

St. Louis Bertrand Catholic Church

MARRIAGE PREPARATION AND WEDDING GUIDELINES

(Revised December 2019)

About Marriage and Matrimony

Many blessings on you as you move toward becoming married. Marriage is both a natural and a sacred institution—natural, follows from our nature as male and female, and sacred, because in the Christian dispensation Christ has blessed it by making it a sacrament of his Church. The Lord Jesus confirms marriage's goodness from the beginning by quoting Scripture: *for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh*. Just how two become one is mysterious, but married couples discover its truth, when they live according to God's plan. The two persons who marry do not lose their individual identities, nor do their bodies become physically fused together, but there is a deep convergence of purposes and loves between spouses that makes this love unique among all human loves, and persevering through many trials together, husband and wife become better people. Two spouses also become one flesh in the offspring of their love, their own children, who become an incarnational fulfillment of Scripture's prophetic words.

All marriages are indissoluble, by nature. When two baptized persons marry, their marriage is a *sacrament*, meaning it is a source of divine grace for the married couple. Christian marriage is specifically referred to as *Holy Matrimony*. A marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian can be valid and good, but of itself it does not confer grace. A marriage between two baptized Christians does exactly that.

Who can be married at Saint Louis Bertrand Church?

At least one member of a couple wishing to marry here must be an active (regularly attending) member of St. Louis Bertrand's, and that for at least one year. Those who were raised in the parish but since have moved to another parish, as well as children of parishioners, may also marry here, with the permission of their current pastors and a letter of good standing from him.

Whose marriage?

It's your marriage, of course, but also God's, and the Church's. The Catholic Church has a very rich body of doctrine concerning marriage and human love and sexuality—one of the reasons for parish marriage preparation is to impart that knowledge to you as best we can in the days leading up to your marriage. Bride and groom marry each other; they are the co-ministers of marriage (the priest or deacon is present in order to ensure that the couple are adequately instructed in the nature of marriage and that the ceremony is done properly). You promise each other lasting love and fidelity. You do this before God, the priest of the Church, and the Church itself. The Church has both the duty and the joy of transmitting to couples being married the mind of Christ as to what marriage is. And individual parishes have their own particular policies based on what works and doesn't work. It may not seem obvious why so much is needed to prepare for marriage. But there's a difference between wedding prep and

marriage prep. The ceremony is important, but it only lasts an hour, at most, and is easy to plan. Marriage is until death, and you have no idea what your future brings. Marriage preparation in the Church is aimed at preparing to you stay together no matter what happens in you future life together.

What must be the intentions for those entering marriage?

Permanence: Each partner to the marriage must intend to enter a permanent marriage, i.e., until death. No divorce and remarriage may be envisioned during the lifetime of either party. Most prenuptial agreements invalidate marriage.

Fidelity: The couple must intend fidelity to each other.

Offspring: The mutual love of the couple must welcome the birth and education of children according to the law of Christ and His Church. Contraception and sterilization are grave evils. They are wrong by nature and against the law of God and His Church. Moreover, statistics show that marriages in which contraception is habitually used frequently end in divorce. Natural family planning, properly understood, is permissible.

Must Catholics marry other Catholics?

No, Catholics may marry baptized non-Catholics (these are called “mixed” marriages) and even non-baptized persons (“disparity of worship” marriages). While it is ideal for Catholics to marry those who share worship and their understanding of human existence (and the afterlife) with those they marry, marriage of its nature does not demand both parties to share the same faith. In the early Church, marriages between believers and unbelievers was the norm, and also a wonderful opportunity for virtuous Christians to make converts of their spouses. Permission or dispensation for these marriages can be arranged by the priest. The Catholic spouse has the responsibility to have the children baptized and brought up to practice the Catholic faith. You are urged to discuss candidly any concerns you may have with the priest.

Cohabitation (Living together before marriage)

Living together before marriage is profoundly damaging to your relationship both before and after your marriage. It is also gravely sinful, and obviously incompatible with the Christian understanding of marriage and sex. These days “living together” is as common among Catholics as it is among non-Catholics, but until quite recently it was seen by practically everyone to be personally and socially harmful. It also calls into question the understanding of the true nature of Christian marriage. It involves the sin of scandal, i.e., suggesting to family and friends that such an arrangement is acceptable as a Christian practice, further eroding a true sense of good and evil. Cohabiting couples wishing to marry at St. Louis Bertrand should make arrangements to live separately for the duration of the engagement. If you’ve made a mistake in moving in together, you don’t have to persist in that mistake. You can undo the harm that’s been done to yourselves and your family by giving witness to the truth and

living the way Christ expects for his people. For those who claim there's no way to do that, there's always a way, because God never asks the impossible. Have an open talk with the priest preparing you about possible remedies.

