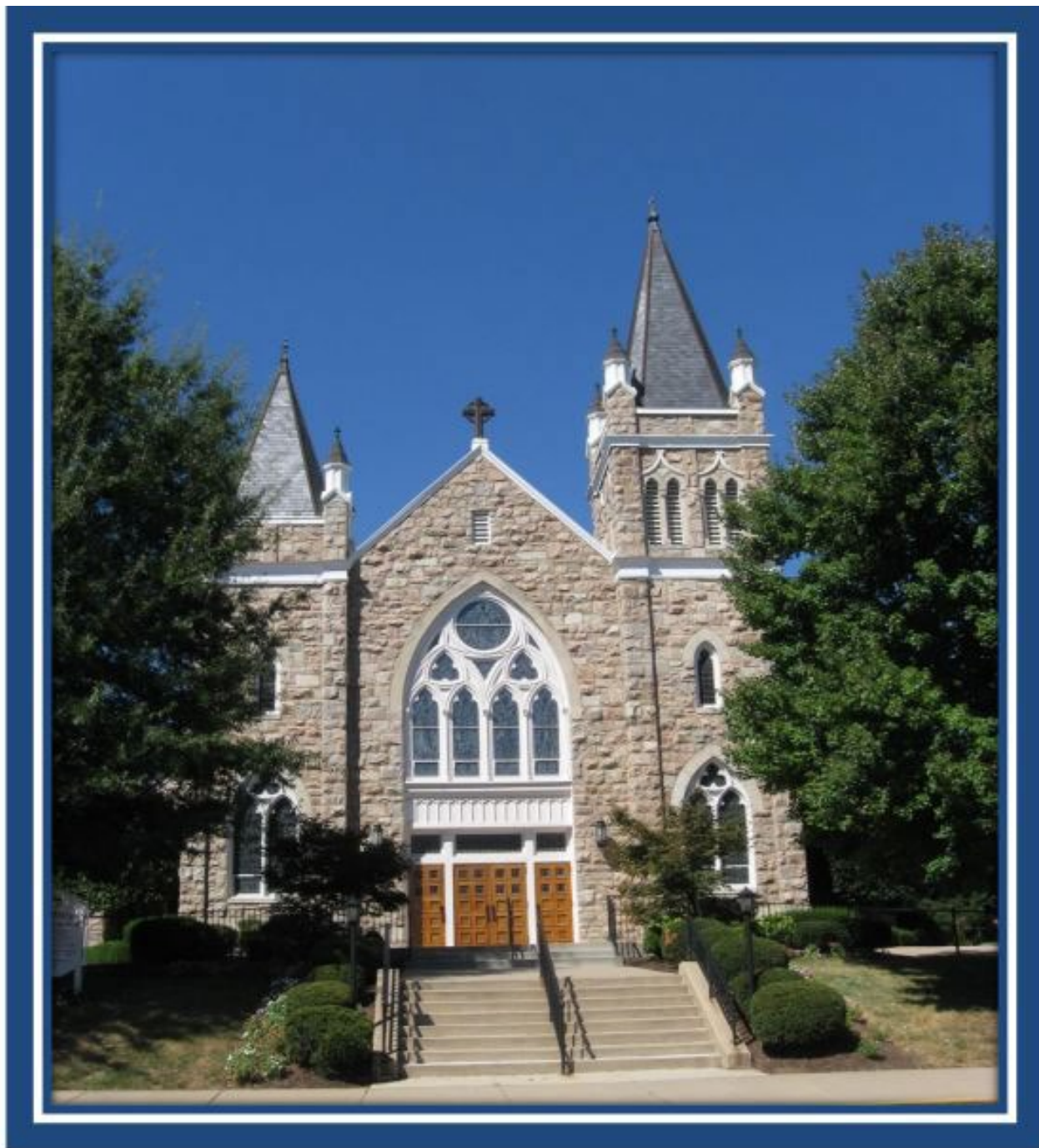




# ***St. James Catholic Church Wedding Preparation Booklet***



**905 Park Avenue  
Falls Church, VA 22046  
[www.StJamesCatholic.org](http://www.StJamesCatholic.org)**

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# MARRIAGE

## 1. What's the difference between a Catholic marriage and other marriages?

A Catholic marriage encompasses everything involved in any marriage: the irrevocable union of a man and a woman in exclusive, intimate love. Jesus restored the original nature of marriage, and the Church alone continues to hold the same standard for all marriages, that they be permanent and naturally ordered to the procreation of children.

