

St. Peter in Chains Church

Hamilton, Ohio

Wedding Guidelines

Revised December 16th, 2011

**“By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligations, they are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ, who fills their whole lives with faith, hope, and charity.”
Familiaris Consortio, 56**

Congratulations on your engagement and upcoming marriage! Know that the people of St. Peter in Chains will be praying for you as you prepare for the Sacrament of Marriage. We at St Peter in Chains certainly want to do all we can to assure that your wedding will be a happy and memorable occasion. We wish to support you in this part of your journey of faith. Married couples are a sacramental sign to the world of God's love and faithfulness. We are thankful that you will be this sign for us.

To be married in the Church is a sign to the community at large that the bride and groom are persons of faith and they wish God's blessing on their marriage. Your desire for a church wedding should reflect your commitment to your Christian faith and the practice of your Christian faith.

The Church's hope for married couples is that they and the entire community of believers find in marriage a “Specific source and original means of sanctification” with an assurance of peace happiness and permanence. (Familiaris Consortio, 56)

Because marriage is such an important and sacred step in your lives, it is essential there be some form of reflective preparation. This preparation is a discernment process in which the irrevocable consent of the sacrament may be freely chosen, maturely considered, and clearly understood. Here at St. Peter in Chains we want to help you in preparing for marriage. Please be sure to read **all** of the wedding guidelines. **Remember, the wedding is one day; marriage is for a life time.**

Marriage preparation is essential for entering into the Sacrament of Marriage. Marriage preparation is not a series of hoops to jump through. Rather, the process is intended to help couples prepare for a life long healthy and happy marriage.

**Marriage is a life long process, an unfolding of the mystery of God's working in our lives. The wedding is the event that celebrates within the faith community, the formal and public declaration of this process
(Marriage Preparation Guidelines Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Family Life Office)**

The marriage preparation process begins by meeting with a priest or deacon. Once the initial meeting has taken place then a date can be set for a wedding. **Note: priority of date will be given to parishioners over non-parishioners. No dates will be set until the initial meeting occurs.** The first meeting will usually take about two hours. During this meeting basic information will be gathered. (Names, addresses, phone numbers, birthdates, places of baptism

names of parents) The couple will be asked how they met and their journey to engagement. During this meeting the priest or deacon will review basic Catholic teachings with the couple. The priest or deacon will administer what is called the FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication Understanding & Study). Some think of this as a test, rather it is a tool to help couples fully discuss pertinent issues as they relate to marriage. You will be asked to answer a number of statements regarding attitudes toward many aspects of married life such as finances, values, and attitudes.

Couples preparing for marriage may also be asked to meet with a mentor couple as they prepare for marriage. In other parishes the couple preparing for marriage finds this very helpful.

The priest or deacon will meet with the engaged couple a number of times to share in a conversation about the FOCCUS results. The number of meetings will be determined based on the maturity of the couple and the results of the FOCCUS. The final meeting with the priest or deacon will be to plan the Wedding Liturgy.

Couples preparing for marriage are also required to participate in Engaged Encounter Weekend. Engaged Encounter allows a couple to have an entire weekend to focus on each other and reflect on the true meaning of marriage. The priest or deacon will provide information on this marriage preparation ministry.

Theology of the Body and Natural Family Planning formation is also a requirement for marriage preparation. Ruah Woods Center in Cincinnati teaches Theology of the Body from Pope John Paul II. The program consists of a Friday evening and all day Saturday. The priest or deacon will provide information on this marriage ministry. Arrangements for payment of fee is to be made with Ruah Woods.

Natural Family Planning is taught by Rebecca Ramsey RN, BSN, FCPI. Information will be provided by the priest or deacon. Arrangements for payment of fee is to be made with Rebecca Ramsey.

Couples who are living in another part of the country may not be able to attend these marriage preparation programs. In such cases the couple will need to make arrangements to participate in similar programs where they live. The priest or deacon can be helpful in this situation.

Sometimes a couple approaches the Church for marriage and one party is not Catholic. The Church welcomes both of you as you prepare for marriage. Weddings between a Catholic and a non-Catholic are celebrated in the church as a Wedding Liturgy outside of Mass. The liturgy will still be beautiful. The Catholic party does sign a statement promising to continue in the practice of the faith and to raise the children as Catholics.

Sometimes a couple approaches the Church for marriage in the later years of life. Perhaps this is because of the death of a previous spouse or simply marrying for the first time later in life. The priest or deacon will handle these situations on a case by case basis with regard to marriage preparation programs.

