

GUIDELINES FOR THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE



**The Parish of Mary,
Queen of the Apostles
Belmont, North Carolina**

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Queen of the Apostles
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9. THE USE OF THE PARISH

a) There are no fee requirements for the celebration of the sacraments. Use of the building by parish members is free. Use by non parish couples carries a fifty dollar (50.00) fee.

b) If the bride wishes to dress here at the parish, a \$25.00 cleaning fee must be paid beforehand. The bridal party is expected to remove bags, boxes and other materials brought with them immediately after the wedding.

c) The parish has limited facilities for receptions. There is also very limited facilities for the bride and her party prior to the wedding. Use of facilities for dressing, etc. must be discussed with the pastor.

10. THE ORDER OF SERVICE

Most weddings follow this pattern closely:

- Procession
- Greeting and Prayer
- Reading of Scriptures and Homily
- The Wedding Ceremony
 1. Statement of Intentions
 2. Vows
 3. Rings
- General Intercessions

(If Mass is celebrated, the Offertory occurs here and then Mass continues as normal until after the Communion Rite. Then the marriage rite resumes:)

- The Lord's Prayer
- The Nuptial Blessing
- The Closing Prayer and Blessing
- The Recessional

This not only allows us to prepare for our next service but does not "overburden" the couple with additional opportunities for picture requests and late arrivals at the reception.

We strongly enforce this 30 minute rule. Please make your photographer aware of it.

8. WHAT ABOUT VARIOUS WEDDING CUSTOMS?

a) The parish wishes to support those ethnic and multi-cultural wedding customs that represent the heritage of our families and the best of liturgy and culture. The proper use of these customs will be discussed in preparing for the wedding.

b) The throwing of rice or birdseed is not permitted. The use of rice is an ancient, pagan fertility symbol which is not consistent with the Christian ethos. The substitution of birdseed, which remains on walkways and stairwells after the wedding party leaves, is a safety hazard and a potential risk for injury.

c) The use of a cloth or disposable plastic aisle runner is not permitted in the church. The purpose of the runner was to protect long gowns from the dirt of stone floors. Practically speaking, since our aisles are carpeted, there is no need for a runner. Added layers of cloth or plastic that are not secured can also be a safety hazard as others attempt to walk on it at the end of the service.

d) Flower petals may not be scattered or dropped indoors. All real petals contain dyes that seep into the carpeting and leave stains. Also when real petals or artificial ones are scattered on the floor where others must walk, a safety hazard can be created.

e) There are never any exceptions to (b), (c), and (d) above.

CONGRATULATIONS!

What a wonderful gift for a parish community to celebrate: the love of a man and a woman in the sacrament of matrimony! In witnessing this love the community is reminded of the love of Jesus Christ for his spouse, the church (Ephesians 5: 22). By word and example your married life will make you heralds of the faith (L.G.: 11). In order to assist the church in its obligation to offer you guidance and support, I am happy to offer these guidelines for celebrating a parish wedding.

-Father Frank Cancro

1. WHO MAY MARRY IN THE PARISH CHURCH?

As much as possible we wish to be a welcoming parish. This means we try hard to make many different people feel as comfortable as they can in our church home. In discerning who may celebrate the sacrament of matrimony here, we try to balance this call to hospitality with a concern for the laws of the church and a regard for the integrity of the sacraments. The combination of these three realities lead us to the following :

a) Generally speaking, *members* of our parish community may celebrate their weddings here. Membership in the parish is defined by the completion of a registration form, and by regular and active participation in the worship life and mission of the parish.

b) Roman Catholics who reside within the boundaries of this parish but who have no formal relationship with us must speak to the pastor first about establishing a relationship with the parish -- with an eye toward celebrating a wedding here *sometime in the future*.

c) Former parish members whose family may still reside here or whose family have spent a significant number of years growing up here must obtain written permission from their *current* pastor before speaking to the pastor concerning a wedding here.

d) Catholic individuals from outside the area who wish to marry in Gaston County and use our parish church must present the letter mentioned in (c) above as well as a completed preparation file from their home parish. The use of the parish in these situations will be determined on a case by case basis by the pastor.

2. CAN OTHER CATHOLIC CHURCHES BE USED?

Since the parish church is the "sign" of the baptismal community to which an individual belongs, weddings should normally take place in the parish church here at Belmont. There are a few exceptions:

7. WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE LITURGY FOR OUR WEDDING?

Marriage in the Catholic Church is not just a matter for the couple. It is a celebration of the whole church. At the beginning of your preparation you will be given materials that identify the various options you have for prayers, readings and processions. We can help you shape the ceremony. There are a few general principles, however, to keep in mind:

a) Generally the marriage of two Catholics takes place during the celebration of the Eucharist. The wedding of a Catholic and a member of another Christian communion takes place during the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word. Sometimes the composition of family and friends who will be present will further shape the type of liturgy for your wedding.

b) The celebration of any sacrament in the church, including marriage, should be accompanied by opportunities for all those assembled to respond in prayer and song. This must be kept in mind when planning your service.

c) When decorating our sanctuary space for a wedding one must always respect the centrality of the Table and the Ambo and the reserved Eucharist.. Decor cannot interfere with the flow of individuals around and in front of the altar. Please keep this in mind as you lay out your church decor. Generally we do not anticipate that your wedding flowers will remain in the church. Please arrange for them to be taken to the reception or elsewhere after the ceremony.

d) The parish's only requirement for photographers and videographers is that they never obstruct the view of the assembly during the celebration or impede the "flow" or procession or ritual in order to take a picture. To this end, it might be wise to consider pictures before and/or after the ceremony as well. We do restrict photography time after the wedding to no more than 30 minutes.