Our Lord also raised the marriages of Christians to the dignity of a sacrament. As a sacrament, marriage communicates sanctifying grace and the indwelling of the Holy Trinity. Whereas in a natural marriage the husband and wife contract a marriage with each other, in a sacramental marriage the husband and wife are the ministers of the sacrament of marriage to each other.

## 2. What's the difference between a sacramental marriage and a natural marriage?

A marriage between two baptized Christians is a sacrament. Otherwise, when two non-Christians marry each other or when a Christian marries a non-Christian it is a natural marriage.

## 3. What does it mean to be “married in the Church”?

It simply means that the Catholic(s) is (are) married with the permission of the Church. It does not refer to the fact that the wedding physically took place inside a Catholic Church.

# REGISTRATION

## 4. How can I sign up to get married?

Contact the Parish Office once you are sure that you are free to marry and well-suited for marriage *and* after you have found someone of the opposite sex who is so similarly disposed *and* when you both are ready to marry each other.

## 5. Who may be married at St. James?

- 1) **Parishioners:** any Catholic not otherwise impeded by Divine law or Church law, who lives within the territorial boundaries of St. James is a parishioner and may be married at this church. It is not necessary that both the bride and the groom be parishioners, but at least one of them must be. A parishioner who does not actually live within the parish boundaries, but who is a registered parishioner still needs the permission of the pastor of the parish in which he/she resides. That pastor's written permission needs to be submitted **prior to any arrangements being made.**
- 2) **Children of parishioners:** any Catholic, whose parents are actively participating members of St. James, **IF** the pastor of the parish in which they reside will give his **written**

**permission prior to any wedding arrangements being made.**

- 3) Non-Parishioners:** Any non-parishioners wanting to get married at St. James must meet with our pastor and get permission before a reservation can be made and **IF** the pastor of the parish in which they reside gives written permission **prior to any wedding arrangements being made.**

**6. May I marry a non-Catholic?**

Yes, if you make a firm commitment to continue to practice your faith, which includes baptizing your children and doing your best to raise them Catholic, presuming there is good reason to believe that the other party will not interfere with your exercise of religious freedom.

**7. May a member of an Eastern Catholic Church marry here?**

Only with explicit written permission from their proper Church authority.

**8. Must one be in full communion with the current Pope to be married here?**

Yes. However, a Catholic in good standing may marry a schismatic or apostate with written permission from the Bishop.

## **CELEBRANT**

**9. Who will be the celebrant of my wedding?**

Technically, you and your fiancé will be the celebrants of the wedding (see No.1) since your exchange of vows brings the marriage into existence. One of the clerics of the parish will witness your vows. You may ask one of the priests to prepare you for marriage and officiate at your wedding. If you will have a Nuptial Mass (wedding Mass), the same priest or another priest of your choosing will offer the Mass.

For the sake of simplicity, let it be clear that any further reference to “priest” or “celebrant” applies equally to a deacon except for contexts that refer to the offering of Holy Mass.

**10. May I invite another priest to officiate at our wedding at St. James?**

Ordinarily, one of the parish priests would officiate at your wedding. You may choose to invite any relative or close friend who is a Catholic priest in good standing to officiate, in which case he is to request permission from the pastor of St. James as soon as a date has been set. Should the priest you choose be stationed in the Diocese of Arlington, he must assume full responsibility for all marriage preparation and submit the completed wedding folder to St. James at least one month prior to your wedding. It is expected that any visiting priest will abide by universal liturgical law, as well as local parish custom.

**If your visiting priest is not a priest of the Diocese of Arlington, please note that any priest**

performing a wedding in the Commonwealth of Virginia **must** be properly “bonded” by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Virginia does not have a reciprocity agreement with any other State in this matter, and this “bonding” is **never automatic**. Please check with your visiting priest to make sure he can and does comply with this law—**do not assume** that he will comply on his own. **Failure to comply with this STATE LAW will render your wedding void and you will not be legally married.**

## **LOCATION OF THE WEDDING**

### **11. May I be married at a Catholic church other than St. James?**

Any Catholic living within our parish boundaries who wishes to be married at another Catholic Church or military chapel will be given a letter of permission. However, in such cases, it usually becomes the responsibility of the priest in that parish who will officiate at the wedding to see that all requirements for preparation and documentation are fulfilled unless he resides at too great a distance from you. **The priests of the parish usually do not officiate at marriages outside of St. James.**

### **12. May I be married in a non-Catholic church, a synagogue, a mosque, etc.?**

Since marriage begins with a promise to God and before God, Church law requires that marriages are normally celebrated within a Catholic church in the presence of a priest or deacon, and two witnesses. When a Catholic has permission to marry a non-Catholic (see No. 7), the Bishop may dispense from the obligation to marry per the Catholic ritual, especially if the couple’s wedding would be conducted per the religious custom of the non-Catholic. The priest who prepares the couple requests this permission.