Sometimes couples approach the Church about their marriage being blessed by the Church after having been married in another church or by a "justice of the peace." Common law arrangements in some states may even be considered a marriage. This process is called a Con-Validation. The

couple will be expected to take the FOCCUS, Engaged Encounter, and NFP. The Con-Validation is generally a simple ceremony.

Divorce is an unfortunate reality in a fallen world. Sometimes the Church grants a declaration of nullity in certain cases. Thus, a person is allowed to marry in the Church. When one or both members of the couple are divorced the marriage preparation process and the setting of a date cannot occur until a declaration of nullity has been granted. There is a special Cana-II program for couples entering into a second marriage.

There is no easy way to address the issue of “cohabitation;” the practice of unmarried couples living together. Today, it is not unusual for couples to be living together in what is most often a public affair. Yet, it is a serious moral wrong in the eyes of the Church, and it is a challenging issue for couples preparing for the sacrament of marriage. When couples that are living together present themselves to the Church for marriage, it is an opportunity for reconciliation and we warmly welcome them into the community of faith.

So what’s the problem? As the age old saying goes, “Everybody’s doing it.” The Catholic Church has one overriding objective in ministering to engaged couples and that is to do everything possible to ensure that your marriage is **life-long**. The statistics on cohabitation and the impact it has on the failure rate of marriages are compelling. Because this is such an important matter and one that also effects the spiritual well being of the individual spouses, the couple and eventually the entire family unit, St Peter in Chains, in union with the teachings of the Catholic Church, follows a policy of strongly encouraging cohabitating couples to physically move apart (out of the same residence and sexually). If continuing to live in the same residence, due to financial constraints, you are strongly advised to live in abstinence.

Couples are strongly encouraged to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before the wedding and rehearsal date so that they may enter into this sacrament in a state of grace. Should couples not want to partake of the Lord’s mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation then perhaps the Wedding Liturgy should be celebrated outside of Mass. This entire approach has been found to be very effective and rewarding; and in our experience, the vast majority of couples are open and accepting of this request and expectations with regards to cohabitation. Whatever your decision for moving in together, the reality is that this time of preparation for your marriage in the Catholic Church, and for the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony is a vastly different and sacred time, and cohabitation simply shouldn’t be a part of this process. The priest or deacon will be discussing this matter with you in greater detail during your preparation meetings.

Each couple entering into marriage is a unique couple. The priest or deacon helping a couple to prepare for marriage has the responsibility and the right to ask the couple to participate in other marriage preparation programs if needed. Finally, the priest or deacon can refuse to marry a couple if he believes there are serious reasons as to why a couple should not be married in the Church. Hopefully, the couple would recognize this on their own before such decisions have to be made.

The Wedding Liturgy

The celebration of Christian Marriage within the context of a liturgy has a long tradition in the Catholic Church. **The Wedding Liturgy as well as all liturgies are sacred and belong to the entire Church.** Therefore it is important that the Wedding Liturgy reflect what we believe about

the beauty of marriage and its relationship to Jesus Christ and His Church; and that this relationship is the **central focus** of the Wedding Liturgy.

Who is involved in the planning of the Wedding Liturgy?

The priest or deacon will plan the liturgy directly with the couple. The music director will plan the music directly with the couple. The priest, deacon or music director will not plan the Wedding Liturgy with other family members or friends. We will work directly with the couple. Please share this with your family to prevent any confusion.

Wedding Liturgy Times

Wedding Liturgy times are at either **1:30 pm or 6:30 pm on Saturday**. Only **one** wedding will be allowed each Saturday. (Please note that **Wedding Masses** celebrated at 6:30 pm on Saturday night must be the Sunday Liturgy since the Mass is taking place after the Vigil Mass for Sunday. The couple is permitted to substitute the second reading with a New Testament Reading from the Wedding Lectionary. This Wedding Mass fulfills the Sunday obligation.) The rehearsal is on Friday evening. The rehearsal may not begin any later than 5:30 pm due to parking issues with Bingo. Should a couple decide that they would like the Wedding to take place on Sunday at Mass, this would occur at the 11:00 am Mass. The Wedding Liturgy would be handled differently since it would take place during a regularly scheduled Mass. (This could become a normal practice in the future since we have fewer priests.) Since the church is already in use there will be no fees for the church, music, servers or wedding coordinators. The priest can be helpful in making a decision about this.

