

Reverend Jeffrey M. Defayette, Pastor

Saint Matthias the Apostle Catholic Church  
9475 Annapolis Road ♦ Lanham, Maryland 20706-3020  
[www.stmatthias.org](http://www.stmatthias.org)



Dear Engaged Couple:

Date

The Sacrament of Matrimony, which you are preparing to celebrate, is indeed an honored institution of our Church and speaks to the entire Christian community of the love and unity binding Christ and His Church. As you enter into your preparation for marriage, you also enter into a process that demonstrates to all within our faith community that your love is rooted in God. Your preparation for the sacrament is an important responsibility for you and the Church.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (#59), from the Second Vatican Council states:

As with all the sacraments, marriage demands adequate preparation if the sacrament is to have its full meaning and effect. The planning of the liturgical celebration with the intimate involvement of the priest, musicians, and the couple is an essential part of that preparation because '(the sacraments) not only presuppose faith, but by words and actions they also nourish, strengthen, and express it'.

The pastoral staff of St. Matthias the Apostle Church is committed to providing you as a couple with the best and most adequate preparation available. We are especially committed to you during the months of immediate preparation. We will do what we can to enliven in you a sense that your marriage will be not only a lifelong commitment to one another but also a relationship into which you are inviting the presence of God.

The role of the priest or deacon in marriage preparation is one of leader and coordinator. He is also friend and counselor on behalf of the Church. He will witness and accept your vows on the day of the wedding. He will draw all present into a faith-filled participation in the sacrament. Your roles, as bride and groom, are those of the ministers of the sacrament; roles bestowed by the dignity of your baptism. When you publicly state your commitment, you in fact minister the unifying grace of Christ's love to each other, to your family and friends, and to the entire Church and society as well.

In order to assist you with these important preparations, we are providing you with the attached guidelines. On behalf of the people of St. Matthias the Apostle Church, we rejoice with you as you embark on this exciting and extremely significant segment of your lives. We assure you of our commitment in assisting you in the coming months and remaining faithful to you in our prayer. May God bless and unify you in His Love!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Reverend Jeffrey M. Defayette, Pastor

# Celebrating Marriage



## Parish Policies and Procedures for Clergy and Engaged Couples\*

\* N.B. These also apply to civilly married couples seeking a convalidation (“blessing” or “regularization”) of their current bond.

### **Saint Matthias the Apostle Church**

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Explore the parish and school on our web page: [www.stmatthias.org](http://www.stmatthias.org)

### **Introduction**

All clergy, including visiting clergy, are reminded that the *sacramental norms and policies of the Archdiocese of Washington* (January, 1995) are to be reviewed carefully and followed, in particular, see *Chapter Seven: The Sacrament of Marriage*, pages 57-74. A copy of those norms and policies is available for visiting clergy from the contact priest or deacon of the parish. It is presumed that all clergy are familiar with the canons of the Church’s Code of Canon Law pertaining to the administration of the Sacrament of Marriage.

The Rite of Marriage is to be conducted according to the required liturgical and canonical laws of the Church. Only the officially promulgated liturgical texts as well as approved texts of the revised lectionary (scriptures) are to be used.

### **Initial Contact with the Parish, Interviews and Documentation**

When couples desire to schedule a wedding at the parish or inquire about marriage preparation, they must speak directly to the pastor or one of the parish deacons. Parish clergy are encouraged to speak only with the engaged bride or groom. When a couple calls the rectory, the call is given to the requested priest or deacon. Following the initial telephone conversation, the clergy may tentatively ‘book’ a date on the parish calendar *in pencil*, printing clearly the following information:

- the date and time of the wedding
- the first and last name of the bride and groom
- a convenient telephone number for each party

-the initials of the priest/deacon

The same sequence should be followed when recording the information for the rehearsal which is normally the day or evening preceding to the ceremony.

During this initial telephone contact with the engaged couple, a first meeting with the priest/deacon should be scheduled as soon as possible to confirm, in person, that all will be in order for a wedding to take place at the parish. It will be essential to confirm the date and time of both rehearsal and ceremony at this time. Any change to the agreed date and time is to be communicated as soon as possible to the priest/deacon handling the preparation and arrangements for the wedding. ***It is strongly recommended that engaged couples do not 'book' a reception facility or other services for the wedding until after the initial/first meeting with the priest/deacon.***

The parish secretary/receptionist or any other parish staff member is not permitted to record wedding information on the parish calendar. The clergy are entrusted with this responsibility. Should there be a change to the date and time or a cancellation, the clergy should remove the couple's name from the calendar immediately so as to open the date and time for another couple.