It is never allowed to perform two wedding ceremonies (e.g., Catholic and non-Catholic) since it is the exchange of vows that marks the definite beginning of the marriage. When permission is granted for a non-Catholic wedding ceremony, your deacon or priest is not allowed to perform a Catholic wedding ceremony.

### **13. May our wedding ceremony be celebrated in a home, a garden, a hall, etc.?**

Not typically, for the reasons stated above. Permission to do so must come from the Bishop of the Diocese where the wedding will take place. Even when a Catholic marries a non-Christian it is not common that permission is granted for the wedding not to take place in a sacred space.

## **SCHEDULING A DATE**

### **14. When can I schedule a date, and why does it seem to take so long?**

As soon as the priest preparing you knows that you are free to marry and is convinced that you

understand the wedding vows and are ready to commit to them, you can set a wedding date. That sometimes takes a little bit of time. (See No. 18).

While an unofficial date for the wedding may be tentatively set at the first meeting with the priest, it is not official or binding until the priest has made his determination. This is generally not possible until after the FOCCUS Test (see No. 21) has been reviewed and the Pre-Nuptial Investigation is completed. Therefore, **arrangements for a reception hall must not be finalized until the priest confirms the official date.** Couples should therefore seek to fulfill all these requirements as soon as possible.

## **15. On what days and at what times can I get married at St James?**

**Weddings** are normally scheduled for Saturdays at 10:00am, 12:00pm, and 2:00pm. to accommodate other liturgies during the day.

**Rehearsals** for Saturday weddings take place on the preceding Friday evening at 4:30pm, 5:45pm, or 7:00pm depending on Church and priest availability.

*Weddings and rehearsals must always start on time, since the church may be scheduled for other events and the priest, coordinator, and musicians may have other obligations. Thus, the wedding party should arrive at the church well before the time scheduled for the beginning of the rehearsal or wedding. **When a wedding is delayed for any reason, the priest might have to modify the planned ritual to make up for the delay.** For example, depending on the length of the delay, certain songs or Scripture readings may be eliminated, or in some cases, a Nuptial Mass might have to be replaced with a wedding ceremony outside of Mass.*

Wedding Masses are **not** celebrated at St. James **on SUNDAYS or HOLY DAYS of OBLIGATION.**

*For weddings that are to take place during the penitential seasons of ADVENT (four weeks before Christmas) and LENT (six weeks before Easter), the solemn nature of these seasons is to be observed in the externals (e.g., flowers, music, decorations, etc.) by stark simplicity reflecting the penitential mood of these days. Thus, you may prefer to celebrate your wedding outside of these liturgical seasons.*

## **MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROCESS**

### **16. What is marriage preparation, and why do we have to do it?**

Marriage preparation is less like counseling and more like spiritual direction. Someone once said that marriage will either break you or make you a saint. Since nobody ever became a saint by accident, it would be good to have some guidance.

### **17. When should I begin planning for a wedding at St. James?**

Try to begin planning as soon as you get engaged. The Diocese of Arlington requires a **MINIMUM** of six months of preparation for marriage.

**18. What does the six-month marriage preparation process required by the Diocese involve?**

- 1) Meet with the priest with whom arrangements are being made **AT LEAST** four times. We urge you to be punctual for your sessions with the priest. Due to subsequent appointments being scheduled, we cannot assure you a priest will be able to meet with you if you are late. Please call if you foresee any difficulty or if you need to reschedule.
- 2) Attend an additional weekend program sponsored by the Diocese; you may choose from:
  - i) **Conferences for the Engaged** (these options will be explained in brochures you will receive at your first session with the priest),
  - ii) **Engaged Encounter**
- 3) You must also enroll in a course in **Natural Family Planning** (NFP), the only method of family planning compatible with the Catholic Faith, as all practice of contraception is gravely sinful. A schedule of dates for these classes is provided in a brochure you should receive at your first session with the priest. Be sure to ask for it in case the priest forgets. You also can look online for a schedule of classes at [www.ccli.org](http://www.ccli.org).

