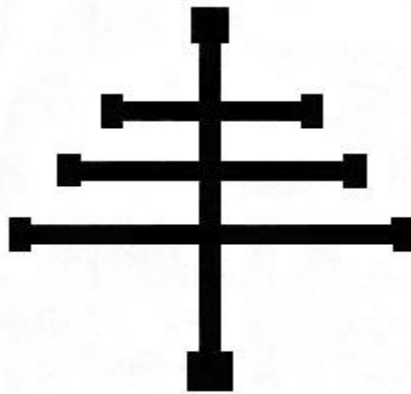


ST. LEO
THE GREAT
CATHOLIC
CHURCH



**MARRIAGE PREPARATION &
WEDDING GUIDELINES**

Congratulations on your engagement! The Church rejoices with you and eagerly awaits the day you become husband and wife, a new family, in the Sacrament of Marriage.

As Catholics we believe that marriage comes as a gift from God. The Catholic vision of marriage is rooted in Sacred Scripture and is expressed in the teachings and practices of the Church. Marriage unites a couple in faithful and mutual love and opens them to giving life. It is a way to respond to God's call to holiness and invites the couple to be a sign of Christ's love in the world.

The Catholic Church has a long history of helping couples to prepare for marriage. It has learned a great deal that can benefit any couple, regardless of their religion. The priests at St. Leo the Great are dedicated to helping you prepare for your wedding so that you may truly open your hearts to receive God's grace and to love one another as you have never loved before. The following guidelines are designed to assist you in preparing for this special day.

I. CANONICAL MARRIAGE PREPARATION

A. Initial Steps

Because the Catholic Church wants you to form a strong and lasting marriage, you will be asked to complete the marriage preparation process. It will take at least six months to intensively prepare for your marriage. The preparation goes beyond choosing a date or reserving a place for the reception. It means using this time to delve more deeply into your relationship and approach this important day with prayer and reflection.

To begin the process, please personally contact the office as soon as you decide to be married to schedule an appointment with a priest. Contacts made throughout the process, by third parties, such as your parents or a wedding planner, will not be considered.

B. Interview with the Parish Priest

Please bring the acknowledgement page of these guidelines with you when you meet with the parish priest. During this interview he will explain the marriage preparation process and inform you of other necessary steps you may need to take.

C. Setting the Date

If the interview with the parish priest discovers an impediment, the date of the wedding cannot be scheduled. For instance, if a needed annulment is not final, a date cannot be set until the impediment is removed. Please understand that even if the date is set, the wedding cannot take place unless all the requirements are met.

D. Required Participation

1. Premarital Inventory

After meeting with the parish priest, both of you will be required to complete a premarital inventory called FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study) or ReFOCCUS (for couples entering a second marriage). This questionnaire is not a “test” to determine whether you can get married in the Church. Rather, it is a tool to assess your readiness to commit to marriage. The parish priest will review the results with you.

2. Marriage Preparation Programs

At the initial meeting with the priest, he will discuss different marriage preparation programs available to you. Upon completion of an online course, a certificate will be issued. It will be your responsibility to submit it to the priest to place in your marriage preparation dossier. You will be required to complete one of the following programs of your choice:

a. Witness to Love

Witness to Love is a virtues-based, Catechumenate model of marriage renewal and preparation that integrates modern principles of psychology and the virtues to help you facilitate an authentic dialogue about your relationship. What makes Witness to Love unique is that you will be able to choose your own mentor couple whom you admire and see as a source of faith formation. The mentors must meet some basic requirements and they will be trained to work with you.

b. Theology of the Body Marriage Prep (online)

This marriage preparation course is a one-on-one experience with a certified instructor couple, at your own pace. It can be completed within three weeks and is available in English, Spanish and French. To help you offset the registration fee, you may apply for a scholarship or military discount available through the program. Register at <http://www.catholicmarriageprep.com/course-info/online-pre-cana/>. For more questions about the program, please contact Catholic Marriage Prep directly.

c. Living our Faith in Love (online)

This is an online, on-demand preparation program based on videos from experts and married couples and is interactive, convenient, and private. It is available anytime from anywhere and is run by Marriage Ministries, an initiative of The

Marriage Group. Materials were prepared with collaboration from several archdioceses. To register go to <https://catholiccourses.advancedministries.com/course/living-faith-love/>. It is also available in Spanish at www.preparacionmatrimonialcatolica.com.

d. Marriage in the Lord (online)

Staged in a traditional style and setting, this course version offers engaged couples the opportunity to view videos on topics that are helpful in a Catholic marriage. There are Questions for Reflection and downloadable worksheets for you and your future spouse to fill out and discuss. Upon completion of all the videos and Questions for Reflection. You can take this class anywhere and at any time that is convenient for you. To register, go to: <https://catholiccourses.advancedministries.com/course/a-marriage-in-the-lord/>

e. Private Instructions with the Priest

When you meet with the priest to discuss the results of your Premarital Inventory (FOCCUS), instead of you taking an online course, he may also schedule another session to offer you private instructions on the Sacramentality and Indissolubility of marriage.

