

# **Marriage Preparation and Wedding Policies**

**St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church  
Grand Coteau, LA 70541**

<http://www.st-charles-borromeo.org/>

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# Marriage Preparation and Wedding Policies

Dear Newly Engaged,

First of all, congratulations!

This time of preparation can be a wonderful time of discovery as well as a stressful time of planning. In order to help you in the best possible way, this booklet has been developed to help you understand more fully the Sacrament of Marriage and plan for the many details of your special day.

As the stress of all the preparation becomes apparent, it is important to keep your focus on the things that matter most. Often nonessential things (i.e. the site of the reception, the wedding dress, or the kind of decorations used) can drive the planning process. This is difficult to avoid. Yet, it is important to remember that the two most important things for your marriage are:

1. your preparation and
2. the actual celebration of the wedding.

These two priorities are the focal points of the Diocese of Lafayette and St. Charles Borromeo marriage preparation process. It is our hope that this process does not become a series of “jumping through hoops” but an effective part of your journey towards a life of Christian marriage.

In the spirit of offering you useful information as well as answers to common questions, you are encouraged to keep this booklet handy.

God bless you!

Fr. Derrick Weingartner, S.J.  
Pastor, St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church

## **When should we contact the parish?**

The couple must contact the parish at least six months before the date of their wedding. The wedding date will be reserved only *after* the priest/deacon handling the marriage preparation has met with the engaged couple to begin the necessary paperwork, the fees have been paid, and the pastor has approved the wedding.

Engaged couples should secure their date with the church *before* making commitments with caterers, reception halls, etc. Again, this may be difficult as the reception plans can easily overshadow the preparations for marriage but remember that the wedding is more important than the reception.

## **What does it mean to live the Sacrament of Marriage?**

Marriage is a vocation, that is, a life-response driven by a call from God. “The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1603). It is not just a human institution despite the many variations that it has held throughout history.

In the Roman Catholic Church, marriage is recognized as a Sacrament, that is, a practice identified by Jesus whereby the couple imitate the life of the Divine in a committed, faithful, and fruitful bond of love. Quite literally, the couple make Christ present in their very lives as husband and wife. This presence enriches their lives, the lives of their children, and the lives of the Christian community. Thus, this Sacrament means more than a wedding ceremony; it designates the lifelong relationship of husband and wife.

Marriage is not so much something that a couple receives as something a couple becomes. It follows that marriage has enduring significance for the entire membership of the Church. It is not exclusively or even primarily a private matter having to do with the couple’s welfare. As a Sacrament, the couple makes a covenant between themselves and Christ. A wedding is an important moment for the Church community and the Church community has a responsibility to guide couples as they prepare for life together.

## **Preparation Process**

The seriousness of entering a Christian marriage requires the utmost diligence and willingness to be prepared in the best possible way. Typically, the church parish of your domicile holds the responsibility for your marriage preparation. If you are a parishioner of St. Charles Borromeo Parish, there will be an;

**1) Initial Meeting with the Priest or Deacon.** This is a “get to know you” session and a chance to discuss the marriage preparation process. The minister will help you fill out the initial paperwork to begin the process, describe the preparation process itself, answer any questions, and offer advice as you journey towards your new life together.

All couples (*parishioners and non-parishioners*) married at St. Charles Borromeo must;

**2) Contact the Church’s Wedding Sacristan.** The Sacristan must be present at the rehearsal and wedding ceremony. The Sacristan will assist the couple in planning the details of the actual wedding ceremony, as needed. If a contracted Wedding Coordinator is engaged, he/she is expected to follow the wedding policies and guidelines of St. Charles Borromeo Church. Any questions regarding the ceremony should be addressed to the parish’s Wedding Sacristan.