The non-Catholic party in an inter-faith marriage should be aware of the Catholic spouse's obligation to refrain from all contraception and be willing to be supportive and cooperative in this resolve.

**19. At what hours of the day are the sessions with the priest scheduled?**

The priests are eager to cooperate with the busy schedules of couples. However, please remember that priests also have busy schedules with confessions, Mass, meetings, and classes scheduled in the evenings. Just as you are willing to meet with florists, dressmakers, caterers, etc., during their regular, "9 to 5" business hours, please be willing to try to meet with the priest during his regular office hours, if possible. A limited number of evening and Saturday morning appointments may be available, which you can arrange with the priest who is preparing you.

**20. What do the sessions with the priest involve?**

The sessions with the priest will deal with:

- 1) the required paperwork and documentation which will help the priest determine that the couple is free to marry and capable of marriage,
- 2) the administration of the FOCCUS test (an indicator of the depth of your communication) and point-by-point consideration of the areas of disagreement,
- 3) the Church's understanding and appreciation of marriage as a vocation along with its challenges and blessings, and
- 4) the actual planning of the wedding ritual.

**21. What if my fiancé is not a Catholic, or not baptized; how will this affect our preparation?**

Many happy marriages begin with one spouse who is not Catholic. It can't be denied, though, that there are some struggles that accompany differences of religion. There may be another meeting and some additional reading to address the matter.

In addition, because of the importance of this issue, the priest must apply to obtain special permission or dispensation from the Bishop of Arlington for the wedding to take place (see No. 7). This application is very seldom denied. To obtain this permission or dispensation, the **Catholic party** must make two promises (and the non-Catholic party must be informed of these promises):

- 1) That he/she is prepared to remove dangers of falling away from the practice of the Catholic faith, and
- 2) Will do all in his/her power to have all the children born of the marriage baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church.

Finally, certain adaptations are made to the wedding ritual (see No. 31) to reflect the religious faith that the two do have in common.

## **22. What if we are already “married” according to civil law—how will this affect our preparation?**

We are very happy to assist couples who come to us to have their civil marriages “blessed by the Church”—or what we call a “**convalidation**”. It must be understood, however, that a merely “civil marriage” involving a Catholic is not recognized by the Catholic Church as a marriage in the eyes of God (see No. 3). Thus, when such a couple comes to us, their Catholic ceremony will be considered as though it is a new marriage and the preparation involved will largely parallel the preparation of other unmarried couples. However, since many of these couples will come to us with long term “natural bonds” between them, we can often allow some flexibility in both the time and process of preparation, based on the situation of the couple involved.

Nevertheless, since a couple in this type of marriage is, objectively speaking, *publicly* living in a relationship which is directly contrary to the teachings of Christ and His Church, the *public* celebration of marriage for such couples *must* be of a more subdued nature; that is, their Catholic wedding will involve only a “simple ceremony” (see No. 25).

## **23. What if my fiancé and I are living together—what effect will that have on our wedding preparation?**

Living together before marriage, “cohabiting”, is one of the worst ways to prepare for marriage. Current statistics bear out the high divorce rate among those who marry after having lived together. Not only does it involve the morally grave sin of fornication and directly mislead others to think that it is acceptable behavior (the sin of scandal), but the social sciences clearly show that it also seriously damages their relationship emotionally, psychologically, and practically. In addition, in many cases the ability to clearly discern and freely choose to give themselves in marriage is severely impaired. Out of sincere love and concern for the cohabiting couple, the priest preparing them for marriage will try to help them to understand the seriousness of this problem and encourage them to find alternative living arrangements during the engagement.

Unfortunately, some cohabiting couples try to avoid facing this issue by misleading the priest, e.g., giving a false address. Since any such deception seriously undermines the whole preparation and evaluation process, if it is discovered, **the wedding in question may be postponed or even cancelled.** (See No. 29).

## 24. What is meant by a “simple ceremony”?

A “simple ceremony” refers to a special manner of conducting a Catholic wedding ritual in the case of couples who already are civilly married. Some couples may have had a wedding ceremony already but without permission of the Church (see No. 3, 13). The simple ceremony provides for a simple and dignified exchange of vows in a manner that allows everyone to avoid any awkwardness. Nobody is put in the position of celebrating the purported beginning of something that for all intents and purposes has already begun. Practically speaking, a simple ceremony is generally *less* elaborate and *more* subdued in tone and appearance than the usual wedding ceremony. Appropriate dress for a simple ceremony is semi-formal. Modest flowers, music, and decorations are permitted.

# REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

## 25. What paperwork does the Church require?

- 1) A Catholic party must provide a **recent copy** (not more than 6 months old) of his/her Baptismal Certificate that has been issued by the church in which he/she was baptized. Write to or call the church of baptism, tell them you are planning to marry, give them your name and the date of your baptism, and ask for a copy of your **Baptismal Certificate “with notations”**. A recent copy is required because the notations include records of any sacrament (except for Confession) having been received since Baptism. Our first step in establishing your freedom to marry is making sure that there is no record in the Catholic Church of your having been married. Then submit the original certificate you receive (NOT a photocopy of it) to your priest. A Catholic party is also required to provide copies of his/her Confirmation Certificate, unless noted on back of the Baptismal Certificate.
- 2) A baptized non-Catholic is to provide a photocopy of his/her **Baptismal Certificate**, or a letter from his/her church indicating that the Baptism has taken place.
- 3) Each party will be given two copies (a total of four) of an **Affidavit of Freedom**. These also serve as proof of each party’s freedom to marry. They roughly equate to a minister’s request at the wedding: “If anyone knows why these two should not marry, speak now or forever hold your peace.” The forms may be completed by your parents, other close relatives, or those who can vouch for your readiness. In order to be an official document for your marriage file, **each affidavit must be signed in front of a**

**notary, whether it be a notary public or a Catholic priest or deacon.**

- 4) The priest with whom arrangements are being made will fill out a questionnaire (**Pre-Nuptial Investigation**) by asking the parties to testify, under oath, that there are no impediments to their proposed marriage.
- 5) The priest will ask the parties to fill out a pre-marital inventory (**FOCCUS test**), the purpose of which is to assist the couple to evaluate their communication.
- 6) When you attend the **Conference for the Engaged or equivalent program**, you will be given a certificate that your priest will add to your file.
- 7) When you finish attending the required course in **Natural Family Planning**, you will be given a certificate that your priest will add to your file.
- 8) If either the bride or groom (whether they are Catholic or not) has *ever* been married before in *any* type of ceremony (Protestant, Jewish, civil, etc.) or under “common law”, proof must be submitted regarding the annulment of that prior bond (i.e., a **decree of nullity** from the competent Catholic tribunal) or the death of the prior spouse (i.e., a **death certificate**). A **copy of the original divorce decree and marriage license/certificate** must also be provided.
- 9) If the couple has previously entered a merely civil marriage and now wish to enter a marriage before God by “having their marriage blessed by the Church” (convalidation) they must also provide a **certified copy of their marriage certificate**.
- 10) The parties must provide to the priest who will officiate at their wedding a Civil License issued by the Circuit Court of the Commonwealth of Virginia. This is to be done **prior to the wedding rehearsal. No wedding can take place unless the Civil License has been secured and been given to the priest who will officiate.**

## **26. What should I know about obtaining a Civil License?**

Residents of Virginia may obtain a Civil License from the Clerk of the Circuit Court at any county courthouse in the Commonwealth. Non-residents of Virginia **MUST** obtain a Civil License from the Clerk of the Circuit Court at the courthouse of the county in which the marriage is to take place. For St. James’s Parish, this means the CITY OF FAIRFAX COURTHOUSE. Also, please note:

- 1) County courthouses are not open on Saturdays or Sundays.
- 2) The Civil License is good for only sixty (60) days; therefore, do not get it too soon.
- 3) A blood test is no longer required in the Commonwealth of Virginia; therefore, the license may be obtained upon application.
- 4) There is a fee for the Civil License.

# THE NUPTIAL MASS

## 27. Who will help us plan our wedding at St. James?

While the priest is certainly happy to help you with planning the liturgy, the Wedding Coordinator is the one who will help you with the events of the wedding ceremony or Nuptial Mass. She is familiar with all our policies and preferences and can answer all your questions regarding the wedding. Furthermore, a Wedding Coordinator will make sure someone is present at the rehearsal and at the wedding itself to make sure everything runs smoothly. You may reach the Wedding Coordinator at [sramsel@stjamescatholic.org](mailto:sramsel@stjamescatholic.org). Please understand that the wedding coordinator is only a resource for the ceremony itself and not a planner of the event outside of church. In addition, you will work with our parish Music Director, Mr. Don Carolina, ([dcarolina@stjamescatholic.org](mailto:dcarolina@stjamescatholic.org)) in planning the music for the wedding. Please contact him as soon as you have set a date with the priest. He also is familiar with the policies and preferences of the parish regarding music and can give you sound advice and direction.