E. Required Documents

Each engaged couple is required to submit a variety of documents and paperwork to the Parish in order to get married. This is part of the process of determining your freedom to marry in the Catholic Church and of registering your marriage with the Catholic party's church of baptism. To celebrate your marriage, the following documents will be needed:

1. Baptismal Records

If you are Catholic, please bring for the initial interview with the priest, a recently issued baptismal certificate with notations dated within six months of the wedding. If you are a non-Catholic Christian, an original baptismal certificate or affidavit from the baptizing minister will be accepted.

2. Canonical Pre-Nuptial Questionnaire

This form will be completed at the first meeting with the parish priest and signed by both of you.

3. Affidavits Concerning the Freedom to Marry

The parish priest will give you forms to be filled out by your parents, siblings or close relatives, who can attest to your freedom to marry. Two forms are needed for each the bride and groom.

4. Certificates for Workshops

Upon the completion of the marriage preparation workshops, certificates will be issued. You must submit them to the priest preparing you for the marriage.

5. Marriage License

The final required document is a state issued marriage license. The license is obtained from the State of Florida through the local Clerk of Courts. The parish priest will give you a certificate which will show that you have completed a marriage preparation program. This certificate might give you a discount in purchasing the license. For further information, please visit www.stateoflouisiana.com and search Florida Marriage Guide. The marriage license must be hand delivered to the officiating priest at least one week before the wedding day.

F. Special Circumstances

1. Previous Marriages

If you have been previously married and you want to get married in the Catholic Church, you must provide a copy of the Decree of Nullity issued by the Catholic Church or if your previous spouse is deceased you must provide a copy of his or her Death Certificate.

2. Convalidation

When a civilly married couple acknowledges that they are not in a valid marriage and seeks to validate their union within the Church, a convalidation can be performed. A convalidation is not a renewal of the marriage vows but the creation of a new marriage in the sight of the Catholic community. If you are already married civilly, a copy of your civil marriage certificate must be provided.

3. Inter-Faith Marriages

In cases of inter-faith marriages, a Mixed Religion Dispensation or Disparity of Cult Dispensation from the local bishop is needed. This is arranged by the parish priest.

4. Marriage Preparation Outside of St. Leo the Great Parish

If you are being prepared for your marriage outside of St. Leo the Great Parish, the complete marriage preparation file must be submitted to the local diocese where the preparation took place. That diocese then sends the documentation to the Diocese of Venice from where it is forwarded to St. Leo the Great Parish.

5. Marriage Preparation Only

If you are being prepared at St. Leo the Great Parish for a wedding at another parish, the parish priest will submit the complete marriage preparation file to the Diocese of Venice. The Chancery Office at the Diocese of Venice will review and forward it to the chancery office of the diocese where your wedding will take place. The chancery office of that diocese will then forward the file to the appropriate parish.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE WEDDING CEREMONY

A. Three forms of the Rite of Marriage

The Catholic Church provides three different forms of celebrating the Rite of Marriage. When two Catholics are marrying, the celebration will normally take place within a Mass. The second form, which does not include a Mass, is used when a Catholic enters into a marriage with another validly baptized person. There is a third form, which also does not include a Mass, for a Catholic marrying someone who is a non-Christian. The parish priest will help you make this choice.

B. The Ritual

A very good way to know what the Catholic Church believes is to participate in her public worship. This is especially true in the case of marriage. The Catholic wedding rite, whether it is celebrated within a Mass or not, is a powerful teaching tool. This is experienced in many ways, for example:

- in the active role taken by the couple who, in the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, are the “ministers” of the sacrament;

- in the fact that the wedding takes place in a church, signifying it is a sacred action;
- in the scriptural readings which speak of God’s plan for marriage and his presence to the couple;
- in the music which lifts our thoughts and feelings in a prayerful, joyful way;
- in the homily given by the priest addressing the couple and their guests about the meaning of marriage as well as its joys and challenges;
- in the vows and exchange of rings in which the couple express their freely-given consent, promising to create a loving and lifelong union of permanence, fidelity, and openness to children;
- in the various prayers and blessings through which the Church solemnizes and supports the journey on which the couple is embarking.

Thoughtful, prayerful planning and participation in your Catholic wedding ceremony is a decision that will bring many blessings to your married life long after you have forgotten your decisions about flowers, photos, and favors on the tables.

III. PREPARATION FOR YOUR WEDDING CEREMONY

A. Hospitality to Your Guests

Consider various ways to extend hospitality to those who will gather to celebrate your wedding. Some couples arrive at the church thirty minutes before the wedding and stand at the doors with their parents to greet those who have come from far and near to be with them on this special day. Assign members of your wedding party to help people find seats toward the front of the church and to introduce them to the other people with whom they will be seated.