Witnesses (Best Man and Maid of Honor)

A Catholic must be married in the presence of a priest or deacon and two other witnesses. The groom's witness and all his party must be men. The bride's witness and all her party must be women. Your witnesses need not be Catholic.

Mass or without Mass?

If both parties are practicing Catholics, you may ask for a nuptial Mass (though you may celebrate it without a Mass also). When one of the parties is a non-Catholic, a Mass would be inappropriate for the simple reason that non-Catholics may not receive the Eucharist, and so the note of unity is squelched at the very center of the service. Quite unsuitable for a ceremony meant to signify the unity of the couple.

Date and time of wedding

Weddings are typically celebrated Saturdays at 2:00 p.m. For good reason, weddings may be scheduled on other days of the week (excluding Fridays and Sundays). Only the pastor can approve dates. Large expenses should not be incurred until the date has been set and approved by the priest. **NOTE:** If you make any changes to your wedding plans that affect the church, let us know.

Wedding rehearsals are typically held on the evening (usually Friday) before the wedding, at 6:30. Allow one hour for the rehearsal, and please urge the members of your wedding party to be punctual. Only those who have some function in the ceremony should attend the rehearsal, and things go much more smoothly and briskly when only they are there. Small children should not attend the rehearsal.

Elements of Marriage Preparation

The working relationship between the couple and the priest must be honest and, as appropriate, confidential. Please advise parents and friends that you alone will be working out all of the details of the wedding ceremony with the priest. You're adults making an adult life decision. The priests cannot make decisions in dialogue with your parents. In accordance with standard Catholic guidelines, you should arrange to meet with the pastor at least six months prior to the anticipated date of the wedding. (If you live out of state we will try to help you receive the marriage preparation you need with the help of priests in your area.)

A parish wedding assistant will be assigned to you as the wedding date draws near to help with the rehearsal and the wedding ceremony, as well as other preparations leading up to the day of the wedding. Any additional wedding coordinator you may wish to hire will deal with the reception or other aspects of your wedding day. The parish wedding assistant will handle all that happens at the church.

Meetings with priest: The couple will meet with one of the priests of St. Louis Bertrand for four to six sessions during the period of preparation.

Meetings with mentor couple: The pastor will assign you to a mentor couple. You will meet with them at least twice during your engagement.

Foundation for Marriage: You must attend one of the Foundation for Marriage Saturdays sponsored by the Archdiocese of Louisville. See: archlou.org/foundation-for-marriage/. The parish should be sent a certificate of your attendance. This is a day full of very good and practical stuff for your marriage.

Natural Family Planning (NFP): You will receive instruction in NFP. This will require multiple meetings with an instructor, and there is a fee involved (the parish will cover 50% of the fee). The meetings will need to be closely spaced, and will go on for 2-3 months. It would be wise to get started on this training as soon as possible. There are different methods of NFP, involving different kinds of measurement for determining ovulation: the two most common methods are called the sympto-thermal method and the Creighton method. Please contact one of these instructors:

- Tom and Teresa Knight, (502) 366-0938 or (502) 208-2343 (sympto-thermal method)
- Katie Parris, (321) 615-4674 or keparris@gmail.com (Creighton method)

(Note: Katie Parris will be unavailable for NFP instruction until May 2020. Those interested in Creighton method may contact Rita Johnson at littlekerrysacres@gmail.com or through her website: naturalfertilitycare.org. She is willing to meet you in person or online.)

They will send us a certificate when your NFP instruction is completed.

Study: The priest preparing you will ask you to read certain books or articles, and also to watch certain helpful videos, then discuss together, and then discuss further with the priest.

Prayer and Sacraments: Above all, you need to be attending Mass regularly (i.e., at least Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation), and are urged to go to Confession frequently during your engagement, and especially to make a confession just before the wedding. The priests and mentor couples to help prepare you for marriage, but the Holy Spirit is the principal director and guide in the Christian life, and is the only One who can provide the light and resolve you need in making a momentous decision like marriage.