*The generous and professional contributions of our Wedding Coordinator, Music Director, and other parish staff have proven to be invaluable. In recognition of this, and in the spirit of simple Christian charity, we ask you to always show due courtesy and cooperation when working with them.*

## 28. Should our wedding take place during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass?

**If both parties are Catholic**, the wedding should normally be celebrated within the context of the Holy Mass so that the couple, together, may worship the God Who made them and unites them in Holy Matrimony and so that they may receive Holy Communion together as their first married act.

**If one of the parties is not baptized**, it is **NEVER** permitted that the wedding be celebrated within the context of Holy Mass.

**If one of the parties is baptized**, but not a Catholic, the wedding is normally celebrated without Mass, since the non-Catholic spouse may not receive Holy Communion (see “Invitation to Holy Communion” below). A wedding ceremony without Mass focuses on what the newly married couple shares in faith, rather than highlighting their differences. Please consult the priest preparing you and the Wedding Coordinators for ways to make this service both sacred and beautiful.

## 29. If our wedding takes place at Mass, may those who are not Catholic receive Holy Communion?

Non-Catholics (including members of the wedding party) may **NOT** receive Holy Communion in the Catholic Church at a wedding, due to our very different beliefs and convictions about the Eucharist. The only exceptions to this norm are members of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National

Catholic Church.

Catholics may receive **IF** they are in the state of grace, properly disposed, and desirous of receiving. An announcement briefly summarizing these requirements will be made prior to Holy Communion.

**30. Do we still need to go to Mass the next day?**

Yes, if your wedding takes place on a Saturday morning or early afternoon, you still must attend Holy Mass the next Sunday. Only when a Mass on Saturday begins in the evening could it satisfy the obligation to observe the Lord's Day.

## **THE WEDDING RITUALS**

**31. How can I personalize my wedding?**

In coming to the Catholic Church for your wedding, you have recognized that the liturgical celebration of marriage is not something that belongs simply to any one person, couple, or family. It is primarily the action of the whole Church—the *Bride of Christ*. It is a solemn and holy occasion. The Church has its own Rituals that allow the faith of both bride and groom to be expressed while ensuring that those gathered will be drawn towards the Lord. A Catholic wedding is not about you as much as it is about what God is doing through you and for you.

Consequently, while you are free to make decisions regarding various options in the Rite (e.g., Scripture passages, blessings, etc.), we will also very carefully adhere to all the Church's liturgical norms, customs, and teachings in every respect. In addition, since there are practical limitations to what our resources of space, time, and personnel can accommodate, we ask that you respect the specific policies that apply.

At your first meeting the priest will give you a book containing the options for the readings and prayers of the wedding; this will also contain a form on which you may indicate your choices. Most importantly, try to get to know your priest and let him get to know you so that it will be a friend who is preaching at your wedding.

With the help of the Music Director ([dcarolina@stjamescatholic.org](mailto:dcarolina@stjamescatholic.org)), you will also be able to select the music for your wedding. Please coordinate your decorations and flowers with the wedding coordinator at St. James ([sramsel@stjamescatholic.org](mailto:sramsel@stjamescatholic.org)).

**32. May I incorporate pious customs into the wedding, such as laying flowers at the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary?**

It is perfectly legitimate to incorporate well-established pious customs into the wedding, such as a devotion to Our Lady (which is *always* encouraged at St. James), if they are situated in the appropriate place in the wedding and do not tend to dominate or distract from the liturgy. Practices, however, which are not parts of the Catholic tradition of piety or which are overly distracting will not be permitted.

### 33. May the Unity Candle be used during the wedding?

The origins of the Unity Candle seem to be found in the secular wedding industry (e.g., Hallmark) rather than the pious custom of Christians. In any case, it is not part of the Catholic tradition. For example, the three lighted candles associated with the Unity Candle are usually understood to represent the bride and groom becoming one in marriage, but in the Catholic liturgy the symbol of the lighted candle *always* represents Jesus Christ who is “the light of the world.”

Thus, the Unity Candle may not be used at St. James. Please do not request an exception to this policy. Whenever a couple desires to preserve this symbol, they are encouraged to use it at the reception, in conjunction with grace before dinner, as a way of carrying the spiritual dimension of their wedding event to their celebration.