B. Entrance Procession

Many couples are surprised to learn that the recommended entrance procession at a Catholic wedding liturgy includes the priest or deacon and then the bride and the groom, escorted by their parents and the two witnesses (maid of honor and best man). Unlike the common American form of the procession which suggests that the bride is given away by her father to the groom, the faith of the Catholic Church holds that the bride and groom enter marriage mutually and as equal, complementary partners. This one of the reasons why the tune known as “Here Comes the Bride” is not recommended for the procession. Its focus on the bride alone contradicts the Church’s emphasis on the couple. While it is still allowable for a father to escort his daughter down the aisle, as well as for the parents of the bride to escort their daughter to the waiting groom, give serious consideration to the full entrance procession, and assure the father of the bride that he will still walk his

daughter down the aisle. He will simply be joined in this happy role by the bride's mother and by the groom's parents who will escort their son down the aisle.

C. Liturgy of the Word

1. Readings

The readings at a Catholic wedding liturgy are a proclamation of God's Word and of the Church's belief about marriage. For this reason, they are limited to readings from the Scriptures (the Bible). There are nine options for the first reading from the Old Testament, thirteen options for the second reading from the New Testament and ten choices for the Gospel. You choose one from each of these categories. You may find it helpful to reflect prayerfully on each reading and to choose those that speak to your hopes and dreams for your Christian marriage.

2. Prayer of the Faithful

The Prayer of the Faithful at a wedding liturgy includes petitions for the couple, their families, the Church, the world and the local community. The parish priest can help you to select these petitions and you can tell him of people and concerns that you would like to have included, for example, the names of deceased or sick family members.

3. Readers

You are invited to select people to proclaim the first reading, second reading and Prayer of the Faithful. Think about family members or friends who have been readers (or lectors) at their church, who has participated in Bible study, or who is used to speaking in public. Give them a copy of the reading or intercessions well in advance, and ask them to attend the rehearsal so that they have a chance to rehearse in the church with the microphone.

D. Music

For those couples requesting music, they must contact their assigned parish musician at least eight weeks before the wedding. He will guide you through the music selection process. Any questions regarding the suitability of wedding music selections are decided by him. The use of pre-recorded music is never permitted in church liturgies.

1. Cantor/Soloist

The cantor sings the Responsorial Psalm and aids the congregation in singing. Your parish musician will secure the services of the cantor for your wedding. The cantor is also the soloist. He or she sings the solos that have been selected for your wedding.

2. Additional Instrumentalists

Additional instrumentalists may be used as part of the wedding music. Your parish musician engages instrumentalists who are skilled and experienced in providing liturgical music.

3. Non-Parish Musician

Do not make arrangements with other non-parish musicians. Due to the high level of skill required, familiarity with wedding liturgies, and experience in performing in the church space, the use of non-church musicians for weddings is discouraged. In the event, however, that you wish to request a non-parish musician for your wedding, your parish musician must determine the musician's ability to fulfill their musical role in the liturgy, in order to insure the quality of musical and liturgical prayer at your wedding. If approved, a non-parish musician will be allowed to perform.

E. Optional Traditions

1. Marian Devotion

The beautiful Catholic tradition of the bride's offering of prayers and flowers to the Blessed Virgin Mary after communion is welcome. Your florist can furnish a single flower or a small bouquet for the ceremony.

2. Unity Candle

While not a part of the official Roman Rite, couples may choose to light a Unity Candle at the wedding. If a Unity Candle is to be used, it (along with a stand) must be provided by the couple and the couple should take it, as a memento, after the ceremony. Unity Candles are available at religious goods stores, florist shops and greeting card shops.

3. Care for the Needy

How will your wedding express the care for the needy that a Christian couple is called to reflect in marriage? Some couples prepare a large food basket that they bring forward along with the bread and wine for Mass. Other couples include a request on their wedding invitations that guests bring one or two items of non-perishable food to the church where they are collected in a basket. After the wedding liturgy, the food will be taken to the parish food bank.

F. Flowers

You are responsible to make arrangements for flowers with a florist of your choice. Flowers may not be placed in the aisles or on the pews nor can they ever be placed on the altar. Flower arrangements and candle stands may not obstruct the liturgical movements of the ceremony. Aisle runners and flower petals are never allowed.

All flowers and decorations must be removed from the church immediately after the ceremony. Regulations for florists are outlined in "Appendix I: Guidelines for the Florist." Please review these regulations and make sure that the florist understands and abides by them.

G. Photography and Videography

You will make arrangements for photographs and videos with a photographer and videographer of your choice. No group photographs of the wedding party or the families will be behind the altar.

