



GUIDELINES FOR WEDDINGS

ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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This packet is intended to offer an overview and to clarify questions you may have concerning the Sacrament of Marriage and how it is celebrated at St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church.

Marriage is a most serious and sacred commitment. We are delighted that you have chosen to bring your commitment before God and God's people by having a church wedding. We wish to help you prepare—not only for the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage but also for a permanent, happy, and faith-filled married life.

Your wedding ceremony reflects your commitment to each other in the presence of God. It is a spiritual ceremony. Your wedding day is one of the most important days of your lives; and we wish to do everything possible to guide you along to that day. However, it is important to remember that you are not preparing for just one day—but for a lifetime.

Congratulations, and may this be a time of grace and blessings for you and your families.

Fr. Cuthbert "Cuddy" O'Connell, Pastor
Fr. Dominic Vu Xuan Pham, Parochial Vicar
Fr. Pat O'Shaughnessy, Retired in Residence
Deacon Buddy Vancourt

REQUIRED PREPARATIONS FOR MARRIAGE

The following requirements are part of the overall preparation for marriage in church:

- at least six months between the time you contact the parish and the wedding date
- meetings with a priest or deacon
- meetings to discuss FOCCUS (see next paragraph)
- meetings with wedding coordinator to discuss guidelines and expectations
- participation in an approved preparation program (described later in this packet)

FOCCUS

FOCCUS stands for Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study. It is an inventory for marriage preparation. It is designed to help the couple evaluate their relationship and communicate openly about many things that are important to married couples. It will help the couple target the topics that they need and want to talk about in preparing for married life. **It is not a test—there is no pass or fail.**

APPROVED MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMS

The couple, with the guidance of the priest or deacon, **must complete** one of the following marriage preparation programs **(a) or (b)**:

- (a) **FOR BETTER AND FOREVER:** The engaged couple meets with a married couple trained to assist with preparing couples for married life—usually one night a week for five weeks. Other engaged couples may be attending with you.
- (b) **ENGAGED ENCOUNTER:** The engaged couple spends a weekend at a retreat house with other engaged couples to strengthen communication and understanding between the couple.

PROCEDURE

- 1) Please contact the Parish Office (228 863-1610) to set up the initial interview with a priest or deacon;
- 2) The couple contacts one of the wedding coordinators (names and telephone numbers listed later in packet) to set up an appointment to discuss scripture readings, prayers, music, photographs, church decorations, and other important details regarding the rehearsal and wedding ceremony;
- 3) After the interview with the priest or deacon, the couple will meet to complete FOCCUS;
- 4) The couple then proceeds with one of the two approved Marriage Preparation Programs outlined above.

GUIDELINES FOR WEDDINGS IN THE CHURCH

- 1) Completion of the preparations for marriage listed on page 2 is required. Even though the wedding date is reserved on the parish calendar, the date is not confirmed, pending completion of marriage preparations (paperwork, Foccus, and sponsor couple marriage preparation or engaged encounter).
- 2) For our own active parishioners (registered at least six months prior to scheduling the wedding, attending Mass here and supporting the parish), there is no charge for using the church for the celebration of marriage. However, if you wish to make a donation to cover the costs of materials, utilities, etc., it will be much appreciated.
- 3) Use of the church by non-parishioners for a wedding is welcomed. In such instances, there is a fee of \$400.00, payable at least 60 days prior to the wedding date, to help defray the costs of utilities and materials.
- 4) Because of the many activities in the parish, we find it necessary to require that you use the services of one of our approved wedding coordinators:
Paula Spears, 697-7814
Marilyn VanCourt, 863-9852 or 860-6953
- 5) The cost for the extremely helpful service and direction of the wedding coordinator is \$150.00, which you pay directly to the wedding coordinator prior to or at the rehearsal. Please contact the wedding coordinator as soon as possible after you have scheduled the date of your wedding with the parish.
- 6) The wedding coordinator
 - a) is present for a planning meeting with the couple (this should take place very early in the planning stages);
 - b) conducts the rehearsal;
 - c) works with the florist in arranging for flowers, plants and other decorations in the church;
 - d) works with the photographer to explain when it is appropriate for photographs to be taken, where the photographer may stand, and where the video camera may be placed;
 - e) opens and sets up the church before the wedding;
 - f) takes down and locks the church after the wedding;
 - g) is responsible for having the air conditioning turned on for the rehearsal and the wedding;
 - h) If there are other services which you require, please discuss them with the wedding coordinator you choose from the two listed above.
- 7) Effective January 1, 2016, there will no longer be Saturday night weddings. We enter the Solemn Sabbath from the vigil mass----evening mass on Sunday.
- 8) The times for weddings are 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Weddings may also be scheduled for Friday evenings. There will be no weddings during the Lenten Season, or on Holy Days of Obligation. For the 2:00 p.m. wedding, the church will be available and cooled at 12:30 p.m.
- 9) St. Thomas is a “tobacco free property.” Therefore, there should be no smoking or use of tobacco products on the church property.
- 10) Regarding wedding rehearsals and wedding day: Please out of respect for the Bride and Groom, no alcoholic beverages are to be consumed prior to wedding rehearsal or wedding, especially in the parking lot of the Church.
- 11) Wedding party and guests are to park in the designated area on the gravel northeast of the bayou marked “Wedding Parking.”
- 12) The cry room is available for the bride to dress. Bridesmaids may also use the cry room, if acceptable to the bride. We do not have a separate place for the bridesmaids nor is there a place for the groomsmen to dress. If the groomsmen wish, they may gather in the west entrance foyer.
- 13) The decorations in the church should be dignified and simple. No decorations may be placed near or block the view of the tabernacle. Seasonal liturgical decorations in the church will remain in place. Church law must be adhered to during liturgical seasons with regard to decorations. [During Advent