### **3) Complete the Diocesan Requirements for Marriage Preparation.**

Requirements can be found at the Diocese of Lafayette website under Marriage and Family Life ([www.diolaf.org/marriage](http://www.diolaf.org/marriage))

**3.1 Take the Prepare and Enrich Inventory.** Prepare and Enrich is not a test, but a recognized discussion tool used by couples to gain insights into the partner they have chosen to marry, to learn more about themselves, and learn more about their relationship. After taking the Prepare and Enrich Inventory, the results will be sent to the Church. Then the couple will meet with the priest or deacon who will facilitate conversation about the results of the Prepare and Enrich Inventory.

**3.2 Complete a Diocesan Marriage Preparation workshop/program.** There are three options available to you, partly determined by either the priest or deacon who is assisting you in the marriage preparation process. You can view the three possible options on the Diocesan website.

**4) Complete All Paperwork.** As you journey through the preparation process, you will see that both church and civil forms need to be completed. Keep in mind that each civil parish may have unique requirements. You are encouraged to check the civil parish of your domicile to learn its requirements for obtaining a civil marriage license.

Note: If the bride’s domicile is outside the boundaries of St. Charles Borromeo Parish, the pastor of the bride’s domicile parish will have to grant permission for the marriage

ceremony to be held in St. Charles Borromeo Church

**5) Rehearsal.** You will schedule a rehearsal at the same time you reserve the Church for the wedding. The rehearsal is intended to familiarize the wedding party with the procession, the sanctuary, ushering, and other elements of the celebration. This will be led by the parish Wedding Sacristan. The Church is available for 1 hour to conduct the wedding rehearsal. The civil marriage license should be brought to the church at least a week before the rehearsal.

**6) Sacrament of Reconciliation.** Catholics can benefit from celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance) before their wedding. It is a time not only to examine your conscience, but to enter your marriage as selflessly and as spiritually healed as possible. Engaged couples are strongly encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation before their wedding.

## Questions to Consider

We invite you to consider the following:

1) **Am I a practicing Catholic?** A practicing Catholic joins the Christian community for Sunday Mass on a weekly basis, has a clear understanding of the Catholic faith, and is actively involved in the activities and programs of the parish community.

2) **Am I prepared to celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage?** Catholic faith testifies that marriage is a serious commitment with rights and responsibilities. As a Catholic you have the right to receive the Sacraments while the Church is obliged to uphold the dignity of the Sacraments. Therefore, it is our greatest desire that all couples take the preparation process seriously. Engagement is a wonderful time of serious discernment.

If any of these questions cause doubt in your mind, we suggest that you begin a discussion with your loved one and discern if you are ready to begin the marriage preparation process at this time. It is not a failure to delay or cancel a wedding if serious doubts exist for a couple.

## Documentation

**1) “Pre-Nuptial Inquiry” Form.** The engaged couple provides information regarding identity, status in the Church, and freedom to marry. The parish provides this form and it is filled out in the early phase of the preparation process. Any needed permission forms or dispensations are discussed at this time as well.

**2) Baptismal Certificates.** Catholics and any baptized Christians must provide baptismal certificates that are no more than 6 months old. These certificates can be obtained by contacting your church of baptism.

**3) Civil Marriage License.** The couple must provide a valid Louisiana marriage license to the parish office one week prior to the wedding date. Typically, there is a three day waiting period from the day the license is issued until it can be used. The license is valid for 30 days. Your civil parish of domicile may have unique requirements so you are encouraged to contact your civil parish for more information.

**4) Permissions/Dispensations/Annulments.** Any needed permission forms or dispensations that are needed will be discussed during the initial meeting with the priest. If one or both of the engaged persons have been previously married, a declaration of nullity (annulment) from the Catholic Church is necessary. Ask for more details if you think this applies to you. Delay in receiving these forms may delay the wedding date.

## The Wedding Ceremony

The celebration of Christian marriage is an opportunity for the whole community of faith to experience the Lord through powerful symbols: bread and wine, spoken and sung Word, light, and rings. In the love of the husband and wife, we see a reflection of God’s love for us, the people of God. These signs and symbols are invitations to respond in faith to the Lord. For this reason, careful planning should take place in the selection of appropriate readings, music, etc.

