

Wedding Procedures at Old Saint Joseph

General Information

If you have recently become engaged to be married, we congratulate you. This is a beautiful moment in your lives, the first of many beautiful moments you will share as a married couple. These months leading up to your wedding are a precious time for you to grow ever closer together. But your growth as a couple must include a spiritual dimension as well. For our gracious God wishes to share many graces with you, vital for deepening your love for one another. Open your heart to those graces.

You and your families need to decide whether you will be comfortable celebrating your wedding here at Old Saint Joseph (OSJ). We will describe both the procedures that the Catholic Church requires to be followed and also the special guidelines that are observed here at OSJ. Our purpose throughout is not just to plan for the “big day,” but beyond that to prepare you for your life-long vocation as a married couple.

Even if you are planning to celebrate your wedding in a ceremony in another location, we are happy to guide you through the steps so that you can enter into a marriage that meets the legal requirements of the Catholic Church.

What is necessary to be married at Old St. Joseph (OSJ)?

1. Good Faith

Celebrating your wedding in a Catholic ceremony means that you share the Church’s beliefs about marriage. Most importantly, you must be in good faith towards the Catholic Church. Old St Joseph is not a “wedding venue” like a reception hall. If you are a parishioner of OSJ, you already know the profound faith of this community. If you are new to OSJ, your wedding nevertheless has a deep meaning for our faith community. Your vows express a covenant love for one another that builds up the body of the whole Church, and this is the faith community that witnesses your promises. If your faith is weak and your religious practice is not strong, we will work with you. But you must be willing to acknowledge your faith and express an openness to the graces that the sacrament confers upon you as a couple.

If one of you is not a member of the Catholic Church, we will respect the religious conscience of the non-Catholic party. The Catholic party is expected to profess his or her faith openly.

Traditionally, Catholics usually celebrated marriage in what was popularly called their “home parish,” i.e., in the parish Church where they and their families live and worship regularly. This was customarily interpreted as the parish Church of the bride’s family. In this spirit, we welcome our own parishioners who wish to celebrate their wedding here at Old St. Joseph’s. But in today’s world where people are so mobile, this custom of turning to the local parish is

frequently no longer viable. At Old St Joseph, therefore, we are eager to welcome everyone who desires to enter into a valid Catholic marriage, is in “good faith,” and is suitably prepared to do so.

2. Spiritual Formation

Besides your receptive attitude toward the Catholic faith, the most important part of marriage preparation is to enter into a period of spiritual formation. If you are not a practicing Catholic who attends Mass regularly, we urge you to begin doing so as the single most effective way to prepare for your new Christian vocation as a married couple. A further step is to meet with the priest who will be officiating at your wedding. You and he will have an opportunity to discuss how your life of faith and the wedding liturgy bring God and the life of grace to your marriage.

Another part of your spiritual formation is to participate in a “pre-cana” program recognized by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. You can obtain information regarding these approved programs at Phillycatholicmarriageprep.com. You will need to make your own arrangements to participate in one of these programs. These programs tend to fill up quickly, so plan some time in advance to make a reservation. When you have completed the program, you should submit the certificate to the priest who will be meeting with you. If you have difficulty making arrangements, one of the members of our parish staff can offer further assistance.

3. Marriage Laws of the Church

You must comply with the marriage laws of the Catholic Church. This means that you must be free of any legal “impediments” to marriage, according to Church law. The most common impediments are the existence of a previous marriage or the fact that one of the parties is not a baptized Roman Catholic (mixed religion). Frequently, an impediment, like mixed religion, can readily be removed simply by petitioning the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for a dispensation. Other impediments, like a previous marriage, may prove more problematic.

A word of caution: You shouldn’t make a judgment about your legal circumstances without consulting a competent Church official. At Old Saint Joseph we will help you with the legal process to determine if any impediments apply to you and, if so, how you can deal with them. The parish cannot guarantee that your wedding can be celebrated at Old St Joseph until it is determined that no impediments apply to you as a couple.