### **Requirements of the Church/Archdiocese and Parish**

A couple who wishes to marry within the Archdiocese of Washington must contact their parish priest/deacon at least six months prior to the intended wedding date. At least one of the parties must be a registered member of the parish. If you are not registered in the parish but still have immediate family in the parish, a wedding may still be arranged provided the pastor of your home parish sends us a letter of freedom...(a letter indicating the pastor's agreement for the wedding ceremony to be celebrated in St. Matthias the Apostle Church) and assures us that you are undergoing marriage preparation with all necessary marriage data being sent to this parish one month prior to the ceremony.

Catholics should be making every attempt to practice their faith by participation at Sunday Mass and regular reception of the sacraments.

The marriage preparation can be accomplished in several ways: Engaged Encounter; a parish class or group preparation; or a personal preparation with the priest/deacon. The priest/deacon you meet with will discuss with you the best option for your needs and/or circumstances.

The priest/deacon who will be preparing you for marriage will ask you to provide a baptismal certificate dated and sealed within the six month preparation period. Other documentation will be filled out with the priest/deacon (i.e. Pre-Marital Investigation form and, if needed, any dispensations [i.e. special permissions required by Canon Law]).

All documentation is the responsibility of the officiating priest/deacon and should be carefully assembled and placed in the official marriage folder. After the wedding is celebrated, the

marriage folder should be given to the pastor who will be responsible for neatly and thoroughly recording the vital information in the Marriage Registry of the parish. The folder will then be placed in the parish archives.

If you do not receive a marriage certificate from the celebrant of the wedding on the day of the ceremony, please contact the parish secretary who will be able to send one to you *after* the ceremony.

In most instances, it is customary that the parish priest/deacons of Saint Matthias the Apostle Church witness the weddings celebrated here. Alternately, a priest/deacon who is an immediate relative of the bride or the groom or a former pastor/associate pastor of the parish can witness the ceremony *with delegation (permission) from the current pastor*.

### **Wedding Planning, Policy and Procedures**

Weddings may be celebrated at Saint Matthias the Apostle Church on Friday evenings, or on most Saturdays throughout the year. The time for your wedding ceremony will be determined in consultation with the priest/deacon preparing you. Because of our weekend Mass schedule, weddings should preferably be scheduled at one of the following times: Fridays 6 P.M. and Saturdays at 10 A.M.; 12 Noon; and 2 P.M. Saturday evening weddings are possible in some circumstances however they cannot begin before 6:30 PM.

Hospitality should be extended to all, but in a special way to all handicapped persons. Please inform the priest/deacon who will be working with you so that the appropriate handicap entrance may be pointed out to your relative or friend. Special seating arrangements are available within the church.

During the penitential season of Lent, the forty days prior to Easter Sunday, weddings are discouraged unless extenuating circumstances exist.

In most instances, photography is permitted during the wedding, however, excessive use of a flash is discouraged. Please consult the priest/deacon regarding the use of video recording equipment. Videography may be employed but should never distract from the ceremony: *equipment, lights, cables, or cameras are not permitted in the sanctuary at any time...before, during or after the ceremony*. Your photographer and or videographer should be respectful of our sacred space. The photographer should consult the priest/deacon prior to the ceremony regarding his/her movement in and about the church.

Photographs after the ceremony are permitted, however, please be aware that there may be time constraints due to another wedding, confessions, or weekend Masses. The church must be cleared by 3:15 P.M. on Saturdays so that confessions can begin. No receiving line at the church will be permitted.

