

**POLICIES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE CELEBRATION OF
THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE**

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the parish family of Saint Mark Catholic Church we would like to congratulate you both on your upcoming wedding. The Sacrament of Matrimony is concerned with the sacred covenant of love between two persons. This sacrament witnessed before a believing community is made holy in the self-sacrificing witness of the couple who have proclaimed that henceforth they will “become one.” Please be assured of our prayers and support as you prepare for the Sacrament of Marriage. The following information will help you to begin the process towards your wedding date.

In order for a wedding date and time to be reserved, the bride, the groom, or their family must be actively participating at Mass and living the life of an active member of Saint Mark Catholic Church, for a minimum of six (6) months. For those living in another city, this would mean establishing a relationship with a parish there and fulfilling this requirement. To begin your marriage plans, please call the Pastoral Secretary at 910-398-6509 to set your initial meeting with one of the priests.

REQUIREMENTS

The Prenuptial Investigation. Those helping the couple prepare for marriage, usually the priest, will complete a short questionnaire with the couple. This elicits basic background information and ensures that the couple is free to enter into marriage.

Baptismal Certificate. Catholics will need to obtain a baptismal certificate dated within the last six months from your church of original baptism. Baptized Christians are also asked to obtain a baptismal certificate if possible; otherwise we require two affidavits attesting to the baptism. Have a recent Certificate of Baptism from your church of baptism (both parties) sent to:

**St. Mark Catholic Church
1011 Eastwood Road
Wilmington, NC 28403
Attn: Pastoral Secretary**

Marriage Preparation Program. It is the Church’s preference that the priest who works with the couple during their preparation also be the one to witness their vows. We recognize that is not always possible, so we ask that all couples who are being prepared elsewhere schedule a meeting with the priest who will be witnessing their marriage at least 3 months prior to the date. That way, we can get to know you and make sure that everything is well prepared for a beautiful and meaningful celebration.

You are required to attend a Marriage Preparation Workshop sponsored by the Diocese of Raleigh. The dates and locations for both the One-Day Workshop and or the Weekend for Engaged Couples can be found on the Diocese of Raleigh Webpage www.dioceseofraleigh.org. Locate “Offices” in the top menu, click on “Marriage & Family Life”, then “Marriage Preparation” and follow the links to register on line for the workshop that best suits your schedule.

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Dispensations/Permission. When one partner is non-Catholic, or the location of the ceremony is not in a church or chapel, is located outside the diocese of Raleigh, or the Officiant is a non-Catholic, the priest will assist the couple in obtaining the proper dispensations and permissions.

Civil Marriage License. For a marriage at St. Mark, the couple can obtain a civil marriage license from the New Hanover County Marriage License Department located at 216 N. 2nd Street, Room 2, Wilmington. Office is open M-F from 8:00-4:00. Both bride and groom must be present when the license is issued. The following documents must be presented from both the bride and groom before a license will be issued:

Effective February 01, 2009, Applicants for Marriage in New Hanover County must provide Picture ID with date of birth, certified copies of birth certificates (if birth certificate is from another country, couple must also provide a certified translation) and an acceptable proof of social security or ITIN number. (Will accept W2, statement from Social Security Administration or pay stub with printed SSAN).

You may obtain a license in any county in North Carolina, but you will need to call for their specific requirements per county.

If you have been divorced in the last 60 days you should bring your divorce papers. The marriage license costs \$60 and is good for 60 days.

For widows and widowers, an authentic certificate of death of the departed spouse with whom the individual was married and a certificate of the previous marriage.

Declaration of Nullity, if previously married and the former spouse is not deceased. When there is a previous marriage, special investigation will be made, and some of these can take an extended period of time. Wedding dates cannot be set until freedom to marry is assured.

** Please call the Tribunal Office at the Diocese at (919) 821-9759.*

Date and Time of Wedding. The date and time of the rehearsal and wedding will be confirmed at the first appointment with the priest.

CONVALIDATION

A Catholic who marries another Catholic or non-Catholic in a civil ceremony or a religious ceremony of another faith without receiving the required dispensation or permission from the Bishop should have the union validated in the Church.

In this way, the Catholic partner recognizes that marriage is a Sacrament of the Church; that s/he is returning to the community of the faithful and may rightfully receive Holy Communion. The requirements and procedures for validation follow the usual preparation for marriage.

THE CEREMONY

Since the Second Vatican Council, the options available to the couple for their wedding have been greatly expanded. At the first meeting you will receive the wedding format and a list of readings. During one of the scheduled meetings with the priest the options and reading selections will be discussed.

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Times. Saturday weddings are the norm and may be scheduled for 11:00 or 2:00 p.m. with rehearsals normally scheduled for 5:30pm and 6:30 p.m. the night before. Other dates and times need to be coordinated with the parish. There are many activities and celebrations that take place on the Church grounds; therefore the rehearsal and wedding are scheduled for these times. Please stress with all members of the wedding party that they are on time for scheduled events.

