



COMMUNION *of* SAINTS PARISH

Revised 08/2025

A Guide to

Marriage Preparation



Cover image: Philippe de Champaigne. *The Marriage of the Virgin*. Circa 1644. Oil on panel. Wallace Collection, London.

Communion of Saints Parish

Church of St. Ann
2175 Coventry Road
Cleveland Heights | Ohio | 44118

Church of St. Philomena
13824 Euclid Avenue
East Cleveland | Ohio | 44118

Office: 216.321.0024
Fax: 216.321.7702
communionofsaintsparish.org

Table of Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. Preparation Process
- III. Setting a Date
- IV. Eligibility to be Married at Communion of Saints
- V. Initial Meetings
- VI. Assessment of Readiness
- VII. Necessary Documentation
- VIII. The Sacramental Preparation Process
- IX. The Wedding Liturgy
- X. The Ministers of the Wedding
- XI. Answers to Frequently Asked Questions
- XII. The Wedding Procession

I. Introduction

Congratulations on your engagement! Our parish family of Communion of Saints is honored to help you prepare for your wedding day, and the community welcomes you as you begin your new life together.

A sacrament is an encounter with the Risen Lord Jesus. Every sacrament brings us into contact with the saving activity of the Lord; we encounter the dying and rising of Jesus.

The ministers of the Sacrament of Matrimony are the bride and groom. When two baptized persons exchange wedding vows, they share the life of Christ which they have received in baptism. The bride and groom extend the Lord's presence to each other, and they become a sign of the Lord's presence to the wider community.

The visible sign of the Sacrament of Matrimony is the exchange of consent, often called the wedding vows. In order to have a true exchange of consent, both the bride and groom must be responsible adults and be capable of forming a community of life and love. The couple must honestly, and without reservation, declare to each other their willingness to assume the duties of marriage and parenthood according to the teachings of Christ and the Catholic Church.

Since Christ is the center of Christian marriage, the bride and groom should seriously review their relationship with the Lord. They should show signs of a positive commitment to Christ and should (if Catholic) regularly participate in the parish celebration of Sunday Eucharist.

For this reason, it is important that you give time and energy to prepare well for the Sacrament of Matrimony. We are pleased to share in this responsibility with you and to assist you in the months to come. The following guidelines are meant to provide you with important information about our marriage preparation process. Please take time to read these guidelines carefully.



II. Preparation Process

The parish priest or deacon will guide you through the preparation process.

To give preparation the time it deserves and requires, please contact the parish between six and twelve months before your intended wedding date. Our parish staff can tell you the availability of a date, but they cannot reserve one until the preparing minister gives permission.

Setting a Date

A wedding date can only be set after the couple has met with the parish priest or deacon. Your wedding date will be confirmed after the proper assessments, evaluations, and requisite preparation with the priest or deacon, and any necessary dispensations are completed. Availability is subject to other activities for which the church has been reserved, as well as liturgical restrictions for certain holy days. Weddings can be scheduled at any time of the year except during Lent. In the case of a previous marriage, no date may be given until the annulment process is completed and a decree of nullity has been granted.

III. Eligibility to be Married at Communion of Saints

To be married at Communion of Saints, at least one of you must be Roman Catholic, and must be practicing and living out your Catholic faith.

IV. Initial Meeting

In the initial meeting, the preparing minister will gather basic details such as contact information, what faith each party practices, and the history of the relationship. There will also be an assessment in which the minister determines your canonical freedom to marry within the Church. The rest of the preparation process will also be explained to you in greater detail. If you intend for the place of your marriage celebration to be someplace other than Communion of Saints Parish, please inform the preparing minister in this initial meeting. At this meeting, the time of the wedding will be set ---Fridays: any time after 3:00 pm. Saturdays: 11:30 am or 1:30 pm. Only two weddings are scheduled on any given day.