***The sanctuary (the location of the altar, ambo, tabernacle, presider's chair) is the holiest location within any Catholic church. Therefore, in order to show reverence for this sacred space, posed photographs are permitted only in the area immediately on or in front of the two steps before the altar. The altar platform and inner sanctuary are off limits to photography.***

***Furnishings, plants, and flower arrangements are not to be moved or removed for any reason without the express consent of the pastor. The sanctuary and church are to be in the same order after the ceremony as they were prior to the ceremony.***

Flowers for the altar are more than welcomed and are considered a donation to the church. These flowers will be used for the liturgical celebrations in the days following your wedding. Frequently, there are other weddings scheduled for the same day and it may be possible to divide the cost of the flowers with others sharing your wedding day. The priest/deacon can advise you as to whether there are other couples being married on your wedding day.

***Pew bows or floral arrangements (if utilized) are to be attached to the pew with elastic, ribbon, string, or floral tape ONLY. Other kinds of tape, tacks, or wire are prohibited.***

A "Unity Candle" is not a prescribed part of the Catholic marriage ritual. However, it can be incorporated into your ceremony after consultation with the priest/deacon. The purchase of a "Unity Candle" is the responsibility of the engaged couple. A piece of glass or plexi-glass must be under all candles so as to preserve the altar cloth and sanctuary floor of the church. If the wedding is being celebrated in the context of Mass then a Unity Candle is ***not*** to be placed on the altar. Candelabra are not permitted for wedding ceremonies.

A ceremony book will be given to you to assist you with the selection of the prayers, scripture texts, vows, blessings, etc. that are part of the Catholic Marriage Ritual (with Mass or without Mass).

Altar servers may be assigned to your wedding ceremony to assist the priest/deacon. You must request them if you want them to be part of the wedding ceremony. A token of appreciation should be shared with these youth. We suggest a minimum offering of ten dollars per server.

***The throwing of rice, confetti, bird seed, or rose/flower petals is strictly prohibited. Balloons are not permitted inside or outside the church.*** Many handicapped and elderly persons attend our church and this debris can become a hazard to them in damp/wet weather, or when it is carried into the church area. If this regulation is not observed, you will be charged a one hundred dollar janitorial fee for the clean up of this trash.

The consumption of alcoholic beverages on church property is strictly forbidden. Any individual(s) who is in violation of this will be asked to leave the church property immediately.

Punctuality for meetings, wedding rehearsal, and the wedding ceremony are a sign of

common courtesy to the priest/deacon; the music staff; and other people who may have appointments or ceremonies scheduled with the priest/deacon or music staff. Kindly be on time for all scheduled events. The parish and music personnel reserve the right to charge a fee to the couple who is late for wedding rehearsals and/or the wedding ceremony. The couple also understands that by agreeing to abide by these parish policies and procedures, should they fail to arrive at church on time or rehearsal or ceremony, the priest and other parish staff involved in this event, reserve the right to vacate the premises, thus canceling the ceremony after a courtesy period of no more than ten (10) minutes from the point of the agreed upon ceremony or event start time.

### **Music**

In order to maintain the standard of excellence in liturgical music at Saint Matthias the Apostle Church, the following regulations apply:

The Director of Music and/or the parish accompanist will have authority over *all* music to be used within the wedding ceremony. No outside organist, instrumentalist, or soloist will be permitted to play or sing without the express consent of the Director of Music. In this event, the requesting party will supply the name and telephone number of the outside musician and contact will be made for him/her to discuss the possibility of assisting with the music for the ceremony. The Director of Music reserves the right to audition any soloist or musician who desires to be part of the wedding.

The engaged couple should contact the Director of Music once the date and time of the wedding ceremony are confirmed with the pastor or deacon. We suggest an appointment be made to see the Director of Music at a mutually convenient time. Reserving the services of the Director of Music, the parish accompanist, and/or soloist are the responsibility of the engaged couple. The selection of music will be made in consultation with the Director of Music. *Secular music is not permitted before, during, or after the ceremony. There are no exceptions to this policy.*

The fee for the parish organist and the soloist's fee will be determined by the Director of Music in consultation with the organist and soloist. Their respective fees are due 10 business days prior to the wedding and are non-refundable. These fees are subject to change.

The Director of Music can be reached through the rectory business office or the priest/deacon working with you will give you the best means to contact him/her for your appointment.

The pastor will settle any disputes between the engaged couple and the Director of Music or any person on the Director of Music's staff. His decision is final.