4. Wedding Fees

We ask each couple who is celebrating their wedding at Old Saint Joseph to support the needs of the parish as an expression of their solidarity with the parish community. In a practical sense, the wedding program consumes a good deal of the resources of the parish, so it is fair that you contribute to the support of the parish. In a deeper spiritual sense, the parish community is the family that is witnessing your vows and formally embraces and celebrates your new vocation as a married couple. We hope you will join in this spirit to support our parish family.

The total Church fee is \$1,500. A \$300 non-refundable deposit is required at the time of

reserving the wedding date. The balance of the Church fee is due at least 60 days before the ceremony. A stipend for a **visiting** priest (a priest not on our parish staff) is NOT included in the wedding fee. Music fees are not included in this amount and must be paid separately.

Calling the Rectory

If you can accept these policies described above and wish to explore the possibility of being married at Old St. Joseph, your first step is to call the Rectory at (215) 923 1733 and inform the receptionist that you are calling to inquire about arranging a wedding reservation. You will be connected to a member of the parish staff.

Since preparing to enter into marriage requires a suitable period of preparation time, we normally expect the date you are planning for your wedding to be at least six months from the initial call to the rectory. However, calling even more in advance better insures that the date you wish to request will indeed be available.

Here are some points of information and practical concerns that will be addressed in the course of your call to the rectory:

5. Setting a Tentative Date

The parish staff member who is assisting you will ascertain if there are any clear impediments to your entering into a valid Catholic marriage. This determination cannot be definitively settled until you meet personally with the priest who will preside at your wedding. However, your truthful response to the questions asked of you will allow for a ***tentative date*** to be set for your wedding.

Generally Old St Joseph Church is available for weddings on Fridays (between 2:00 PM and 5:00 PM) and on Saturdays (between 10:00 AM and 5:00 PM). Special feast days and parish events can affect this availability. Along with the tentative wedding date, the rehearsal time should also be set. Usually rehearsals take place on Thursday or Friday evenings at 5:00 PM or 7:00 PM for a maximum period of one hour.

We will send you a “Wedding Information Sheet” and a “Declaration of Common Understanding” to be filled out. After you return these forms with your non-refundable deposit of \$300, the wedding date and time will be held for you. The wedding rehearsal time should also be confirmed at this time. As stated above, the balance of the Church fee (\$1,200) is due at least 60 days before the ceremony.

6. Arranging for a Priest (or Deacon) to Preside

Ordinarily, one of the priests from Old Saint Joseph will be assigned to preside at your wedding celebration. You may request a particular priest from the parish staff, if you wish. Or you may request a priest or deacon from outside the parish staff to preside. Such a priest or deacon must, of course, be in good standing with the Roman Catholic Church. If you wish to request a clergy

person not on our parish staff to preside at your wedding, you can discuss the arrangements and details with parish staff member who is assisting you.

7. Required Documentation

You will be asked to submit required documentation. (Some of this documentation will be sent to you for you to fill out.)

i) You must contact the parish where you were baptized and request that the parish sends you a **recent** copy of your **baptismal record**. If you were baptized as an infant, the so-called “original” certificate that was issued at the time of your baptism is not sufficient to meet this requirement. You should be ready to present this recently issued certificate when you meet with the priest who will preside at your wedding. If you are a baptized Christian but not a Roman Catholic, you should obtain some certification of baptism, e.g., a letter from the Church showing that the baptism was recorded or an official certificate of baptism.

ii) You will be sent **Witness Declarations** forms: You and your fiancé must provide two written declarations by two different witnesses that you are “free” to marry your intended spouse. We will send you the forms to use for this purpose. The witnesses should be members of your immediate family or other persons who have known you well through your adult years. The witnesses need not be Roman Catholic.

iii) **Civil License**: You must obtain a civil marriage license from a local county government office in the state of Pennsylvania. The civil license becomes effective three days after it is issued and remains effective for a sixty day period. The commonwealth of Pennsylvania charges a ninety dollar fee to issue a license. The license (including all the related material you receive from the county office) should be presented to the officiating priest as soon as possible after it is obtained. (Do not wait until the rehearsal to deliver the license to the priest.) It is the legal responsibility of the officiating priest to return the required documentation to state officials.