The Wedding Party

The members of the Wedding Party are determined by the couple. Please keep in mind that two people must serve as official witnesses. They must be of sound mind, of sufficient maturity and at least the age of fourteen. When selecting a flower girl or ring bearer please consider the age and attentiveness of the child. Please always designate a care taker should the child need special attention during the Wedding Liturgy. **It is important to note that members of the Wedding party including parents are not to have other roles in the liturgy such as a lector, cantor (Vocalist) or distributor of Holy Communion.**

The Wedding Procession

The Church envisions that the procession will begin with the servers, the priest or deacon, the wedding party, the parents and finally the Bride and Groom. The Bride and Groom coming in together expresses fully that the husband and wife are equal partners in the marriage. **However**, there has been a long tradition of the Bride being escorted by her father, and the Groom greeting the Bride and father. This tradition is **welcome** and it is for the couple to decide on the procession.

Lectors

The lectors are those who proclaim the Word of God; and read the petitions. Every Wedding Liturgy needs three lectors. For Wedding Liturgies at Mass the lectors must be Catholic. For

Wedding Liturgies outside of Mass the lectors do not have to be Catholic. Lectors will practice the readings and petitions during the Wedding Rehearsal.

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion assist in distributing the Body and Blood of Christ during a Wedding Mass. Three Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are needed. They must be practicing Catholics who regularly distribute at their own parish church. They must attend the Wedding Rehearsal.

Gift Bearers

For weddings that take place during Mass the couple should select two people to bring forth the bread and the wine that will be used for the celebration of the Eucharist.

Wedding Coordinators

The parish has wedding coordinators who assist during the Wedding Rehearsal and the day of the Wedding Liturgy. They can be helpful to the Bride and also assist with placing flowers.

Servers

The parish has servers available to assist at the Altar during a Wedding Mass. Servers from outside the parish are permitted, provided that they are practicing Catholics who regularly serve at their own parish church.

Music

Music at any worship service is integral to the purpose of the liturgy and should be chosen to express the fundamental understanding of the ceremony. However personally meaningful some music may be to the bride and groom, the principle that governs its usage is its sacredness and acceptability in the religious aspect of the wedding. Music that is not appropriate for the ceremony may be fine for the wedding reception. The parish Director of Music can be very helpful while also having the right and responsibility for judging the artistic quality of any suggested music. The decision of the music director shall be final.

You are **required** to have a meeting with St. Peter in Chains Director of Music, regardless of who is performing the music. He will help you plan appropriate music, and if you would like him to play at your wedding, a fee will be paid directly to him for his professional services.

Flowers

Flowers have always been a traditional decoration for a wedding ceremony. Keep in mind that during certain liturgical seasons, the church is already appropriately decorated with flowers. This is especially true during the Christmas and Easter seasons. No one may move any plants or flowers that are already in place. A fresh flower arrangement is permitted on the floor in front of the Altar. Flower arrangements are **not** permitted on the sides of the Altar. Flowers or other objects are **never** placed on the Altar. A fresh flower arrangement is also permitted on the floor in front of the Ambo. Flower arrangements in other areas of the sanctuary are not permitted. If

you wish to use flowers or greenery in the aisles or on the pews, your florist will need to provide whatever is needed to attach them to the pews (rubber-bands or ribbon). **No plastic clips, metal hooks, pipe-cleaners or tape may be used. No candles or small vigil lights are permitted to be attached to the pews.** Flowers are to be placed and removed from the Church at times that will not interfere with other parish services. Flower arrangements are **not** permitted in the entrance area of the church for safety reasons. Flower petals **cannot** be dropped during the procession due to safety and clean-up reasons.

Sometimes couples present flowers to Mary during the Wedding Liturgy. The origins of this custom are not well understood. Many times couples themselves are not really sure why they are presenting flowers to Mary. The presenting of flowers to Mary is **not** part of the Catholic Wedding Liturgy and is not permitted at St. Peter in Chains. Should couples have a special devotion to Mary it is suggested that they present flowers to Mary privately before or after the Wedding Rehearsal or on the day of the Wedding. This way the flowers are then present for the entire Wedding Liturgy.

The Aisle Runner

No aisle runner is allowed. This is a safety issue with our tiled floor.

Candles

The parish does have two candelabras that have been **traditionally** used here at St. Peter in Chains for weddings. They are placed in the raised area of the sanctuary behind the Altar. Should the couple choose to use these candelabras please let the priest or deacon know when the Wedding Liturgy is being planned.

The unity candle is not a Catholic liturgical symbol and it is not a part of the Roman Catholic Marriage Rite. The unity candle has enjoyed widespread acceptance but its origins and meanings are confused and how it worked its way into the Catholic marriage ceremony is somewhat of a mystery. However, the fact is that it is quite out of place in a Catholic marriage liturgy and it is not part of the Wedding Liturgy. Traditionally candles represent the "Light of Christ" to the world. We see this particularly during the lighting and consecration of the Paschal Candle at the Easter Vigil. In the Catholic liturgy, candles and their light are used as a sign of Christ and not used as signs of individuals or couples. St Peter in Chains does **not** permit the use of the unity candle during the celebration of marriage both within and outside the Mass. You can make better and more appropriate use of the unity candle during the rehearsal dinner or at the reception.