-Music Ministers can be hired from outside the parish or arrangements can be made for a church musician. In either case, congregational singing as well as musical accompaniment is the norm for a Catholic wedding and any musician is expected to shape a program to accommodate this principle. Musicians are hired by the couple, not the church. The couple is also responsible for negotiating any music fees.

6. WHAT ABOUT THE REHEARSAL?

a) The rehearsal is usually held the evening before the wedding. Other arrangements can be made when necessary. It is expected that the entire wedding party which will participate in the ceremony will be present (and on time) for the rehearsal. Remember, the parish has other activities that may be unfolding in the same evening.

b) The day and time for rehearsal is arranged with the pastor when the wedding date is set. Since we understand the need for flexibility with regard to rehearsal, we are happy to work with the couple.

c) The couple is expected to bring the official license from the Gaston County Courthouse to the rehearsal (or drop it off prior to the rehearsal in the church office). Rehearsals will not begin until this paperwork is made available.

d) At the rehearsal you may choose a family member or friend who might assist you in ordering your procession and see to the escorting of parents and others as part of the ceremony and receiving line. The parish does not utilize the services of outside "directresses."

e) While the couple should compose the wedding party in any way they feel appropriate, children *MAY NOT* serve as flower girls, ring bearers, junior brides or grooms or in any other capacity in the procession or ceremony. Our experience has taught us that even the well behaved child reacts differently in a church full of people and in a ceremony full of different actions, sounds and expectations from everyday life. There are no exceptions to this policy.

a) If both parties are Catholic and the wedding is scheduled to occur in the parish church of the other party.

b) If there is a Catholic Church of historical or personally important significance that the parties wish to use (this, of course, is subject to the other church's wedding policies). In this case, written permission from the pastor of Queen of the Apostles in Belmont must be obtained first.

c) Generally speaking, because of parish schedules, the parish priest will not travel to other Catholic churches for such weddings. Arrangements must be made with the clergy of the place where the wedding will occur.

d) Symbols are important to Catholic believers. The church building is an important symbol of the Body of Christ. For this reason, Catholic weddings must take place in a church building and not in other indoor or outdoor venues.

3. CAN OTHER CHURCH BUILDINGS BE USED?

If a Catholic is marrying another Christian, it is possible for the wedding to be held in the church of the other party. This requires permission called a "Dispensation from Form." Be sure that the parish is aware of this as you start your preparation program so the appropriate paperwork can be completed.

a) In such instances, church law dictates that the vows must be received by the minister of the place where the wedding occurs.

b) The same is true if a Catholic is marrying a non - Christian.

c) With a *Dispensation from Form*, for an appropriate reason, even a civil authority can preside outside of a religious building and the marriage is valid in the Catholic Church. Circumstances that might warrant this must be discussed with the pastor.

4. HOW DO WE SET THE WEDDING DATE?

a) Couples should contact the church office (704 825 9600) at least six months in advance of the date they hope to celebrate marriage. They may reserve the date *tentatively* at that time. Their reservation becomes *formal* after their first meeting with the pastor and the completion of the pre-marital information forms.

b) The time for the wedding is set with respect to the couple's wishes and the availability of both the church building and the clergy. Weddings are usually scheduled on Saturday from 10:00 AM through 2:30 PM. The church facilities and parking lot must be cleared for Reconciliation at 4:00 PM.

c) Outside of scheduled weekend Eucharist, no Saturday evening or Sunday weddings are permitted. Evening weddings may be celebrated on Friday evenings, if the church and clergy are available.

d) Since a wedding is a public expression of God's love for the whole church, weddings *may* always be celebrated at *any* of the parish weekend liturgies. We can help you plan a wedding in this context.

e) There are some times in the church year when the celebration of a wedding is prohibited or discouraged. Weddings are *not permitted* on Christmas or the Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday or Holy Saturday. A nuptial mass *may not be celebrated* on All Soul's Day (November 2) or other Solemnities of Obligation. While weddings may be celebrated during Lent, they *must reflect* the simplicity and the spirit of that penitential season.

5. WHO ARE THE MINISTERS IN A CATHOLIC WEDDING?

a) In the Roman Catholic tradition, the bride and the groom minister the sacrament to one another. A clergyman and two other witnesses are required to be present.

b) Ordinarily, the parish priest will be the official witness at a wedding. If a couple has a special relationship with a priest or deacon friend, or if they have a relative who is a priest or a deacon, they are welcome to invite them to preside over the church's rites and act as official witness at the wedding. Please be sure to mention this at your first meeting with the pastor, so proper permissions can be obtained.

c) Ministers from other Christian traditions who have a connection to one of the parties can be invited to participate as well. For example, one of the possibilities for their presence and participation would include the sharing of Scripture. This can further be discussed with the pastor.

d) Other ministers to consider for the celebration include:

- Altar servers to assist especially if there is a Mass. These can be provided by the family or arranged through the church.

- Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion since Communion is shared under both forms at a wedding Mass. These can be provided by the family or arranged through the church.

- Readers to proclaim the Scriptures during the celebration (whether during or outside of Mass). Often family members are comfortable in this role.

- Hospitality Ministers can help direct people to their seats, hand out programs and generally provide a hospitable environment for guests. Often family members and/or friends are willing to assist in this role.

- Wedding Coordinators can assist the bridal party in a number of details including the order of the procession. However, once rehearsal begins at the church, the details of the rituals are the focus of the pastor with no additional assistance.