We realize this is a good deal of preparation for your wedding, and will require a sizable investment of your time. But marriage is for life, and difficulties in marriage come soon. To help you weather the storms of life, and to help you hear the voice of the Lord as you live out your marriage, all these are necessary, deeply enriching, and essential for entering the new life you will be leading.

All of the above elements must be completed prior to the wedding. You should check with

the priest preparing you to make sure everything is in order before your invitations are sent and final preparations are made.

What Church documents are needed?

A Baptismal document of recent issue: For Catholics, the baptismal certificate must be dated no more than six months prior to the date of marriage. They should be obtained from the parish where you were baptized. Please ask the parish to send it directly to St. Louis Bertrand Church, not to you. If you were baptized here, we have your records already. Please ask that all “notations” are indicated; a certificate without “notations” is incomplete. A copy of the certificate you or your parents have won’t do—it has to be newly issued. If you have trouble getting this, please let us know and we can assist.

An affidavit establishing freedom to marry for each party to the marriage. The priest who is preparing you for marriage will provide the form to be used. You need someone who has known you all your life who can swear on your behalf that you have never been married previously (or, if you have, you need to produce either a death certificate or a decree of nullity by the Church). One of your parents is the best person to do this. In lieu of a parent, anyone can do this who has known you at least since you have entered majority.

A certificate of attendance at the Foundation for Marriage Saturday is required (they normally send those to us after you attend).

What civil documents are needed?

A Kentucky marriage license, which you can obtain at any County Clerk’s office in the state. It expires after 30 days. Under no circumstances can the wedding take place without the civil marriage license. The marriage license should be delivered to the priest at or before the rehearsal.

Sacred demeanor, dress, and respect for Catholic sensibilities

Since the Lord is present in the Blessed Sacrament, please demonstrate your respect for Catholic sensibilities through hushed conversations and subdued actions when inside the church building. In keeping with appropriate standards of decorum, there is to **be absolutely no** drinking or even the possession of alcohol in the church building or anywhere on the church property. No one in the wedding party (especially the couple and their witnesses) should consume any alcohol the day of the wedding prior to the service. **If any alcohol is found on premises at a wedding, or signs of drinking are evident on the part of the couple or their entourage, the service will be immediately cancelled.** (The same obviously goes for the possession or use of drugs on church property by any of the wedding party.)

While the parish has no particular demands with regard to dress, there are certain principles we expect to be observed, and some types of dress are clearly out of line. Couples are expected to choose attire that reflects the beauty and sacredness of the occasion. Bridal gowns and bridesmaids’ dresses should avoid low necklines, high open seams in the skirt, and

uncovered shoulders and backs, etc. Tattoos should be concealed. Groom and groomsmen should wear suits or tuxedos suitable for a religious service. Your choices should reflect the dignity of Christian marriage. Dress at the rehearsal should also be modest, though not formal. Jeans, shorts, t-shirts, flip-flops, strapless or spaghetti-strap dresses, or short dresses and skirts are inappropriate in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

Planning the Ceremony

- The priest preparing you will work with you in planning your ceremony. Within the limits of the ritual of the Church, you can choose selected Scriptural passages and prayers.
- Please do not print ceremony programs before clearing the music selections and other liturgical details with the priest officiating your wedding and the Music Director (more on music below). We have wedding assistants who can assist you in drafting the ceremony program.
- The Unity Candle is not used at St. Louis Bertrand Church, as it liturgically inappropriate. We suggest the reception as a more suitable venue for the unity candle, if you want one.
- Ring-bearers and flower girls should not be less than seven years of age. If they are younger than seven, please have an adult escort the children down the aisle.
- During the ceremony no members of your wedding party are to enter the sanctuary (except, e.g., if the bride needs assistance from the Maid of Honor or a groomsman brings up the rings). Since bride and groom are the ministers of marriage, they alone take a place in the sanctuary. During the exchange of vows wedding party members remain in their pews.

Who may receive Holy Communion?

