Catholic faith.

Planning the Wedding: Policies

- **Required Documents.** Catholic parties are to present a recently issued copy (not more than six months old) of their baptism certificate. For those baptized at Mother of Sorrows Church, this record will be in the Baptism Register in the parish office. Catholics baptized elsewhere should contact the Church of Baptism and request a new copy of their baptism record. For those who are not Catholic, a certificate of Baptism from their Church of Baptism must be presented. A notification of the marriage will be sent to the Catholic party's Church of Baptism after the wedding.
- **Dispensations.** A dispensation or permission from the Bishop must be granted for a Catholic to marry a person who is not Catholic. In this case, the Catholic party is asked to promise to continue in the Catholic faith and to assume responsibility for the sacramental preparation and religious education and formation of children in the Catholic faith.

Steps in the Process

- First Interview with Priest-wedding date confirmed
- FOCCUS—Communication inventory is taken
- Second Interview with Priest to review FOCCUS
- Marriage Preparation with Sponsor Couple (or other program, e.g. Engaged Encounter Weekend)
- Appointment with Music Director to plan wedding liturgy
- Third Interview with Priest - to complete marriage forms
- Wedding Ceremony Review (if necessary)
- Wedding Rehearsal

- **The Wedding Liturgy.** If both parties are Catholic, the wedding liturgy will normally take place within the Mass. If one party is not Catholic or not baptized, the wedding is celebrated “Outside of Mass.”
- **Date and Time of Weddings.** The usual time for weddings on Saturdays is 2:30 p.m. Friday or weekday evening wedding times may be scheduled around the parish calendar. The time allotted for the use of the Church is 1½ hours from the time of the wedding.
- **Planning Wedding Music.** An appointment should be made with the Director of Music and Liturgy at Mother of Sorrows Church to plan the wedding liturgy. The director serves as organist for weddings and will coordinate the hiring of additional musicians as necessary.
- **Photography/Videography.** These professionals are asked to respect the Church as a sacred space for worship. They must check with the priest and the wedding coordinator regarding appropriate rules and regulations when they arrive prior to the wedding.
- **Smoking, Drinking and Food.** Smoking is not permitted within the Church building, including sacristies and restrooms. Alcoholic beverages are not permitted on Church grounds. (Photographers may not stage wedding pictures in which alcoholic beverages are used either in the Church or on parish grounds.)