As you plan your wedding ceremony, there are several things to keep in mind. First, those attending are never to be considered merely guests to be entertained. The liturgical assembly is called to a role of active participation in prayer and song. Secondly, when choosing readings, songs, meditations, or other music, always ask yourself, “Can we pray these words?”

The most essential elements are the proclamation of the Word of God and your response in the form of the marriage vows. As part of the planning process, you will be offered guidance in choosing readings and prayers for the liturgy.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is generally not included when both parties cannot receive the Eucharist. All details should enhance your and your guests' experience of the essential elements. The main consideration should be: "How will this or that detail help us, our families and friends enter into a prayerful celebration of God's love mirrored for them in our marriage?" With that in mind, we hope that you will find the following guidelines helpful.

**1) Setting a Date and Time of Wedding:** Wedding and rehearsal dates will be reserved when the Pastor of St. Charles has approved and signed the Application to Reserve the Church for a Wedding. This requires that all parish based fees are paid in full (see fee schedule).

Weddings are scheduled on:

- Fridays at 6:00 PM and 6:30 PM
- Saturdays at 11:00 AM, 1:30 PM, 6:00 PM, and 6:30 PM.

Please note: On Saturday evenings and vigils of Holy Days, only wedding ceremonies (weddings without a Mass) are permitted. Also, weddings are not held at St. Charles during the season of Lent.

**2) Place:** Custom provides for Catholics to be married in a Catholic church. The Marriage Rite takes place after the Gospel and the homily. If this is an interfaith marriage, or if the majority of your anticipated guests are not practicing Catholics, we suggest having the ceremony without Mass.

The wedding party should arrive no later than 30 minutes before the scheduled time unless they are taking pictures outside. Wedding parties may remain in the Church for 20 minutes after the wedding ceremony to take pictures.

**3) Decorations in the Church and Sanctuary.** Simplicity is most effective and allows attention to be focused on the celebration. The altar and pulpit should get first attention. No flowers are to be set directly upon the altar. Flowers may be placed in front of the altar or on the side altars. Any decoration should be carefully placed so as not to block the liturgical action or your guests' participation in what is taking place.

No part of the Church décor (banners, plants, etc.) may be changed or removed. The following are not permitted at the wedding ceremony:

- Unity candles
- Candles or candelabras brought in from outside of the Church
- Runners for the main aisle
- Strollers, wagons, etc. during the procession
- Archways
- Tape, tacks; Only clip on hooks or ribbons ties are permitted
- Throwing of rice, birdseed, confetti, flowers, or any other item either inside or outside the Church. We suggest mention of this in your invitation.
- Food and drink inside the Church

If a florist is contracted, the florist must check with the Church's Wedding Sacristan before any final decisions are made regarding flower arrangements.

**4) Entrance Procession.** Good liturgical and ceremonial practice dictate a single procession. The celebrant and the entire wedding party may enter from the back of the church, as at Sunday Mass. We encourage both sets of parents to accompany the groom and bride in procession, and suggest that the attendants enter as couples. There is, of course, flexibility in planning your procession, which you may discuss with the celebrant.

**5) Family Participation:** There are several opportunities in the liturgy for parents and family members to be involved in this special occasion, including proclaiming the Scripture readings and leading the Prayers of the Faithful. Please assign the readings (except the Gospel) to a family member or friend who will proclaim the Word with reverence.

**6) Number of Attendees:** The limit on the number of attendants is ten (10) for the wedding ceremony, but because of limited space in the sanctuary, only the bride, groom, and two official witnesses may stand in the sanctuary during the ceremony.

**7) Program.** Printing a program of the wedding liturgy is an excellent gesture to aid in participation, especially for non-Catholic guests.

**8) Music.** Guidelines for music at weddings are the same as those for Sunday Mass. All music used in church should be prayerful in its tone and should be carefully

chosen to match the various moments of the wedding ceremony. The priest or pastoral musician can assist you in making these choices. Taped music is not appropriate.