V. Assessment of Readiness

Part of the preparing minister's responsibility in working with you is to ensure that you are capable, as a couple, of entering into the Sacrament of Matrimony and fulfilling the responsibilities and duties of a married couple. The Church wants your marriage to last and to be filled with joy, which is why we take preparation so seriously. However, for serious reasons, the minister may decide to indefinitely delay the wedding until certain concerns have been addressed; these situations are rare, and normally apparent early in the initial meetings. For other reasons, a wedding may be impossible, such as if a previous marriage is not granted an annulment.

In all cases, the preparing minister will make you aware of any concerns as soon as possible and will provide guidance and direction for working through them.

VI. Necessary Documentation

- *Sacramental Records*

Catholic parties are to obtain a baptismal certificate. These certificates may be obtained from the church in which baptism was celebrated. The documents are to be dated within the last six months. Non-Catholic parties are to obtain a baptismal certificate from their Christian denomination and/or church.

- *Previous Marriages*

If a person has been married before, in any capacity, by any minister, in any way, at any time, it is necessary to provide: (1) Certificate of previous marriage, (2) Death certificate of former spouse (if widow or widower), (3) Declaration of Nullity.

- *Civil Marriage License*

A civil marriage license must be obtained no more than sixty days prior to the wedding, from the Ohio county of residence of either party. If neither party is a resident of Ohio, then the license must be obtained from Cuyahoga County, which is the county of the parish. Most counties charge a fee for obtaining the license and some counties require proof of residence, such as a driver's license. If either party has been married previously, most counties expect a certified copy of the divorce decree or a death certificate.

In Cuyahoga County, a marriage license may be applied for at:



Marriage License Department
One Lakeside Avenue, N.E.
Cleveland, Ohio 44114
website: probate.cuyahogacounty.us

Hours: Monday – Friday 8:30 am – 4:00 pm

N.B. You may complete the information for the license on-line before going to the court to obtain it in person.

VII. The Sacramental Preparation Process

In the Diocese of Cleveland, we utilize an assessment tool called PREPARE & ENRICH. It is an online inventory designed to help identify areas of strength and weakness within a relationship, as well as to evaluate places where growth can occur and how that might come about. It is not a test—it is a tool to help the priest navigate the inner workings of a couple's relationship to strengthen their bond and prepare them for the Sacrament of Matrimony.

In addition, each couple is to participate in *one* of the following, to be discussed with the priest or deacon:

- (1) *Pre-Cana Day*—Pre-Cana is a retreat for couples engaged to be married for the first time in a Catholic Church. It is held at various parishes in our area, and at the Jesuit Retreat Center in Parma, Ohio. For information, call 440.884.9300.
- (2) *Living our Faith in Love* — Online, on-demand program offered by The Marriage Group. Engaged couples can view videos on topics that are helpful in Catholic marriage and respond to reflection questions. Upon completion of the program, a Certificate of Completion will be issued and needs to be presented to the priest or deacon. Access to the materials is good for an entire year. Visit: themarriagegroup.com
- (3) *Cana II*—a Diocesan sponsored program for couples that are entering into a second marriage and blending families. For information, call 216.696.6525 ext. 3570

The couple should expect to meet with the parish priest or deacon several times at the parish to walk through various aspects of marriage, the sacramental vision of matrimony, as well as discuss other pertinent themes.

VIII. The Wedding Liturgy



The wedding liturgy should be understood as the public prayer of the Church that celebrates God's covenant in love. With this in mind, liturgy planning should strive for the full, active and conscious participation of the faithful in this prayer of the Church. Bearing in mind secular and cultural influences, a couple should use the experience of Sunday Eucharist as the model for preparation of their wedding liturgy.

You can and should include your loved ones in the celebration. When it comes to planning the specifics and particulars, the priest or deacon will walk you through the whole process.