and Lent, which are penitential seasons, the Church is less festive in its decorations. If the couple wishes to use flowers at such time, we ask them to be both modest and subdued in their selection and arrangements.] Candles are allowed in the marbled altar area (no candles allowed in carpeted areas)—they must be the dripless type. Candles and hurricane lamps are not allowed on the pews. Also, please tell your florist that tape, glue, tacks, floral clay or wire may not be used on the pews (elastic or soft ribbon may be used to affix decorations to the pews.) Aisle cloths are not permitted for safety reasons. Flower petals, rice, birdseed or other similar materials may not be used either in the church or community center. We appreciate wedding flowers being left in the church for the weekend Masses (except during the Lenten season). Prior to planning decorations, please contact your wedding coordinator.

- 14) It is the responsibility of the couple to engage an organist or pianist and/or song leader(s), if you choose to have music. The name and telephone number of our Music Minister is available through the parish office (228 863-1610). Stipends to the musicians should be paid at or before the rehearsal.
- 15) Music must be of a sacred nature. The marriage ceremony is a religious ceremony. All music selections must reflect the sacredness of the sacrament. Popular “religious” choices must be pre-approved and they may be played prior to the entrance of the parents and the wedding party. Secular music is not permitted.
- 16) A booklet entitled “Together for Life” is available through the parish office. It contains appropriate scripture readings, prayers and many beautiful insights for your wedding ceremony and your married life together. Scripture readings should be selected from this booklet.
- 17) A professional photographer may discreetly move around the church—**but never in the marbled altar area**. Photographs taken from the altar area must be taken from a designated spot (ask your wedding coordinator). Please discuss wedding photography and videos with your wedding coordinator. No photographs may be taken which will interfere with the sacredness of the ceremony. There is to be no flash photography after the entrance procession; flash may be used again during the recessional. A video camera may be used near the altar—the camera and person operating it must remain stationary. Your photographer is expected to contact the wedding coordinator prior to the rehearsal in order to have a clear understanding of acceptable practices in the church.
- 18) No food or drink is permitted in the church building (that includes the bride’s room). Alcoholic beverages are not allowed in the church building. Any such beverages will be confiscated and disposed of.
- 19) All persons involved in the wedding ceremony must attend the rehearsal. This includes the entire wedding party, the parents, the readers, and the musicians.
- 20) Please bring your marriage license to the wedding rehearsal.**
- 21) The Community Center (banquet hall) is available for wedding receptions. For further information, please contact Robert Phillips, Community Center Coordinator, at 281-773-8328, or community.center@saintthomaslb.org.
- 22) Included in this packet you will find the following:
 - a. Checklist provided to help you make sure you have important things taken care of—Exhibit 1.
 - b. Information about Engaged Encounter weekend marriage preparation programs—Exhibit 2.
 - c. Information about Sponsor Couple marriage preparation program—Exhibit 3.
 - d. Application for Matrimonial Dispensation (if required)—Exhibit 4.
 - e. Prenuptial Investigation Questionnaire—form must be completely filled in and returned to the parish office, together with other required documentation—please use full names of all parties (couple, parents, maid/matron of honor, best man)—no initials. The witnesses are the maid/matron of honor and best man.