Pictures

Pictures are permitted during the procession and the recession of the bridal party. Wedding guests are instructed to refrain from taking pictures during the ceremony. Video cameras may be used anywhere before and during the procession, but are restricted to the balcony during the ceremony. Some photographers wish to take pictures before the ceremony. This is permitted if arrangements are made ahead of time. **Couples are welcome to use our beautiful chapel for wedding pictures.** Prior arrangements need to be made. Photographers must not move any

sanctuary furnishings nor are they to stand on any pews or chairs. All photography MUST be completed by 3:00 pm for a 1:30 pm wedding or 8:00 pm for a 6:30 pm wedding. Please discuss these guidelines with your photographer so that there are no misunderstandings with our policies.

Receiving Line

Due to time constraints a receiving line after the Wedding Liturgy is discouraged. This can be done at the reception. The throwing of birdseed, rice, confetti, and flower petals, as well as the blowing of bubbles, creates a hazard to those attending the wedding and later liturgies. In addition, cleanup is a problem after the wedding. For these reasons, St Peter in Chains does not allow this practice.

Alcohol

NO ALCOHOL is permitted anywhere on the church property. Any member of the wedding party showing signs of alcohol use before the rehearsal or the wedding will be asked to leave the church and its grounds.

Dressing Area

St Peter in Chains does not have a dressing room. However, the music room in the lower level of the church is open for the wedding party to prepare for the Wedding Liturgy. Please make sure that people in the Wedding Party are not going into other rooms.

Fees

The fee for a Wedding Ceremony is \$275. Payable to St. Peter in Chains. This fee covers the cost for the music director and the wedding coordinator.

The fee for a Wedding Mass is \$300. Payable to St. Peter in Chains. This fee covers the cost for the music director, the wedding coordinator, and one server.

Non-parishioners will be assessed a fee of \$100 payable to St. Peter in Chains.

Please make arrangements to pay the fees prior to the day of the Wedding.

The Timeline

The newly engaged couple must make arrangements to meet with the priest or deacon **nine months** prior to the anticipated date. No date will be set or reserved until the priest or deacon has met with the couple. Please be sure to bring your calendars with you. **Please be aware that no weddings will take place during Lent. Weddings during Advent are discouraged.** Any Weddings during Advent will have **minimal** decorations and music. Weddings during Christmas and Easter are welcome, however depending on where the date of the Wedding falls the selection of readings may be limited. The priest or deacon can be helpful in this area.

The FOCCUS instrument will be administered at the first meeting.

The couple needs to **immediately** schedule for Pre-Cana or Engaged Encounter and Ruah Woods for NFP. The couple is responsible for the cost of these programs. Each program gives a certificate of completion. Please bring these certificates to the next scheduled meeting with the priest or deacon.

The priest or deacon will schedule follow-up meetings to discuss results of the FOCCUS. Please be sure to bring your calendar.

Six months before the Wedding contact the director of music to set a date, to select music for the Wedding Liturgy.

One to two months before the Wedding, the couple will meet with the priest or deacon to plan the Wedding Liturgy. The priest or deacon will provide in advance a booklet that helps to plan the Wedding Liturgy.

Within sixty days of the Wedding date the couple **must** obtain a marriage license here in the state of Ohio. Here in Butler County the license is easy to obtain. Go to butlercountypreatecourt.org for more information. The priest or deacon will complete the marriage license at the Wedding rehearsal. A Wedding **cannot** take place without a marriage license.

The day of the Wedding Rehearsal make sure all fees are paid and the Marriage License is complete. In order to make the rehearsal flow smoothly, have written down the order of the Wedding Party. Above all delegate responsibilities weeks before the Wedding. People always want to help the day of a Wedding. So, let them help.

The day of the Wedding take time to pray and thank the Lord for the gift of your spouse. Pray for your spouse and pray with your spouse. Relax and do not become stressed out. Enter the marriage with a peaceful spirit. Finally, it is suggested that the Bride and Groom together welcome their guests to the Wedding. Since we are people of faith it is okay for the Bride and Groom to see each other on the day of the Wedding.

Closing

We hope you find these wedding guidelines helpful as you prepare for a life long marriage together. Remember, **the wedding is one day; marriage is for a life time**. May the Lord bless you and your family and friends as you prepare for marriage in the Catholic Church.

Please note: These Wedding Guidelines do not apply to couples who have approached the Church for marriage prior to December 16th, 2011.

