

Your Wedding

Queen of Apostles Church Wedding Guidelines

As you are embarking on a life together in the sacred bond of marriage, we here at Queen of Apostles Church wish you the best. Many of your questions and concerns may center on the wedding ceremony, but since the wedding is a day and the marriage is a lifetime, our first concern is your preparation for marriage.

This booklet has been prepared to assist couples in both their preparation for marriage and their wedding. Please take time to read through the booklet in its entirety, and then fill out the Marriage Preparation Request form. If there are any questions, they can be addressed at the first meeting with the priest.

When asked about marriage, Jesus said, “have you not read that at the beginning the Creator made the male and female and declared, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become one’?” Thus, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, let no man separate what God has joined” (Matthew 19:3-7). Our lord speaks of a beautiful, grace-filled unity between a husband and wife, built on a foundation of a permanent, faithful, and sacrificial love.

Of course, such unity is easier said than done in a world with all its pressures and distractions, not to mention two people with their own personalities and backgrounds. Moreover, sometimes the couples may have the right “feeling” to get married, but the wrong “idea” of what it is all about and its responsibilities. Therefore, the Diocese of Arlington strives to help couples have the best preparation for marriage possible.

The Catholic Church believes that marriage is a sacrament and an indissoluble union. Because of this belief, the priest and the married couples who administer the preparation programs will do their best to help an engaged couple enter whole-heartedly into this sacrament. Granted, no preparation program is perfect. In all honesty, the efficacy of the preparation depends upon **how much the couples put into it**. While weddings oftentimes become very involved with planning the logistics of the ceremony and the reception, the couple must more importantly be ready spiritually. When the ceremony and the reception are over and the relatives and friends have returned home, the couple has to live the marriage.

Marriage Preparation

The Diocese of Arlington requires that a couple contact a priest at least six months in advance of their intended date for the ceremony. While the priest does not “count out the days” to enforce this policy, the Church wants a couple to have at least a six month engagement so that they have time to spend individually and as a couple to grow more firm in their commitment to each other.

The couple will meet at least three times with the priest to discuss marriage. These sessions will cover not only the teachings of the Church and the spirituality of marriage, but also address issues of a more practical nature, like communication and finance.

Any registered parishioner who is free to be married may have their wedding at the parish church. If the couples’ families are parishioners and they wish to return to be married here, permission can be granted on a case-by-case basis.

Due to liturgical demands on our facilities, Saturday weddings are scheduled at 10:00, 12:00, and 2:00. Although weddings can be scheduled during Lent and Advent they are discouraged. Before making such a decision keep in mind the time constraints due to liturgical commitments of the parish.

By both practice and law, every Catholic is bound to be married at a Church in a ceremony presided over by a member of the clergy of the Catholic Church. Gardens, beaches, country clubs, and other locations may not be the place of a wedding. Dispensation can be granted by the bishop and should be discussed with the priest who is preparing the couple.

Wedding Committee. Queen of Apostles Church has a Wedding Committee that consists of volunteers that will assist the priest with the administrative details of the wedding ceremony. Their role is to answer questions that the bride may have about the church/ceremony and to be present at the church to ensure the wedding ceremony is executed smoothly. The Wedding Coordinator is Cathae Hudgins, (703) 354-7245; she will answer any administrative questions that you have and assign someone from the Wedding Committee to assist with your wedding.

The Prenuptial Investigation. The priest will complete with the couple a short questionnaire, entitled *The Prenuptial Investigation*. This questionnaire elicits basic background information from the couple, but also asks questions to make sure there is no impediment to enter into marriage.

FOCCUS. The priest will administer to the couple a 156 (or more) question survey instrument entitled, *Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study*. This survey instrument is not a compatibility test; rather, it raises issues concerning a broad range of areas, like religion, finance, communication, sexuality, and parenting. The survey is used to stimulate discussion between the couple. For example, oftentimes a couple may not talk about financial matters in great depth, yet a clear financial understanding is a very important part of having a stable relationship. Later, the couple and the priest will meet to review the results of the survey.

Diocesan Preparation Program. The Diocese of Arlington requires that couples attend a formal, marriage preparation program. It is highly recommended that the couple make reservations to attend one of the programs as soon as possible after their first meeting with the priest. The couple has a choice between two programs.

The *Catholic Engaged Encounter* is a weekend retreat with other engaged couples. The program begins on Friday evening and ends on Sunday afternoon. A priest and married couples will make presentations on important areas of marriage. The program allows a couple time to spend talking to each other and the other couples.

The *Conference for the Engaged* continues all day Saturday (9:00am-4:30pm). A priest and married couples make presentations on important areas of marriage. This program is offered at different parishes throughout the diocese.

