



Wedding Guidelines at Old St. Joseph's Church

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1. DECISIONS AND PREPARATION

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 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 St. Joseph's (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 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.

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's 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," that is, 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 OSJ, 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.

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 a Catholic who does not attend 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 a 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 at Phillycatholicmarriageprep.com. You will need to make your own arrangements to participate. The programs

tend to fill up quickly, so plan some time in advance to make a reservation. When you have completed the program, submit the certificate to the priest at OSJ when you meet with him. If you have difficulty making arrangements, a member of our parish staff can offer assistance.

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 (this is called "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 St. Joseph's, we will help 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 OSJ until it is determined that no impediments apply to you as a couple.

WEDDING FEES

We ask each couple who is celebrating their wedding at Old St. Joseph's 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 embracing and celebrating 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 \$2,500. A \$500 non-refundable deposit is required when wedding date is reserved. 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 Church fee. Music fees are also not included in this amount and must be paid separately.

If you are getting married at a location other than Old St. Joseph's *and you are a member of Old St. Joseph's* we are happy to work with you to prepare the necessary paperwork. The fee for this is \$250, payable to "Old St. Joseph's Church."

WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

1. CALL THE RECTORY

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

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

2. TALK WITH A STAFF MEMBER

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 responses to the questions asked of you will allow for a tentative date to be set for your wedding.

3. SET A TENTATIVE DATE

Generally, Old St. Joseph's is available for weddings on Fridays between 2:00 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 or 7:00 PM for a maximum of one hour.

4. RETURN COMPLETED FORM AND DEPOSIT

After the phone discussion with a staff member, we will send you a confirmation letter and a Wedding Information Form. Please return completed form along with a \$500 non-refundable deposit within two weeks to confirm your wedding date. The wedding rehearsal time should also be confirmed at this time. Please keep in mind that rehearsals may need to be rescheduled to accommodate other weddings.

As stated above, the balance of the Church fee (\$2,000) is due at least 60 days before the ceremony.

5. SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT TO MEET WITH A PRESIDING PRIEST OR DEACON

Ordinarily, one of the priests from Old St. Joseph's will be assigned to preside at your wedding celebration. You may request a particular priest from the parish staff.

Or you may wish 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 outside clergy to preside, please

discuss arrangements with the staff member who is assisting you.

6. OBTAIN REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

You will be asked to submit required documentation:

- i) **BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATE:** You must contact the parish where you were baptized and request that the parish send you a recent certificate 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. 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 certification of baptism, e.g., a letter from the Church showing that the baptism was recorded or an official certificate of baptism.
- ii) **WITNESS DECLARATIONS:** You and your fiancé must each 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. 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 Commonwealth 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 and all the related material you receive from the county office should be delivered to the officiating priest soon after it is obtained. (Do not wait until the rehearsal to hand the license to the priest.) It then becomes the legal responsibility of the officiating priest to submit the required documentation to state officials after the ceremony.

7. MEET WITH THE PRIEST WHO WILL PRESIDE

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 God 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 discussed above: baptismal certificates, witness declarations, civil license, etc. He will ask questions 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 Section 2. THE CEREMONY for more information about your wedding ceremony at Old St. Joseph’s.

RULES OF DECORUM

We all want to show respect 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’s. 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, while 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 leave 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.

OUTSIDE PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANTS

If you have contracted a professional wedding planner to help with your wedding, their responsibilities do 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 rehearsal and celebration of the liturgy. Consultants must respect all Old St. Joseph’s Wedding Guidelines.

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 description of love in marriage.