Regulations for photography are outlined in “Appendix II: Guidelines for the Photographer/Videographer.” Please review these regulations and make sure that your photographers and videographers understand and abide by them.

H. Receiving Lines

Receiving lines are not allowed inside the church. Please use the Narthex or the courtyard in front of the church for greeting and pictures.

I. Non-Liturgical Signs of Celebration

Confetti, rice, birdseed, rose petals and other objects may never be thrown inside or outside of the church, nor can doves, balloons or butterflies be released. Bubbles or bells are allowed outside of the church. No alcoholic beverages, champagne included, are to be brought to the church ceremony. Animals are prohibited from the premises (service animals are welcomed).

J. Wedding Consultants

If a private Wedding Consultant is retained, please duplicate this booklet for that person’s information. Keep in mind that the celebrant will conduct the rehearsal and he will discuss the liturgical selections only with you.

K. Electronic Devices

Cellular phones and other electronic devices must be turned off when inside the church.

IV. TIMES AND FEES

A. Times

1. Weddings

Friday: 11:00am - 7:00pm

Saturday: 10:00am - 12:00 pm

Sunday: No weddings are celebrated on Sunday.

Other days: Monday - Thursday, 10:00 am - 4:00 pm

No Weddings are celebrated during the following times:

-Lent and Holy Week

-Christmas Season

-Holy Days of Obligation

-Holidays

2. Rehearsals

As arranged with the celebrant.

3. Promptness

It is essential that the rehearsal and the wedding (one hour) start and end on time. Please be mindful that our parish has other events which occur in the church and that the priests and musicians have other responsibilities. Tardiness may put the celebration of your wedding at risk.

B. Offerings and Fees

1. Payable to St. Leo the Great Parish

-Use of the Church by Active Parishioners*: \$300**

-Rehearsal: Included

The offering for the use of the Church must be received before setting up a wedding date. Credit cards are not accepted for this offering.

2. Payable to Individuals

-Parish Musician (Organist/Pianist): \$200

-Cantor: \$150

-Priest At the discretion of the couple

The above mentioned fees include the consultation, preparation and performance of the wedding liturgy. Checks should be made payable to selected musicians, but must be submitted to the parish office approximately one week in advance. Credit cards are not accepted for these fees.

3. Marriage Preparation Only \$75

*Criteria for determining active parish membership for at least eight months before the scheduling of an appointment with the priest:

- a. use of parish envelopes to determine attendance at Mass or,
- b. regular involvement in sharing of time and talents within our parish ministries.

Children or parents of Active Parishioners qualify for the same status.

**If you cannot afford the full amount of the suggested offering for the use of the church, please submit a letter of hardship. Please indicate the amount you can afford for the church offering.

APPENDIX I: GUIDELINES FOR FLORISTS

1. No floral arrangements, candles, hurricane lamps, trellises, canopies, ribbons, aisle runners, or other decorations are allowed in the aisles or on the pews.
2. Flower arrangements and candle stands in the sanctuary should not obstruct the liturgical movements of the ceremony.
3. Flowers are not to be placed on the altar.
4. Flowers may be placed in front of the altar, in front of the ambo and also in the vestibule of the church.
5. Aisle runners are never allowed.
6. Flower petals are not allowed inside or outside of the Church.
7. Any existing church decorations are not to be moved.
8. All flowers and decorations must be removed from the Church immediately after the ceremony.
9. Cell phones and pagers must be turned off.
10. Fitting reverence is expected at all times.
11. The church building will be open approximately one hour prior to the wedding to allow for delivery.

APPENDIX II: GUIDELINES FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS AND VIDEOGRAPHERS

1. Photographers may take pictures in the narthex before the procession begins and in the church during the entrance procession.
2. Photographers and/or videographers are not to interfere with the movement of the procession or recession by having the couples stop in the aisle. Photographers should not walk in front of the couple during the procession. They must never enter the sanctuary area delineated by the steps around the altar.
3. No equipment should be brought into the church or set up while any other liturgical celebration (Mass, funeral or wedding) is in progress.
4. Any chairs or other furnishings moved by the videographer must be returned to their original location immediately following the ceremony.
5. No group photographs of the wedding party and/or the families will be allowed around the altar before the ceremony.
6. Flash photography should be kept at minimum during the ceremony itself, especially during the exchange of vows.
7. Only hand-held cameras or video cameras on a stand are permitted.
8. There should be a minimum of walking around the church to get the “perfect” shot.
9. Cell phones and pagers must be turned off.
10. Fitting reverence is expected at all times.
11. The church will be available for approximately 30 minutes after the end of your wedding to have formal pictures taken.

Acknowledgement Page

We have received a copy of these guidelines, have read them and agree to follow them.

Signature of Bride: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____

Signature of Groom: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____

Witnessed by: _____ **Date:** _____