Whenever a wedding liturgy involves an inter-religious couple, the Church's preference is for the wedding ceremony to be celebrated without Eucharist. Since it is impossible for Eucharistic hospitality to be extended to the entire assembly, the wedding ceremony without Eucharist does not offend or exclude the family of the non-Catholic spouse. In some circumstances, permission may be granted for the non-Catholic spouse only to receive Eucharist on the wedding day provided that certain criteria are met. Please ask the Presider for your

wedding liturgy if you are interested in pursuing this possibility.

Music

Music is important to the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony. The music chosen should be religious in nature and appropriate for church use. It is expected that you contact our Parish Music Director to help you with your wedding music preparation. The Music Director can be reached at 216-321-0024. It is also an expectation that one of our parish cantors be used to encourage the singing of the people gathered at your wedding celebration. Additional instruments are also welcome. The Music Director will assist you in the selection of cantors and instrumentalists. Pre-recorded music is not permitted. Furthermore, copyright permission must be obtained from the publisher for any music printed in the program. Final decisions regarding the appropriateness of music selections are left up to the discretion of the Music Director and the Presider.

The Music Director will assist in selecting appropriate music for your wedding liturgy. You can plan that music is generally appropriate at the following times in the ceremony:

- Prior to the ceremony – usually instrumental or solo piece
- Processional music – usually instrumental
- Gathering Hymn – sung by congregation
- Gloria (during Mass) – led by cantor with congregational participation
- Responsorial Psalm – led by cantor with congregational participation
- Gospel Acclamation – led by cantor with congregational participation
- Offertory (during Mass) – instrumental, solo piece or congregational participation

- Eucharistic Acclamations (during Mass) – sung by congregation
- Communion Hymn (during Mass) – sung by congregation
- Visit to Virgin Mary – usually solo piece
- Recessional music – usually instrumental

Please know that, although the Bridal March by Richard Wagner (“Here Comes the Bride”) and the Wedding March by Felix Mendelssohn are often heard on television and movies, they are not appropriate for the liturgy because of their origin. When you meet with music ministry, several options for every musical place in the liturgy will be played, and you’ll be able to choose what will be most effective at your wedding.

IX. The Ministers of the Wedding

The Couple—the bride and groom are the primary ministers of the Sacrament of Matrimony; they confer the sacrament upon each other through the exchange of consent. The couple must use the formula of consent (i.e., the vows) from the Order of Celebrating Matrimony of the Roman Ritual.

Presider— A priest or deacon assigned to Communion of Saints Parish ordinarily presides at the weddings of our parishioners. The couple should request the priest they prefer when setting the wedding date. A priest who is a relative or good friend of the bride or groom may also be involved in the celebration of the wedding. In such a case the priest should contact one of the parish priests to clarify responsibilities in regards to preparing the couple and planning the liturgy.

Readers/Lectors— Those chosen to read the Scripture texts and/or the General Intercessions should have a good reading voice and be able to proclaim the Word prayerfully and appropriately according to the nature of the celebration. It is never permitted to add one’s own words or reflections to the liturgical texts. Only Scripture readings may be used.

Servers—Two servers will be provided for a wedding Mass. If you have persons you would like to serve, please inform the priest or deacon who is doing your preparation.

Eucharistic Ministers—You may choose persons who are trained as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (Eucharistic ministers) to serve at your wedding liturgy.

Flower Girls & Ring Bearers— Because the nature of a liturgical ministry is geared for adults, we highly discourage the use of small children in the role of flower girl and/or ring bearer. Often this creates an awkward situation at the wedding liturgy when the cooperation of such small children is unable to be obtained. The presider may approve exceptions. Flower petals may not be thrown in the Church.

Witnesses—Each member of the assembly at your wedding is a witness to the exchange of consent. The Church requires a priest or deacon, and two witnesses for a valid marriage. Typically, these two witnesses are called the Best Man and Maid/Matron of Honor. Additional wedding party members

are possible, but not required. They perform no “official” role but are an extension of the hospitality of the bride and groom.