The information below may answer some additional questions you might have. If not, we will be happy to provide further assistance.

Meeting with the priest who will preside at your wedding

Every priest desires to form a supportive personal relationship with a couple when he is to preside at their wedding. Therefore, meetings with the priest are intended to be friendly, supportive and affirming. The primary interest of any priest is to help you grow spiritually through a deeper commitment to one another. He will want to hear from you about your practice of the faith and encourage you to overcome any obstacles that may stand in your relationship with the Lord and the Church and with each other.

The priest who is preparing you will normally want to meet at least twice with you and your fiancé before your wedding.

He will assist you in compiling the necessary documents (as discussed above: baptismal certificate, witness declarations, civil license, etc.) He will ask the questions necessary to establish that there are no impediments in Church law to your marriage. If any impediments are present, he will assist you in procuring the required dispensations.

Most importantly, the priest will help you to *plan the wedding ceremony*. Please consult the separate document on the website entitled “The Wedding Ceremony” for more information about planning your wedding ceremony at Old Saint Joseph.

Additional Points to Keep in Mind

8. Rules of Decorum

We all want to show respect at all times for the sacredness of this house of worship, the integrity of the liturgy and the dignity of all the persons who come to Old St. Joseph. At all times everyone’s conduct must reflect respect, decorum, proper attire (*modest dress*) and dignified behavior.

Being on time for your rehearsal and wedding is an expression of that respect for the Church community. On the other hand, being late to start or finish your rehearsal or wedding is inconsiderate to others.

The consumption of alcohol or illegal substances by anyone associated with your wedding, during the rehearsal or before or during the wedding ceremony is strictly prohibited. The parish is always within its rights to require a disruptive person to vacate the premises. It is your responsibility as the wedding couple to communicate this mandate to the wedding party and your guests in order to protect the integrity of the event and the comfort of everyone in attendance.

9. Outside Professional Consultants

If you have contracted a professional wedding planner to help with your wedding, the responsibility of this person does not in any way pertain to the wedding ceremony in the Church. Only the presiding priest, pastoral ministers and those explicitly delegated by the parish can direct the actions at the rehearsal and celebration of the liturgy. Consultants must respect all the guidelines promulgated by Old St. Joseph.

10. Parking for Guests

Unfortunately, Old Saint Joseph does not own or have access to a parish parking lot. Guests may park in nearby public garages or on neighborhood streets according to city restrictions, or at the location where your reception takes place.

Parking in Willings Alley or in the privately-owned spaces (managed by Bingham Court Home Owners Association) across from the Old Saint Joseph courtyard entrance is **not permitted** at any time. This restriction is strictly enforced by the property owners and is not under the control of

the parish; the police will be called. Please make this restriction clear to any limousine, trolley and van services that you employ.

Upon request, the parish can provide signs that relax local parking restrictions so that your wedding guests may park on both sides of 4th Street between Walnut and Spruce Streets, and on both sides of Locust Street between 4th & 5th Streets. Your guests must display the sign “Attending Wedding at Old St. Joseph’s Church” on the dashboard. These signs are available at the parish office. Note: The police will not agree to relax local parking restrictions on weekday “rush-hours” from 6:30 AM to 9:30 AM and from 3:30 PM to 6:30 PM.

Further Reading

It is a rewarding experience to read the Exhortation of Pope Francis entitled, *The Joy of Love*. You can obtain a copy either from Amazon or from the bishops’ website, usccb.org.

Pope Francis talks about marriage and the family with his characteristic optimism and joyfulness. He describes the biblical perspective and the religious dimensions that make marriage so meaningful in our lives of faith. Especially appropriate for engaged couples is his down to earth and idealistic description of love in marriage.