As a part of marriage preparation, you are also expected to enroll in a course in *Natural Family Planning (NFP)*. Natural Family Planning is the only method of birth regulation compatible with the Catholic faith. Course schedules are available at the rectory.

Required Church Documents. For both the bride and the groom, the following Church documents must be given to the priest:

- x Baptismal Certificate. For Catholics, the Baptismal certificate must be issued from the Church of Baptism no earlier than the date of the initial meeting with the priest. x Confirmation Certificate.
- x Certificate of attendance at one of the Diocesan Preparation Programs.
- x Affidavits of Freedom. The bride the groom must submit two Affidavits of Freedom. These forms should be completed preferably by relatives (especially parents) or others who have known the bride or groom for a long period of time. These affidavits attest that no impediments exist that would prevent the marriage from taking place. The Church requires these affidavits for the couple's own

- protection. The witnesses must sign the affidavits in the presence of a priest, deacon, minister, or notary public.
- x If either party has been previously married, proof of a Declaration of Nullity must be supplied.
- x Death Certificate for widows/widowers.
- x Natural Family Planning (NFP) Class Certificate.

Wedding License. The couple must obtain from the Circuit Court of jurisdiction a wedding license. Residents of Virginia may obtain a Civil License from the Clerk of the Circuit Court at any courthouse in the Commonwealth. Nonresidents of Virginia must obtain a Civil License from the Clerk of Circuit Court at the courthouse of the county in which the marriage is to take place (Fairfax County Courthouse). The Civil License is good for only 60 days. The county courthouses are not open on weekends.

NOTE: The license, and ALL other paperwork related to the couple, must be submitted to the parish offices no later than 45 days prior to the ceremony.

Witnesses. A Catholic must be married by a priest in the presence of two witnesses unless a special dispensation is granted. The best man and maid of honor should be validly married, if married, and practicing Catholics, if Catholic. The witnesses do not have to be Catholic.

The Wedding Ceremony

The Celebrant of the Marriage. Usually, the parish clergy of Queen of Apostles witness all marriages in the parish. However, other priests who are relatives or friends are welcome to assist or to officiate at the wedding. If the couple would like to have a priest other than one of the parish clergy officiate, that priest must be licensed by the Commonwealth of Virginia; such licensing may be obtained from any Circuit Courthouse. For a couple of different religious backgrounds, a minister from another Church is welcome to participate in the ceremony; please let the priest know this so that he can make contact with the minister and invite him to participate.

The Ceremony. A Nuptial Mass should be celebrated when both parties are practicing Catholics. A Nuptial Mass may also be celebrated when the bride and the groom are from different religious backgrounds. However, Church law limits the distribution of Holy Communion to only practicing Catholics. Guidelines for the reception of Communion should be placed in all programs with Nuptial Mass. (See back of booklet for guidelines.)

Usually, when a couple is of different religious backgrounds, the Rite of Marriage Outside of Mass is conducted. The Rite consists of the Liturgy of the Word (a selection of readings from the Sacred Scripture), the statement of intention, the exchange of vows and rings, and the special nuptial blessing.

Invitations. When sending invitations to the wedding, the address of the Church is “4329 Sano Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22312”. It is suggested that a map be enclosed with the invitations with directions to Queen of Apostles. Directions and a map can be found on the Church’s homepage at www.queenofapostles.org.

Dress. Dress must be in accord with the Presence of God and the sacred nature of the sacrament of matrimony. Modesty – wherein

the total person is seen and respected, rather than a focus upon the body – is a virtue that should be especially pronounced at a wedding. That respect for God, the sacrament of matrimony and the individual may be maintained, the dress of the bride, bridesmaids, and lectors may not allow for strapless-bare shoulders, spaghetti straps and/or plunging necklines – cleavage, etc.

Online wedding gown ideas can be found at the following sites:

www.Beautifullymodest.com

www.Bridalonestore.com/store/bridal_gowns_wedding_dress_modest.asp

www.fairygodmothersbridal.com

www.totallymodest.com

www.templereadygowns.com

The bride, groom, and members of the wedding party are asked to be properly attired upon arrival at the church. Queen of Apostles Church does not have a dressing room, only public restrooms.

Flowers. The couple arranges for flowers for the ceremony. Given the design of the sanctuary, the parish recommends the placement of two large sprays of flowers on stands placed at either side of the Altar of Repose. If more than one wedding is taking place on a certain day, the Church recommends that the couples contact each other and share in the expense of a mutually agreeable set of flowers. You can contact the Church Wedding Coordinator for the wedding schedule and phone numbers. The Church asks that the flowers remain in the Church after the ceremony; this gracious gesture is the couple’s expression of thanks to the community of Queen of Apostles.