### 34. May I prepare and distribute a “program” at my wedding?

Certainly. A wedding program is often helpful for wedding guests and can make a beautiful keepsake. The content of the program, however, must be consistent with the Catholic nature of this wedding; that is, it may not contain art or poetry that is incompatible with Christian faith. It should include a schedule showing the order of the ceremony or Mass, and it often lists the names of the wedding party, family members, those taking liturgical functions, the priest, and the musicians. It may also contain a simple sentiment of appreciation or mutual love, or a prayer composed by the bride and groom.

To avoid confusion or error, **all programs must be submitted to the Music Director to review with the priest at least one (1) month before the wedding.** The program may not be printed without the priest’s approval.

## PARTICIPANTS IN THE WEDDING

### 35. How many people may I have in my wedding party?

At least two (2) witnesses (Best Man and Maid/Matron of Honor) must be present in the wedding party to witness your vows. Wedding parties larger than five couples (including the Best Man and Maid/Matron of Honor) are ***strongly discouraged*** due to the spectacle that they can become.

### 36. How many people may I invite to serve in “liturgical functions” at the wedding?

The Music Director will serve as the cantor/soloist. You may invite different individuals (all must be practicing Catholics) to fulfill the following liturgical functions,

- 1) A reader for the 1<sup>st</sup> reading
- 2) A reader for the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading
- 3) A reader for the General Intercessions
- 4) Two (2) presenters (bearers) of the offertory gifts (only at a Mass)
- 5) **Altar Boys** (at least two for a Nuptial Mass and one for a wedding ceremony) are

normally taken from St. James' regular Altar Boys. **You must** contact the parish office (703-532-8815) two weeks prior to the wedding to schedule the Altar Boys. Outside Servers are normally not permitted.

**37. May I invite a non-Catholic minister to participate in my wedding ceremony?**

In the wedding of a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic, where a Nuptial Mass is **NOT** celebrated, a non-Catholic Christian minister may be invited to participate but not co-officiate in the wedding ceremony. These arrangements must be made with the officiating priest and approved by the pastor of Saint James.

**38. May I invite non-Catholic lay people to fulfill liturgical functions in my wedding?**

Anyone invited to fulfill the liturgical functions of readers, gift bearers, and altar servers **must be a practicing Catholic** (or Eastern Orthodox Christian) whose good qualities of Christian life, faith, and morals recommend them to this function. Anyone asked to read at the wedding (i.e., Scripture and intercessions) should also have some experience at public reading/speaking.

**39. May I invite non-Catholics to stand in my wedding party? Absolutely!**  
The Best Man, Maid of Honor, bridesmaids, groomsmen, and ushers need not be Catholic.

**40. May children be included in our wedding party?**

You are ***strongly discouraged*** from allowing children below the age of reason (7 years old) to serve as ring bearer, flower girl, etc., since very young children often disrupt and distract rather than enhance the ritual, especially during the wedding procession. If the children are not able to display the necessary demeanor at the rehearsal, the priest may have to exclude them from the wedding party. Finally, any children involved in the procession must always be supervised by an adult.

**41. Are there any rules about what the wedding party may wear?**

It is customary for the bride to wear white as a sign of purity. The white garment worn at baptism symbolized holiness in just the same way that Sacred Scripture describes the angels and saints robed in white; the white dress worn at First Holy Communion also can serve as a model for the wedding dress, both in symbolism and style.

A wedding dress with sleeves is both elegant and unique. Brides and their attendants must cover their shoulders with a jacket or shawl in the church for the wedding if their dresses are strapless or otherwise expose bare shoulders, the back, or waist. Low necklines designed to show cleavage are not permissible in the church. Hemlines above the knees and slits which rise above the knees must be avoided (even by men in kilts)

These rules must also be observed by all those who serve in liturgical functions (such as readers and gift bearers).

Appropriately modest dress should also be **observed at the rehearsal**. Please tell your guests that because the air conditioning is very cold, they might need sweaters.

**42. Where does the wedding party dress and prepare for the wedding?**

There is not room in the church for dressing. The bride and her attendants should dress before arriving, and they should arrive at the church no later than **20 minutes** prior to the start of the wedding. In the event of extreme weather conditions that preclude walking outside, the bride may arrive right before the ceremony and wait in a vehicle. Please consult the wedding coordinator for details and restrictions.

The groom and his groomsmen are asked to arrive no later than **30 minutes** prior to the wedding. The groom and his groomsmen are asked to wait in the “altar boys sacristy” located behind the sanctuary.