Music. The music selected for your wedding must be religious in character. Overtly secular music is not permitted. For example, the “Bridal Chorus” from the opera “Lohengrin” by Wagner (also known as “Here Comes the Bride”) has strong secular associations, and as such, is not appropriate for liturgy. Other music selected must be approved by the Music Director. The couple needs to make an appointment with the Music Director to discuss music and any instruments other than the organ or piano which the couple may request.

If our Music Director/musicians are not available to play for the wedding, other musicians may be used with the permission of the Music Director. Soloists and instrumentalists are also welcome with the approval of the Music Director. While it is not required, we encourage the use of a trained cantor or psalmist for the liturgy. If a vocal soloist is scheduled, it is expected that they sing the Psalm and Gospel Acclamation. Please review GUIDELINES FOR SELECTION OF WEDDING MUSIC. The Saint Mark Music Director is Alex Hill, and you may reach him at 910-398-6514 or music@stmarkcc.net.

Music Fees must be paid at your initial meeting with the St. Mark Music Director. Please see “Fees and Donations” below for further information.

Wedding Ceremony Coordinators. Saint Mark provides wedding ceremony coordinators that assist the wedding couple and the priest or deacon in preparing for their wedding and ensure that the ceremony will be managed according to St Mark’s guidelines and as efficiently and effectively as possible. Involvement with the coordinators will center specifically on the rehearsal and wedding day. Any personal wedding coordinator will not have responsibility in the Church rehearsal or ceremony. The wedding ceremony coordinator will reach out approximately 3 months before the wedding. At that time, discussion will begin regarding logistical preferences for the ceremony as they relate to the wedding party, readers and other variables not determined by the priest or music director.

Please review the following guidelines prior to booking a wedding date:

*St Mark Catholic Church places a great importance on being able to participate in your wedding and assumes a responsibility for helping to maintain the sacred and serious intent of the special day. As such, we have determined that there are some elements that can detract from making it the extraordinary and religious occasion that you seek and have listed some of the ordinary things that can be distractions or hazards and that prove to be unacceptable:

*It is important to think about the fact that the wedding ceremony is being held in a Church and the bridal party’s wedding attire should be consistent with the need for respect and decorum in our Lord’s house.

*Things such as rice, birdseed, confetti or flower petals and a carpet runner can create the opportunity for falls and accidents and are not permitted.

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*There cannot be a reception line after the ceremony as the Sacrament of Confession occurs shortly after and it will be important to go directly back into the Church for pictures.

*There will be no unity candle.

*While gum chewing is not harmful, it can spoil the beauty of the effect that you will be working so hard to achieve and is not allowed.

*All of the wedding party and readers must show respect and reverence the Tabernacle when approaching the altar.

*The photographer may not roam inside the Church during the ceremony.

*Though you may want to include many family members in your wedding party, children participating in the ceremony must be at least 5 years of age.

For more information please contact Joann Toscano at 910-397-7847; jtoscano1@bellsouth.com.

Decorations. Flowers are permitted on either side of the Altar and in the middle. You may choose your own flowers and florist, but we encourage you to coordinate with other couples being married on the same day. Your flowers may be taken with you after your wedding, please do not take the church flowers in front of the ambo they are for weekend liturgies. Pew bows ONLY may be used on pew, no live greenery or flowers. No other flowers or decorations are used in the church except those bouquets carried by the bridal party. No other paraphernalia is to be used during the wedding ceremony, i.e. candelabra, potted palms, etc. No artificial flowers of any kind are permitted. The altar is the most sacred place in the church for it symbolizes Christ and therefore, must be the dominant and central focus of all decorations. Weddings during Lent and Advent must adhere to the more somber tone of the liturgical season.

Guest Clergy. If you are using a Guest Clergy, it will be your responsibility to communicate the following policy to him. Guest Clergy do not make or set parish policies regarding weddings held at Saint Mark. Guest clergy preside over the ceremony and administer the marriage vows. All guidelines and policies of Saint Mark will be followed as described in these pages. If the guest clergy is not from the Diocese of Raleigh then he must submit his credentials from his Diocese prior to the wedding.

We have one “informal” Bride Room for dressing. One additional classroom may be used for gathering and last minute preparations prior to the wedding. Please coordinate the use of rooms with the pastoral secretary **prior** to the wedding. If available, additional rooms may be rented.

Photography. The photographer is to speak with the priest prior to the ceremony. The discreet taking of candid available light photographs is permitted during the ceremony as well as video taping. Photography may in no way interfere with the ceremony. Due to Mass schedules, Confessions, and to accommodate other regular church activities, all wedding photography is

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restricted to thirty (30) minutes before the wedding and thirty (30) minutes after the wedding. This time limit is not a problem when proper planning is done by the photographer. The ceremony is not re-enacted for photographs.

A Prie Dieu (kneeler) for the bride and groom and two chairs are placed facing the altar or oblique to the altar. No other furnishings are to be moved.

Due to space limitations, a "Receiving Line," in the vestibule of the church is not permitted. We suggest the "Receiving Line" be conducted during the wedding banquet.

Rice, birdseed, and any other grains may not be thrown.

All **active** participants in the wedding should attend the rehearsal.

When both the bride and groom are Catholic, they **should** be married at Mass. If only one party is Catholic then the Wedding Ceremony Outside Mass will normally be celebrated.