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can we throw rice, birdseed or confetti, and use flower petals for the procession?
 - The use of rice, birdseed, or confetti inside or outside the church is not permitted at Communion of Saints. The throwing of these items can create a hazardous situation for walkers. Furthermore, the origin of this tradition is found in a pagan ritual for fertility and has never been a part of our liturgical tradition.
2. Can we bring in our own floral arrangements?
 - Yes! It is expected that the floral arrangements from the wedding will be cleaned up after the liturgy. Please note: no flower petals are to be scattered on the floor of the church.
3. Are aisle runners permitted? What about bows or candles on the pews?
 - Primarily for safety reasons, aisle runners are not permitted at Communion of Saints. Bows may be placed on the ends of the pews with clips or strings but should never be taped to the pew. They should be removed after the ceremony. Candles at the ends of the pew are not permitted.
4. Can we include a unity candle ceremony or something else like that?
 - The lighting of the unity candle has never been an official part of the Roman Ritual. Therefore, it is not used during a celebration of marriage at Communion of Saints.
5. May we bring in hired videographers and photographers?
 - Yes! We ask that photographers and videographers be respectful and reverent throughout the wedding liturgy. Their presence must NEVER distract or divert the attention of the assembly away from the prayerful celebration. The processions (opening, offertory, communion, recessional) must NEVER be halted or stopped for the photographer to get a “still” photograph. We ask that the photographers and videographers never enter the sanctuary of the church throughout the wedding liturgy. The Church is available to you for photographs after the wedding liturgy but please note that reverence and proper decorum is expected while in the church building. Picture taking should conclude in a timely manner, respectful of whatever services or event may follow your wedding. Under no circumstance is furniture to be moved or rearranged. Please have the photographers and videographers consult with the presider prior to the wedding if there are questions or concerns.
6. Do we have to worry about posting wedding banns?
 - Wedding banns will be posted in the parish Bulletin. If you desire for them to be published in another church bulletin, please contact that church office.

7. Do we need wedding programs?

- Wedding programs or liturgical worship aids are not required but may be helpful in encouraging the assembly to sing. If you are duplicating music (words and/or actual music) you **must** obtain copyright permission to do so. You must also give proper credit to the composer under the published music and/or words. The Music Director can assist in this matter. The Presider for your liturgy must approve the wedding program before it goes to the printer.

8. What behavior is expected out of my guests?

- It is important that all be respectful of the worship space as a place that is sacred and holy. Those attending the wedding liturgy should display due reverence by refraining from drinking any refreshments or alcoholic beverages before or during the celebration, chewing gum, eating food, or using cell phone technology.

9. What about hospitality at the wedding?

- The goal of the gathering rite is to gather the people into a praying community open and ready to hear the Word of God. A key element in creating that openness is hospitality. People should be welcomed warmly as they arrive. We suggest this role be extended to include the entire bridal party, the parent(s) of the bride and groom and even the bride and groom themselves since they are the reason the guests are there. It is not necessary to separate guests into the “bride’s side” or the “groom’s side” of the church.

10. What are all the fees?

The offering for a wedding is \$1,000 for active and registered parishioners of Communion of Saints.

The offering for a wedding is \$2,000 for non-parishioners of Communion of Saints.

This includes the use of the church, parish wedding coordinator, organist, cantor, and the parish priest for parishioner weddings only; non-COS presiders are not ordinarily included in this offering.

A non-refundable deposit of \$200 is required at the time of booking the wedding.

The balance due must be brought to the liturgy planning meeting with the Director of Music Ministries.

Altar Servers typically \$20.00 each/day of wedding, at the discretion of the couple.

- All above fees must be paid in full prior to the rehearsal. If there is a need for hardship or other consideration, please do not hesitate to ask your Presider. Make checks payable to Communion of Saints Parish.