Popular romantic songs are usually inappropriate either because they don't say enough, or because they contradict the Christian understanding of committed life. Singing at least one or more hymns, songs, or responses with the entire assembly is the ideal. Active participation, not entertainment, is the goal. Be prepared to submit your musical selections to the priest/deacon that is preparing you.

- a) Prelude music, as guests are being seated, can be instrumental or sung. If the organ is used, light, bright classical music is quite effective in setting an appropriate mood.
- b) Processional music should be instrumental. Your guests' attention is focused on the wedding party, not on words to a song. The same applies to the recessional (march out).
- c) Solos may be used before the ceremony, during the Preparation of the Gifts, or after the exchange of rings, and during Communion if there is a Mass celebrated.
- d) Congregational Singing is appropriate during the preparation of the Gifts, or for Communion meditation. The Alleluia before the Gospel should be sung, if a cantor is employed, as well as the Responsorial Psalm and other Acclamations.
- e) The Lord's Prayer is the prayer of the whole assembly, and may be the only part in which most non-Catholics are comfortable joining in. It is never appropriate as a solo in the liturgy, but if the majority of guests are Catholic, it may be sung by all.
- f) The parish has a list of Cantors, organists and lectors available for hire if you need them.

**9) Children in the Wedding Party:** Children are welcome to be part of your wedding, but based on prior experience, we have found that very young children often create unforeseen issues during the ceremony. An adult must accompany children younger than 6 years old when they participate in the entrance procession.

**10) Pew Decorations:** Please use plastic hangars or large rubber bands, which do not mar the pews. No tape on any wood surfaces within the church should be used.

**11) Photography:** Photography and videotaping during the ceremony are permitted so long as they are not intrusive. If you take formal pictures in the church, we insist that it be done quietly, quickly, and with the respect due the House of God, preferably before the service. During the service, ask the photographer to be discreet and nicely dressed. Videotaping is permitted with the same reservations.

You are asked to inform your photographer of the following conditions so that they will have all the information they need to have a successful day:

- Flashes and spotlights are not permitted during the ceremony
- Photographers and videographers are not permitted in the sanctuary
- The wedding party may engage the services of one still photographer and/or on videographer
- Lights will be turned on in the Church 30 minutes before the wedding begins
- Photographers should not take group pictures inside the Church before the wedding
- The wedding party may remain after the wedding for a group picture for a maximum of 20 minutes

**12) Alcohol:** Use of alcoholic beverages before the rehearsal or wedding is strictly forbidden. Both events require your full attention.

**13) Dressing Facilities:** The reconciliation room is available to the bride for one hour before the scheduled time of the wedding. Please appoint someone to have this area cleaned out of all personal articles immediately after the ceremony.

**14) Clean up:** Please designate someone to stay after the wedding to tidy up both the church and bride and groom's room. Dispose of all trash in the large bin located in the gravel parking lot.

**15) Accountability:** The bride and groom will be held responsible for the actions and behaviors of all guests, florists, musicians, and photographers.

# St. Charles Borromeo Fee Schedule

<b>For Active* St. Charles Parishioner</b> (Preparation, Minister, Building Use)	\$300
<b>For Outside Parishioner</b> (Building Reservation and Use)	\$850
(Marriage Prep, if by St. Charles Clergy)	\$300
(Wedding Ceremony, if by St. Charles Clergy)	\$100
<b>St. Charles Wedding Sacristan</b> (required for all weddings)	\$100
<b>Keyboard Accompanist &amp; Soloist/Cantor</b> (paid directly to the person)	Fees vary

## Diocesan Fees

<b>Prepare and Enrich</b> Paid during online registration	Approx. \$45
<b>Diocesan Workshops</b> Please see Diocesan Marriage and Family website	Fees vary

Note: "Active" is determined by mass attendance and a record of Offertory contributions (via envelope) for 26 of 52 weeks of the year.