

MARRIAGE IN THE CHURCH - GUIDELINES & POLICIES

*A wedding is a joyous occasion. It is a special moment in the life of the Church. In the Sacrament of Matrimony, we celebrate that invitation which the Lord extends to men and women to pledge themselves in love and fidelity, to be a sign on earth of His love for all His people. Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church rejoices with you as you prepare to take this step.*

*We know that there are many details to be taken care of, preparations to be made, and questions to be answered. To assist you in making your wedding as beautiful and special as it should be, we have put together this guideline and policy document, which explains the procedures which are followed in the Church and in this parish.*

*May these days of preparation be filled with joy and excitement and may God bless you.*

I. PREPARATION

1. A COUPLE DESIRING TO BE MARRIED IS EXPECTED TO NOTIFY THE PARISH PRIEST AT LEAST SIX (6) MONTHS PRIOR TO THE PROPOSED DATE OF THEIR WEDDING.

This required notification is designed to assure adequate time for an assessment of readiness to marry and for a fitting catechesis for the celebration of the Sacrament. The date of the wedding cannot be finalized until after the couple has completed their first meeting with the pastor.

At Blessed Sacrament, couples are required to participate in a program of pre-marriage instruction. The program is conducted by a priest and married couple and is designed to enable the couple to reflect upon essential characteristics of Christian marriage and to share their opinions and expectations. Attention is given to awareness of self, communication, sexuality, and sacramentality.

"Engaged Encounter" - is a weekend retreat sponsored by the Diocese of Savannah, which is held at various times during the year. The encounter lasts from Friday through Sunday. For information on locations, dates, times, and any applicable fees, contact the Office of Family Life at the Catholic Pastoral Center (912) 201-4100, [www.diosav.org](http://www.diosav.org).

II. PRIEST

1. ORDINARILY, THE PARISH PRIEST OF THE CATHOLIC PARTY (OF THE BRIDE, IF BOTH PARTIES ARE CATHOLIC) IS THE ONE TO ASSIST THE COUPLE IN PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE AND TO WITNESS IT FOR THE CHURCH.

Another priest, who is a relative or has a special relationship with one of the partners or families, can be invited to officiate at the marriage ceremony. However, the initial contact and inquiry concerning marriage should be made with the proper parish priest.

***If a priest other than your parish priest were to officiate at the wedding, we would ask that he write a letter to your parish priest indicating that he will be performing the marriage ceremony.*** If the priest is not from this diocese, a letter from the priest's home diocese is expected to send a letter of suitability to the Diocese of Savannah. This is required prior to the wedding day and the marriage cannot take place if this letter is not received.

The priest who is to officiate at the marriage ceremony is ultimately responsible for all of the details of the marriage ceremony. Final approval for all details rests with him. At Blessed Sacrament we are happy to work with professional bridal consultants, florists, musicians, photographers, etc., however, any consultant is asked to contact the priest at least two weeks prior to the wedding date. If the priest who is to officiate is from out of town or from another parish, consultants must personally contact him. It is the responsibility of the couple to inform the consultants of this.

### III. PLACE

#### 1. THE MARRIAGE OF TWO CATHOLICS ORDINARILY TAKES PLACE IN THE PARISH CHURCH.

The parish church, where the local faith community gathers to worship, is the proper liturgical place for that celebration. A marriage can be celebrated in another church or semi-public chapel only with the permission of the local Bishop. Your parish priest is the one to seek such permission.

Only in an extraordinary case and for reasonable cause can the Bishop grant permission for a marriage to be celebrated in a private dwelling. Permission will not be granted for marriages to take place out-of-doors, e.g. in gardens, on lawns, on the beach, on a boat, etc.

#### 2. IN THE CASE OF AN INTER-FAITH MARRIAGE

Permission can be obtained so that the priest may witness the vows in a non-Catholic church. Or, as is more commonly the case, a dispensation from the form of marriage can be granted so that the marriage can take place in the non-Catholic church with the non-Catholic minister witnessing the vows.

In both cases, there must be justifying reasons and the proper permissions and dispensations are to be applied for by the parish priest. Please allow extra time in planning when permissions and dispensations must be granted.

### IV. DATE AND TIME

#### 1. THE DATE AND TIME OF THE WEDDING IS TO BE SET BY THE PRIEST IN CONSULTATION WITH THE COUPLE TO BE MARRIED.

The date cannot be finalized until the couple has completed the approved course of pre-marriage instruction and has been judged ready for marriage. While a tentative date may be proposed in advance to reserve the Church, no details should be attended to until the priest finally approves the date. Invitations should not be printed until the marriage instruction has been completed and the priest has finally approved the date.