At a nuptial Mass, practicing Catholics will be invited to receive Holy Communion. Non-Catholics or Catholics unable to receive Communion will be invited to join us in prayer. The priest will handle this delicately and with charity. Non-Catholics are most welcome to attend the Mass but may not receive Holy Communion. **It is wise to take this into consideration when you are deciding whether or not to have a nuptial Mass: even if both parties to the marriage are Catholic, if most of your wedding party and other guests are not Catholic, it can be very awkward and painful.**

Dressing facilities

As there are no changing rooms at the church, the couple and all members of the wedding party **must arrive at the church dressed for the wedding. The bride and bridesmaids may gather in the Heritage Room in the Parish Center for final preparations one hour before the ceremony** (i.e., 1:00 p.m. normally). Groom and groomsmen may gather in the servers' sacristy on the south side of the sanctuary. St. Louis Bertrand Church cannot be responsible for any lost items.

Flowers and church decorations

Flowers. Please contact the wedding assistant assigned to you (call the Parish office to find

out who that is) to discuss the details of flower delivery and arrangements. Flowers should be delivered before 1:00 pm on the day of the wedding, but be careful not to disrupt the church between 11:00 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., i.e., during Confessions and noon Mass.

Flowers may be placed at the steps at the base of the cross but may never obscure the pulpit or Altar. The Baptismal Font is reserved for the Sacrament of Baptism. Flowers may be placed on the floor in front or back of the font, but never on the font. The florist is responsible for removal of all boxes, paper and other debris related to the flowers.

Decorations. Aisle runners are not permitted due to the danger of slippage on the floor. Rice, birdseed, confetti, glitter, real or artificial flower petals, and balloons are not permitted. Flower girls may carry flowers, but not scatter the petals. Bows may be attached to the pews with ribbons, but not with pins, wires, hooks or tape, lest they scratch or mar the wooden pews. Entrances to individual rows may not be cordoned off. Decorations on the pews need to be removed immediately after the wedding. The hand railings in front of Church must have no decorations of any kind due to safety issues. Candelabras or other additional candles are not permitted.

Music

The music accompanying the ceremony should reflect the sacred character of Divine worship according to Catholic faith. All music should be sacred or of a classical variety that is liturgy-friendly (composed for liturgical use). Secular music, popular music, folk music, or anything operatic is not suitable for Catholic worship. Recorded music is strictly prohibited.

All music arrangements for Saint Catherine Church must be made through the Music Director (call the Parish secretary for details). Even if you have your own musicians, you must go through the Parish Music Director for approval. Forms to assist you in planning the music under the guidance of Choir Director are available in the Parish Office.

Altar servers

If you would like an altar boy to serve, please discuss this with the priest. A small monetary gift for their services is appropriate and should be given to them prior to the wedding ceremony.

Photography and video equipment

A good professional photographer will understand our insistence on proper reverence during the wedding. The use of "flash" or strobe/movie lights is strictly prohibited during the ceremony.

Prior to the ceremony, photographers and videographers may take shots from the interior of the church. During the ceremony, all photography and videography must be done from the choir loft—no exceptions. Photographers and videographers may never enter the sanctuary of the church (i.e., they must remain pew-level, never on any of the steps leading up to the

altar or around the altar). The priest or wedding assistant should be consulted to make sure everyone is on the same page.

Members of the congregation should not take photographs or video during the ceremony. The church is not a studio. Loud talking and boisterous laughter are inappropriate in church at all times. Please be as subdued and efficient as possible with photography after the ceremony. A wedding is a joyful occasion, but the church is sacred space.

Housekeeping

Please make sure that packaging materials and other throwaways are properly disposed of after the Ceremony. We have no janitorial services on weekends so we need your help to keep the church clean. Be sure to remove your signs, balloons, etc. from outside the church.

Tossing of rice, birdseed, confetti, flowers, etc. will not be allowed either inside or outside the church. No balloons can be released after weddings. Your security deposit (see below) could be forfeit for failure to observe these policies.

Fees

A stipend of \$750 is usually requested of parishioners. Non-parishioners pay a fee of \$1,700. A date for your wedding can only be reserved once the fee is paid. If you cancel your service with three months' notice you will receive a full refund of this fee. Otherwise, you will receive a refund of half the fee.

Acknowledgement of Intention to Adhere to Wedding Guidelines

We have read the wedding guidelines for Saint Catherine Catholic Church and will comply with all policies and directives listed therein. We understand the wedding could be canceled for failure to adhere to these guidelines.

Bride

Groom

Date

THIS MUST BE SIGNED BEFORE WEDDING IS SCHEDULED.