### **Marriage License**

The couple is responsible for filing for a marriage license at the Clerk of the Court's Office in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. Licenses issued are valid only for marriages in Prince George's County, MD. For complete information on obtaining a license please call the Clerk of the Court's Office at 301-952-3288. Please present the license to the priest/deacon PRIOR to the wedding ceremony...the

rehearsal time is best. If your marriage is a convalidation ceremony (meaning you are currently married civilly but are now asking the Church to receive your marriage as a sacrament) you will be asked to produce a certified copy of your civil marriage license from the jurisdiction in which you were married.

### **Visiting Clergy**

When visiting clergy are present for rehearsals and/or weddings, the appropriate contact person is the parish priest or deacons. The parish priest/deacon is responsible for all the normal protocol of hospitality and assistance. In this case too the priest/deacon is also responsible for the lights and doors, as well as obtaining from the visiting clergy all the necessary documentation and envelopes for offerings. Delegation issues must also be attended to if permission has not already been given.

### **Donations/Offerings**

In order to help defray the costs incurred by the parish for your wedding (i.e. lights, heating or air conditioning, janitorial services, etc.) a donation to the parish is strongly encouraged. This donation is an offering to the parish given at the time of the celebration of the marriage. It is a time honored tradition of appreciation from the bride and groom or their respective families. It serves as an expression of gratitude for the way in which the parish has assisted in making the day of marriage joyful and meaningful. The amount of your donation should be proportional to what you have spent on the entire wedding day (i.e. flowers, clothing, reception, limousines, etc.).

There is never any fee for a sacrament of the Church and each individual couple can evaluate their financial situation with the priest/deacon assisting you. However, the following are suggested:

- Non-registered visitors: \$400.00
- Registered non-contributing parishioners: \$300.00
- Registered contributing parishioners: \$200.00

Kindly remember that the offering you make is, in fact, an offering for the church. If you wish to express your gratitude to the priest/deacon who has prepared you for marriage and/or has celebrated your wedding ceremony, a separate offering should be made to him.

In order to dispel any confusion on this matter, the couple should indicate in writing on the exterior of an envelope the following information:

- Saint Matthias the Apostle Church
- Bride and Groom's Name
- Date of wedding
- Noted: "Marriage Offering"

This envelope should be given to the celebrant who in turn places it in the pastor's mailbox in the rectory.

Should the couple present a gift to the priest/deacon, his envelope should be addressed as follows:

- Priest/Deacon Name

- Bride and Groom's Name
- Date of the Wedding
- Noted: "Clergy Offering"

If your wedding ceremony is *not* taking place at Saint Matthias the Apostle Church then a suggested offering of \$100.00 should be made to the church upon completion of marriage preparation. Your marriage file and documentation will then be forwarded to the appropriate church of the wedding or clergy person. Please make all checks for the church payable to: "Saint Matthias the Apostle Church".

### **Bridal Consultants**

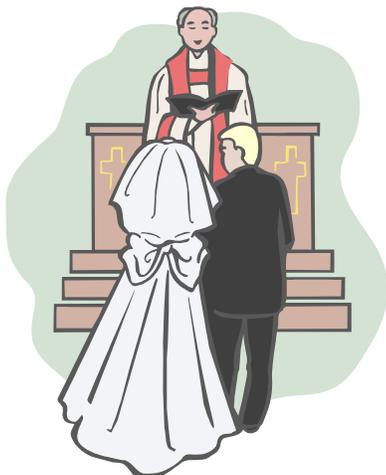
Some couples now employ a "bridal consultant" to assist with coordinating the wedding day, particularly the ceremony. Bridal consultants are certainly welcome, however, the church and ceremony are the domain and responsibility of the priest/deacon witnessing the marriage. All bridal consultants will follow the directions of the pastor and will not alter anything from his express directives as to how the wedding rehearsal and ceremony are to be conducted. Bridal consultants or their employees have no authorization to alter or change any part of the ceremony or environment. Those who are unable to comply with the directions of the priest/deacon will be asked to leave the premises.

### **AGREEMENT TO THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THE MARRIAGE GUIDELINES**

*We have read the above policies and procedures for Celebrating Marriage at Saint Matthias the Apostle Church. We understand the contents and agree to abide by them. All questions and concerns have been answered prior to my signature on this form.*

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*Date*




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**Signature of the Groom**




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**Signature of the Bride**




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**Signature of the Priest/Deacon**