2. All Saturday weddings are **scheduled no later than 3:00pm**. If a reception is to follow on Church grounds the wedding can take place no later than 2:00pm. Due to our 5:30pm Vigil Mass, if an evening wedding is requested, it can be scheduled no earlier than 7:30pm.

3. If you decide to change the date or the time of your wedding, you must speak directly to the priest and inform him of the change so that another date and time can be approved.

## V. REHEARSAL

1. THE DATE AND TIME OF THE REHEARSAL WILL BE SET BY THE PRIEST IN CONSULTATION WITH THE COUPLE.

The usual time for the rehearsal is the evening before the wedding. The rehearsal is to be conducted by the priest. Bridal consultants may assist in lining up attendants, but the rehearsal is the responsibility of the priest. Rehearsals will last no longer than an hour and the entire wedding party **must arrive at the church on time**.

## VI. CEREMONY

### THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY

*"The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men and women, to build up the Body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called "sacraments of faith." They do indeed impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity."*

### **Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Vatican II)**

The style and the manner in which we celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage should clearly express what we believe marriage to be and should increase the faith of all that participate. In planning the marriage ceremony, the couple should keep in mind the essential characteristics of marriage so that the grace of the Sacrament is made manifest in the words and actions.

There are three (3) basic actions (two when celebrated outside Mass) which should be emphasized in the ceremony.

***First, the Word of God is proclaimed.*** The readings from Sacred Scripture tell the story of God's love for us, of the mystery of our redemption in Christ His Son, and of the place of married love in God's divine plan of salvation. Care must be taken in selecting the readings, in choosing readers who can proclaim it clearly and effectively, and in focusing the attention of the congregation, not on the wedding party, but on the Word.

***Secondly, the couple responds to the proclaimed Word by pledging themselves to each other in love and fidelity.*** The exchange of consent is the heart of the ceremony and should be highlighted. The vows must express the Christian understanding of married love and should be spoken slowly and clearly by bride and groom.

Finally, the congregation gives thanks to God in the Eucharistic Celebration.

The couple, in conjunction with the priest, may plan their wedding. They may select the readings to be proclaimed, the prayers to be prayed, the particular form of the vows, and the order and style of procession.

## VII. MUSIC

THE MUSIC SELECTED FOR THE WEDDING SHOULD BE LITURGICAL MUSIC: THAT IS, MUSIC WRITTEN FOR CHURCH SERVICES OR MUSIC THAT IS TRADITIONALLY USED AT WEDDINGS.

Music plays an important role in enhancing the beauty and the sacredness of the marriage ceremony. The music selected should contain and give expression to the Christian understanding of the sacrament of matrimony. Please review our separate document on selecting and preparing music for weddings for more suggestions and guidance.

The music director and organist/soloist for Blessed Sacrament is Mr. Timothy Remsen. He is available to assist with planning wedding liturgies and can assist couples in selecting music for their wedding ceremony. All musical selections should be finalized at least four (4) weeks prior to the day of the wedding.

MUSIC DIRECTOR – Timothy Remsen, [tremsen@mbschurch.org](mailto:tremsen@mbschurch.org)

## VIII. FLOWERS AND DECORATIONS

FLOWERS CAN BE USED TO DECORATE THE CHURCH AND SANCTUARY; HOWEVER, THE FLORIST AND THE COUPLE MUST TAKE CARE SO AS NOT TO PLACE AN OVERABUNDANCE OF FLOWERS IN THE SANCTUARY.

*"Flowers, plants, and trees -- genuine, of course -- are particularly apt for the decoration of liturgical space, since they are of nature, always discreet in their message, never cheap or tawdry or ill-made. Decoration should never impede the approach to or the encircling of the*

*altar or any of the ritual movement and action, but there are places in most liturgical spaces where it is appropriate and where it can be enhancing . . . Both beauty and simplicity demand careful attention to each piece of furniture, each object, each decorative element, as well as to the whole ensemble, so that there is no clutter, no crowding. These various objects and elements must be able to breathe and function without being smothered by excess."*

### **Environment and Art in Catholic Worship** (Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy)

Within the sanctuary area, there are three objects or pieces of furniture which have a function integral to the liturgy and which, for that reason, must never be crowded, obscured, or moved:

1. ALTAR - the table in the center of the sanctuary on which the Eucharistic sacrifice is offered. Space must be allowed for the celebrant and other ministers to walk and stand in front of and behind the altar.
2. AMBO - the podium or lectern located on the left side of the sanctuary from which the Word of God is proclaimed. Although it is semi-portable, it must never be moved out of position.
3. CHAIR - the seat, located near the altar, from which the celebrant presides at the service. Because of its function, it must not be blocked or crowded by decoration.

### **RULES FOR DECORATIONS**

Due to the limited size of our sanctuary and because the functions of these various furnishings should be respected and emphasized, there is a limited amount of space available for the placement of decoration and flowers.