The Wedding Procession

The practice of the bride being escorted down the aisle by her father is a carryover from ancient times when a father “gave away” his daughter and the dowry (a sum of money or goods) attached to her. This no longer being the case, the wedding procession is a symbol of “journey.” The bride and/or groom are walked down the aisle by their parents at the beginning of the wedding liturgy to symbolize the journey parents have shared with their children to prepare them for a new journey in marriage. Bride and groom process out of the church together as a symbol of a new journey begun. As the book of Genesis reminds us, “A man shall leave his father and mother, shall cling to his wife and the two become as one body” (Genesis 2:24).

Processions should be structured to express the equality and mutuality of the couple and ought to be liturgical in nature. Therefore, the opening procession should include all involved in the liturgy: servers, cross bearer, lector(s), presiding minister, attendants, both sets of parents, and the bride and groom. Such a procession would look like this and is to be considered the norm at Communion of Saints Parish:

Cross bearer
Servers
Readers
Presider (priest/deacon)
Groom (with parents)
Groomsmen / Bridesmaids as couples
Best Man/Maid of Honor
Bride (with parents)

Those requesting to marry at Communion of Saints and are parishioners elsewhere in the Diocese of Cleveland

1. Have their pastor send a letter to Communion of Saints Parish giving permission for the marriage to be celebrated in Communion of Saints Parish either at St. Ann Church or St. Philomena Church. That letter should be addressed and sent to The Rev. Anthony J. Marshall, Pastor, Communion of Saints Parish; 2175 Coventry Rd.; Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118
2. Do all preparation for the wedding at your parish church in the Cleveland Diocese.
3. Obtain sacramental records---Baptism—Confirmation—Communion—and give to the person doing the preparation.
4. Have all documentation completed. The file will be forwarded to Communion of Saints Parish. All paperwork should be sent at least three weeks prior to the wedding.
5. Contact Communion of Saints Parish Office to schedule rehearsal.
6. Contact Communion of Saints' Music Director regarding the music and liturgy. Please note—all decisions regarding music must be approved by the Communion of Saints Music Director.
7. Have your presiding priest/deacon sign below indicating that he will preside at your wedding.
8. Regarding your own marriage license—contact Probate Court of Cuyahoga County to follow their process for obtaining a license.

Have your pastor or presiding minister sign below and return to Communion of Saints Parish with your wedding deposit of \$200.

My signature below indicates that I will preside at the wedding on _____ at Communion of Saints Parish after receiving proper delegation.

Priest/Deacon: _____ Date: _____

Those requesting to marry at Communion of Saints and are residents of another (Arch)Diocese:

- 1. Have their pastor send a letter to Communion of Saints Parish giving permission for the marriage to be celebrated in Communion of Saints Parish either at St. Ann Church or St. Philomena Church. That letter should be sent to The Rev. Anthony J. Marshall, Pastor, Communion of Saints Parish; 2175 Coventry Rd.; Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118**
- 2. Do all preparation for the wedding at your parish church, following the guidelines of that particular (Arch)Diocese.**
- 3. Obtain sacramental records---Baptism—Confirmation –Communion – and give to the person doing the preparation.**
- 4. Have all documentation completed and sent to the Chancery of your (Arch)Diocese for a “*visum*.” It will then be sent to the Diocese of Cleveland. The file will be forwarded to Communion of Saints Parish. All paperwork should be sent to the Diocese of Cleveland at least six weeks prior to the wedding.**
- 5. Contact Parish Office to schedule rehearsal.**
- 6. Contact Music Director regarding the music and liturgy. Please note—all decisions regarding music must be approved by the Communion of Saints Music Director.**
- 7. Schedule a presiding priest or deacon who has appropriate letter of suitability, delegation, and a valid Ohio Minister's License.**
- 8. Regarding your own marriage license—contact Probate Court of Cuyahoga County to follow their process for obtaining a license as an out of state resident.**

Please sign below indicating that you have read the guidelines and that you will comply with all obligations set forth in this book:

Bride _____

Date _____

Groom _____

Date _____