The wedding party may choose those to proclaim the readings and the prayers of the faithful. The Officiant always proclaims the Gospel.

RECOMMENDED PLANNING SCHEDULE

Six months before the wedding:

1. Contact the parish and make an appointment to set a date and time for the wedding. You can begin completing the paperwork at this time.
2. You must attend a Marriage Preparation Program. It is best to schedule and attend the program as soon as possible. Please insure that the Fully Engaged results are emailed directly to St. Mark at pastoral@stmarkcc.net. A marriage preparation couple will then be assigned to answer questions and discuss the Fully Engaged results.
3. You will also have your initial meeting with the priest who will explain necessary forms, the sacrament of marriage, and provide the couple a packet with a list of readings and wedding ceremony sequence of events.
4. Catholics must obtain a recently dated Certificate of Baptism from your church of baptism. It is desirable if non-Catholic Christians can also provide a Certificate (or proof) of Baptism.
5. Contact the Director of Music for the initial music planning meeting. Please remember to bring payment for all music fees to your first meeting with the parish Music Director.
6. Prior to or after your wedding, you also have the opportunity to participate in Natural Family Planning Programs (NFP) offered by our parish. We have two different programs and suggest you contact both coordinators to determine the program that best fits your particular needs.

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7. Saint Mark has wedding ceremony coordinators that assist the wedding couple and the priest or deacon in preparing for their wedding. The priest/deacon will contact the wedding ceremony coordinator; they in turn will contact the couple.

Three months before the wedding

1. Contact the parish and make an appointment to discuss the ceremony (if not already accomplished).
2. Finalize music selections with the Director of Music.
3. Review the Fully Engaged with your marriage preparation team.
4. Wedding Ceremony Coordinator will contact the couple for initial meeting.

One month before the wedding

1. Contact the parish regarding the finalized plans for your wedding. These plans include readings, music, sequence of events, etc.
2. This is now an opportune time to bring your donations and gifts to the parish. At this point, you do not have anything to worry about concerning the church ceremony.
3. You can use this final month to concern yourself with other details, civil marriage license, reception coordination, etc.

REHEARSAL

Rehearsals are important in order to make all attendants and participants comfortable. They are held to give everyone a chance to walk through the mechanics of the ceremony. The Wedding Coordinator assigned to your wedding will conduct the rehearsal to insure that the diocese regulations are adhered to. At the rehearsal, the couple should give the Wedding Coordinator the following items for proper set up on the day of the wedding.

- Programs
- You *must* bring the marriage license with you.
- If you have not already done so; bring your donations for the church and altar server(s).

Unless otherwise coordinated, the standard rehearsal times are 5:30 p.m. for an 11:00 wedding and 6:30 p.m. for a 2:00 p.m. wedding. Rehearsals typically take one hour unless the bridal party is unusually large. Please ask all participants to be on time.

YOUR WEDDING DAY

Relax and enjoy! You have invited guests at a specific time, so please help us to accommodate them by starting on time. Also please be reminded that we may have more than one ceremony on any given Saturday.

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FEES AND DONATIONS

The parish Director of Music has first right of refusal for himself or other parish organists for all weddings held at Saint Mark. If an outside organist is requested the Director of Music will approve the guest organist and will receive a bench fee in keeping with the Parish Wedding Policy and the Code of Professional Development of the American Guild of Organists.

The organist/pianist *fee* is \$250 and the check should be made out to the musician. The organist/pianist does not traditionally play for wedding rehearsals; their presence at the rehearsal will require an additional *fee* of \$75.00. A bench *fee* of \$75.00 will be charged when not using the church organist. The cantor/psalmist *fee* is \$150.

A music and liturgy consultation *fee* of \$75 is paid to the parish Director of Music. This fee is for outlining and helping choose music in the liturgy, arranging any special image files for inclusion in wedding program/worship aid, coordination, scheduling, rehearsing with outside musicians, etc. Checks should be made out to the individual.

Other instrumentalist *fees* such as flute or cello are normally \$150 and should be made out to the musician.

Music Fees must be paid at your initial meeting with the St. Mark Music Director.

A *donation* for the use of the church facilities is customary- \$250 for St. Mark parishioners and \$500 for non parishioners. The check should be made out to St. Mark Catholic Church.

A *gift* should also be given to each Altar Server that assists in the ceremony. Typically, two or three altar servers are used for wedding ceremonies.

Please coordinate the use of rooms with the parish office **prior** to the wedding. Should you need additional rooms other than the church, Bridal Room and one classroom, contact the Parish Office at 910-392-0720 ext. 221 to inquire about renting space. The rental fee is \$50 for each additional room; this fee needs to be paid at the time of reserving the space.

CONCLUSION

The Sacrament of Matrimony is concerned with the sacred covenant of love between two persons. This sacrament witnessed before a believing community is made holy in the self-sacrificing witness of the couple who have proclaimed that henceforth they will “become one.” Please be assured of our prayers and support as you prepare for your Sacrament of Matrimony.

Yours in Christ,

The pastor and parish staff of St. Mark Catholic Church