For your wedding, the following decorations are sufficient:

1. USE NO MORE THAN TWO LARGE ARRANGEMENTS OF FLOWERS. These flower arrangements can be placed in the two large, brass vases, which the church possesses, or in others provided by your florist. The vases and flowers may be placed in the recessed area behind the altar and in front of the altar, or, in the case of a wedding, which takes place outside Mass, on either side of the altar.
2. USE NO MORE THAN ONE PAIR OF CANDELABRA. The church possesses one pair of 7-branch candelabra, which you are free to use. If you wish, you can obtain a pair of candelabra from your florist. The candelabra may be placed on either side of the altar, but only in such a way as not to impede movement in the sanctuary.
3. Palms, ferns, etc. may be used. However, ***no more than two palms or ferns should be placed in the sanctuary.*** These plants may be placed on the extreme left and right sides of the sanctuary.

4. If the wedding is to take place at night, candles may be placed on the windowsills, but not at the end of pews. Whenever candles are used, candelabra included, plastic MUST be placed beneath them so as not to allow wax to drip on the carpet.
5. Small arrangements of flowers or bows, etc., may be used to mark off those pews that are to be reserved. Such arrangements may ONLY be attached in such a way as not to damage the pews. (Nails, glue, or tape that will leave a mark, **cannot** be used.)
6. The church possesses kneelers and chairs for use by the wedding party.
7. All arrangements that are the property of the florist MUST BE REMOVED by the florist before the 5:30 PM Mass, or if wedding is after the 5:30 PM Mass, arrangements must be made to remove the items before the Church is locked that evening. **We are not responsible** for items left in the Church. *It is customary for the floral arrangements to remain in the Church for the weekend liturgies.*
8. During Advent and Lent, NO FLOWERS ARE ALLOWED.

*Brittany DeMott (912) 224-4038, brittanydemott@gmail.com and Laura Haslam (912) 596-0641, lghaslam@hotmail.com, have been designated to assist florists and couples. They would be happy to answer any questions concerning these guidelines or to make suggestions.*

## **TIMES FOR DECORATING**

We would strongly suggest that the florist contact the church office, Brittany or Laura, in order to set-up a time when the florist may come to the church and begin decorating.

1. If flowers are to be delivered, the florist must arrange to have someone from the church meet the florist at the church and unlock the sacristy door. Flowers can be kept, before decorating, in the sacristy of the church. Flowers may NOT be delivered and simply dropped in the church before the wedding.
2. The church, as a rule, should be decorated for the wedding no sooner than the day of the wedding itself. If the wedding is to take place before 12:00 Noon, florists may decorate the church the night before. If the wedding is to take place in the afternoon, florists may decorate the church on the same day, no earlier than 9:00 AM. If the wedding is to take place in the evening on Saturday, florists must keep in mind that there is a regularly scheduled 5:30 PM Mass. Therefore, all decorating must be done before 4:00 PM. Also, the decorations must not interfere with the celebration of the 5:30 PM Mass. If they do, as in the case of candelabra, they should be placed in the church after the 5:30 PM Mass.

We will be happy to answer any questions concerning times for decorating the Church.

## IX. PHOTOGRAPHER

**We are happy to welcome professional photographers at the wedding.** We ask that the photographer take only one photograph (if flashes are to be used) as the couple comes up the aisle and one as they go down the aisle. We ask that *no flash photography be taken during the ceremony.* The photographer may take as many non-flash photography as desired, so long as the photographer doesn't distract the assembly.

Photographers are requested to contact the priest who will be officiating at the wedding at least one week prior to the ceremony to inquire about the positions the photographer may wish to assume in the church during the ceremony.

If the ceremony is to be videotaped, the videographer must contact the priest one-week prior to the wedding to be advised as to where to stand.

## X. FEES

1. USE OF THE CHURCH – The fee for use of the church is \$500.00. Cash or checks made payable to Blessed Sacrament Church are accepted, and your wedding cannot take place until we have received this fee in our office. ***For registered & practicing members of the parish,*** consult the pastor.

2. MUSICIANS - The fee for the organist is \$200.00. The organist's contract requires that if another organist is chosen to play at the wedding, a bench fee of \$75 is to be paid.

The Soloist/Cantor charges a base fee of \$125, based on experience. This fee is payable in advance directly to the soloist/cantor or can be given to Mr. Timothy Remsen, the Music Director. *These fees are to be made payable in advance.*

3. ALTAR SERVERS - You may wish to provide altar servers from among your own family and friends. If, however, you wish the parish to provide servers please inform the priest in advance. Normally, two servers are sufficient for a wedding. Servers provided by the parish should receive a stipend of at least \$10.00 each.