

**PREPARING FOR THE  
SACRAMENT OF  
MARRIAGE**

***POLICIES & PROCEDURES***



**Saint Margaret Mary Church**  
3055 Leechburg Road  
Lower Burrell, PA 15068  
724-335-2336  
[www.smm-parish.org](http://www.smm-parish.org)

## **Introduction**

### **Preparing for Marriage**

The Church has traditionally had a great concern that engaged couples have the opportunity to grow in the love they will pledge on their wedding day. Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage aims to assist couples in developing a fuller understanding of the unique nature of the marriage covenant. Marriage is one of the seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church, a sacrament of “vocation.” It celebrates God’s summons to the engaged couple to form a permanent “community of life and love” patterned on the love of Christ revealed in the gospels. Marital love is a sharing in Christ’s total and unconditional love for His Bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:25). This faithful and unending love is expressed in His suffering, death and resurrection.

Marriage preparation at St. Margaret Mary Church is aimed at helping engaged couples to reflect upon their marriage commitment as a part of God’s unique plan for their life together. Time is therefore required to consider the profound meaning of the marriage vows, to complete the necessary marriage forms and records, and to plan the wedding liturgy. Ideally, marriage preparation should begin at least one year from the time of the scheduled date.

### **Requirements for Marriage**

Before a date can be confirmed for a wedding, the following matters are thoroughly reviewed:

The couple should bring the marriage license and all wedding fees to the rehearsal and give them to the Wedding Coordinator.

- **Sacrament of Penance.** Catholics who come to the Church for Sacramental Marriage should be in the “state of grace,” i.e. be absolved of serious sin. Therefore, couples and the wedding party are encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance (Confession) in spiritual preparation for the wedding day. Due to time constraints, however, this cannot be done at the time of the rehearsal except by special request. Plan to take care of this before the rehearsal.
- **The Marriage License.** A Pennsylvania marriage license is required by state law. The license is granted by the County Clerk of the Orphan’s Court Office.

### **Wedding Fees**

Saint Margaret Mary Church provides the Church facility without charge for registered parishioners who marry at the Church. It is customary, however, to provide a stipend (or “fee for service”) for parish staff persons who help the couple prepare and plan for marriage and/or assist in the marriage ceremony.

A fee schedule exists for the Director of Music & Liturgy, Wedding Coordinator, Altar Servers, and Priest Celebrant. Please contact the parish office for this information. Fees may be placed in individually marked envelopes and given to the Wedding Coordinator at the rehearsal.

- **Altar Decorations.** The couple ordinarily provides flowers for the altar. These altar flowers are then left after the wedding as a gift to the Church. Aisle bows or flowers may not be attached to the pews with tape. They are to be removed immediately following the ceremony.
- **Throwing rice, etc.** Objects such as rice, rose petals, confetti, birdseed, oatmeal, bubbles or balloons may not be used on Church premises. Please plan and advise all guests accordingly.
- **Use of Church following the Wedding.** The wedding party has use of the Church for 1-½ hours from the time the wedding begins. Thus, 2:30 p.m. wedding parties must vacate the Church premises by 4:00 p.m. The couple has the option of using the time following the wedding either for a receiving line or for taking pictures.
- **Crash or Aisle Runner.** The use of a crash for the main aisle of the Church is not recommended since the aisle is already carpeted.
- **Unity Candle.** The use of a Unity Candle, while having secular and sentimental value, is not a Christian symbol and is not encouraged during the liturgy. However, it is permitted.
- **Wedding Rehearsal.** All those participating in the wedding ceremony should be present for the rehearsal, unless special circumstances apply. They should be present early enough so that the rehearsal can begin and end punctually. The Wedding Coordinator will conduct the rehearsal.
- **Freedom to marry.** Each party must establish that he/she is free to marry, i.e. that neither party is bound by any previous marriage bond. (For those who have been previously married, the priest will review the documentation of any previous marriage to determine whether or not the marriage bond is valid according to Church law.) Freedom also means that there is no force or coercion on either party to enter into marriage.
- **Church affiliation and practice of the Catholic faith.** At least one of the Catholic parties must belong to Saint Margaret Mary Church. A Catholic party from another parish must have his/her pastor's permission to be married at Saint Margaret Mary's Church. It is assumed that engaged couples are practicing their faith and seeking to grow spiritually as they approach Sacramental Marriage.
- **Intention and Maturity.** The vows of marriage express an unconditional love and commitment to a life-long and exclusive marital covenant. The couple must demonstrate an understanding of the meaning of fidelity and sufficient maturity to enter into such a permanent marital bond.
- **Openness to Children.** Children are the natural outgrowth of the love of husband and wife. Both parties must express their openness to the procreation and nurturing of new life as part of their marriage covenant.

- **Required documents.** Catholic parties are to present a recently issued copy (not more than six months old) of their baptism certificate. For those baptized at Saint Margaret Mary Church, this record will be in the parish Baptism register in the parish office. Catholics baptized elsewhere should contact the Church of Baptism and request a new copy of their baptism record. For those who are not Catholic, a certificate of Baptism from their Church of Baptism must be presented. The marriage will be officially entered in the register of the Church of Baptism for Catholic parties.
- **Dispensations.** A dispensation or permission from the Bishop must be granted for a Catholic to marry a person who is not Catholic. In this case, the Catholic party is asked to promise to continue in the Catholic faith and to assume responsibility for the sacramental preparation and religious formation of children. The issue of raising children needs appropriate discussion in the marriage preparation process.

### **Steps in the Process**

- First Interview with Priest
- FOCCUS Instrument
- Second Interview with Priest
- Appointment with Music Director to plan wedding liturgy
- Meetings with Sponsor Couple
- Third Interview with Priest - Complete marriage forms
- Wedding Ceremony Review (if necessary)
- Rehearsal

### **Planning the Wedding: Policies**

- **The Wedding Liturgy.** If both parties are Catholic, the wedding liturgy will normally include the Mass. If one party is not Catholic or not baptized, the option to have the wedding liturgy without the Mass may be advisable. This matter should be decided in consultation with the priest.
- **Date and Time of Weddings.** Weddings on Saturdays may be scheduled at 2:30 p.m. Friday or weekday evening wedding times may be scheduled around the normal use of the church. The time allotted for the use of the Church is 1-½ hours from the time of the wedding.
- **Planning Your Wedding Liturgy.** An appointment should be made with the Director of Music and Liturgy at Saint Margaret Mary Church to plan the wedding liturgy. The director serves as organist for weddings and will coordinate the hiring of additional musicians as necessary. Before meeting with the Director of Music and Liturgy, please read the [Guidelines for Selecting Readings and Music at Your Wedding Liturgy](#). You may listen to audio clips of [Musical Selections](#) and view [Readings](#) appropriate for your wedding liturgy. Please indicate on the [Planning Sheet](#) your preferences for music selections and readings. If you would like more information on the wedding liturgy, please visit [Introducing the Catholic Wedding Ceremony](#) and [Music and the Celebration of Marriage](#).
- **Photography/Videography.** These professionals are asked to respect the Church as a sacred space for worship. The Church is not a studio. They must check with the wedding coordinator regarding rules and regulations for picture taking when they arrive prior to the wedding.
- **Smoking/Drinking.** Smoking and the use of alcoholic beverages are not permitted on Church property. Photographers may not stage wedding pictures in which alcoholic beverages are used either in the Church or on parish grounds.