Sometimes florists will entice the couple with other paraphernalia used in weddings. These things are unnecessary, usually expensive, and sometimes inappropriate to the Rite of Marriage. The following rules apply:

x Candelabras are not permitted.

x The “wedding candle” or “unity candle” is not part of the Marriage Rite and is thereby not permitted.

- x Pew bows may be used but no tape is allowed. Please attach pew bows or decorations with pew clips or elastic bands, which are available from the florist.
- x The use of flowers, petals, seed, coins, or confetti to be thrown in or outside of the Church is not permitted.
- x A white runner to be rolled down the aisle is permitted, but not necessary since the aisle is carpeted. The aisle is 80' in length.
- x All boxes for corsages, other trash, pew bows, and the wedding runner (if used) must be removed at the end of the ceremony.

Photography. All couples want to have pictures to remember this very important day in their lives. However, the Church is not a photography studio. Please ask the photographer to be discrete and inconspicuous as possible. The photographer may take pictures throughout the ceremony; however, the use of flash is at the discretion of the celebrant. The photographer is never to enter into the Sanctuary area. The photographer should check with the celebrant before the ceremony begins to discuss these regulations. The official photographer is the only photographer for the wedding. No other pictures should be taken during the ceremony.

After the ceremony, the photographer may take pictures of the couple, the wedding party, and the immediate family for approximately 15 minutes, due to time constraints of other weddings and liturgical demands. Again, the photographer must remember that the Church is not a photography studio. All other photographs should be taken at the reception venue or outside of the Church.

Videotaping. Videotaping of the ceremony is permitted. However, the person videotaping the ceremony should be discrete and as inconspicuous as possible, setting up the video equipment in a suitable place agreeable to the celebrant. The video equipment may not enter into the sanctuary area, and the use of a flood light is not permitted.

Music. Music enhances liturgical celebrations and is strongly

encouraged. Various options on the type of music are available. All music, instrumental and vocal, must be approved by the celebrant and must comply with the regulations of the Diocese of Arlington. Only sacred music should be selected; no Hollywood, Broadway, or other secular music is permitted. The couple should contact Mr. Don Cotton, the Church organist and director of music, at 703 220-0574 for assistance with the wedding ceremony. Mr. Cotton's fee for the wedding ceremony is \$250 which includes vocals. The final amount is arranged between Mr. Cotton and the couple.

If the couple desires to have another organist from outside the Church perform, that organist should contact Mr. Cotton for information regarding the Church's requirements and the organ itself; in such case, a gratuity of \$50 is payable to Mr. Cotton. If the couple desires to have a soloist, they should make arrangements with Mr. Cotton. Each soloist sets his/her own fee.

Order of Worship Booklet/Wedding Program (Optional). The Order of Worship/Wedding Program is a booklet couples should prepare for those attending the wedding. It provides an outline of the ceremony and often helps insure participation of all guests. Also, you may wish to list members of the wedding party, music selected, etc. Examples may be obtained from the Wedding Coordinator. The couple should designate people to distribute the booklet at the Church entrance. If there are ushers, they usually make a good choice for this task.

Altar Servers. Generally, the celebrant requires the assistance of one or two altar servers: one for a simple ceremony and two for a Nuptial Mass. A \$15 cash offering should be given to each server.

Donation to the Church. It is customary to give a gift to the Church to help cover the cost of lighting, heating, air-conditioning, etc. The offering to the Church should be in relation to the dignity of the occasion. The Church recommends an offering of \$200.00 to cover all expenses incurred. Should this donation cause a difficulty, please discuss the matter with the priest.

The Rehearsal. The rehearsal is generally scheduled for the night before the wedding ceremony and lasts from a half hour to an hour. It takes place in the Church and is directed by the celebrant. Everyone involved in the ceremony should attend the rehearsal: this includes readers, gift-bearers, parents, etc. The entire wedding party is asked to be on time since the Church facilities are in demand. At the rehearsal, please provide the celebrant the donation to the Church, donation to the Altar Server(s) and fees for the musicians.

Closing Notes. Remembering the seriousness of the occasion, members of the wedding party should refrain from the use of alcohol before the rehearsal and the wedding itself. Additionally, smoking, food, drink, and gum are not permitted in the Church.

Guidelines for the Reception of Communion.

For Catholics - As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for grave reason

where there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confession as soon as possible (canon 916). A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.

For Our Fellow Christians - We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion.

For Non-Christians - We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our faith. While we cannot admit them to Holy Communion, we ask them to offer prayers for the peace and unity of the Human family.