*St. James is not responsible for any personal items left behind. Please designate someone to collect all your belongings so that you will not be burdened by cleaning up after the wedding!*

## MUSIC

**43. May we choose our favorite songs for our wedding?**

A wedding (whether within the context of Holy Mass or not) is a sacred service; therefore, only sacred music – that is, music composed for the specific purpose of the worship of God – may be played or sung during the Mass or ceremony. Please do not request an exception to this law of the Church. Recorded music is also never permitted during any liturgy of the Church.

The parish Music Director, Mr. Don Carolina, will help you select music that will be both beautiful and appropriate for your Catholic wedding. Therefore, please remember to contact the parish Music Director ([dcarolina@stjamescatholic.org](mailto:dcarolina@stjamescatholic.org)) immediately after setting your date with the priest.

You may wish to schedule the joyful celebration of your wedding outside of the penitential seasons of Advent (the four weeks before Christmas) and Lent (the six weeks before Easter), because during these seasons, the music and decorations must also be of a penitential nature. If you do choose to schedule your wedding during the penitential season, however, the Music Director will advise you on what is appropriate.

**44. Who may serve as musicians?**

The Parish Organist will play for your wedding, and the Cantor will serve as the soloist. Outside musicians are only allowed after consultation with the parish music director.

**45. Is there a fee for the music?**

The organist, cantor, and any other musicians' fees are separate from any offering made to the priest or church. The Parish Organist's fee is \$300 and the Cantor's fee is \$250. A check can be made out the organist and cantor directly for these services. If you are bringing your own musician a "bench fee" of \$300 is payable to the Director of Music. **This check must be submitted to the Parish Office no later than one week prior to the wedding.** These fees, however, assume that the wedding begins on time. Additional charges will apply if the wedding begins late.

## WEDDING DECORATIONS

### 46. Are there any norms regarding flowers and decorations?

The use of floral and other decoration to enhance the liturgy and give glory to God is a time-honored custom. Please consult with our wedding coordinator when planning your wedding flowers and decorations. This consultation should take place at least 2 months before the wedding and **BEFORE any final arrangements are made** regarding flowers or decorations.

If your wedding is not taking place during a penitential season, flowers may be of any style or color you wish, if they are consistent with the solemn and religious nature of the celebration. Note also that the parish installs floral arrangements for the Christmas and Easter seasons which cannot be removed for weddings. Couples are welcome to make donations toward these arrangements.

Brides may choose to include a bouquet for the Blessed Mother among their personal flowers. Please consult with the Church decorator regarding this devotion and guidance on sizing this bouquet. Ribbons and flowers may be attached to pews using special varnish-friendly adhesive or plastic slips. Aisle runners are not permitted. Because of the decorations and candles already in place in the church, additional candelabra may not be used.

Any other special decorations not mentioned here must be specifically approved by the Church decorator.

### 47. May we use rice, birdseed, flower petals, etc.?

St. James does not have a full-time custodian on staff to clean up immediately following weddings. Though popular, blowing bubbles, throwing rice, or any other substance is strictly prohibited since **ALL** of these present some degree of hazard on the walkway outside of church. We certainly don't want your celebration marred by anyone accidentally slipping and injuring himself or herself, so please inform your family and friends to refrain from such practices. For this same reason, no flower petals, etc., may be dropped in the aisle in front of the bride by flower girls in the entrance procession.

# PHOTOGRAPHS

## 48. Are there any norms regarding photographs at the wedding?

We do allow candid photographs during the wedding Mass or ceremony. It is also permitted to have your wedding videotaped. We urge photographers to exercise good judgment and common sense out of respect for the solemnity of the occasion, and always accept direction from the Wedding Coordinator and the priest. Saint James does not livestream weddings. An outside videographer can be used, but there is no wifi in the church.

Once the wedding has begun the following rules must be followed:

- 1) No flash photography (or strobe/movie lighting) is allowed;
- 2) The photographer/videographer is asked to keep his/her visible movement to a minimum;
- 3) They may never walk in the area in front of the sanctuary or enter into the sanctuary;
- 4) They may never take a position during the wedding which would distract the assembly or obstruct anyone's view of the couple, the readers, or the priest;
- 5) They may not stop the procession; and
- 6) They may take candid shots from the back of the church.
- 7) Guests must remain seated while taking photos.

## 49. May we take pictures in the church after the wedding?

We encourage couples to take group photographs at the reception. Since the altar is not intended as a backdrop for photos and out of respect for the Blessed Sacrament, posing for pictures at the altar after the wedding is *to be limited and individuals should be mindful of the sacredness of the space. \*At no point should any person enter the Sanctuary.*

If a couple does receive permission from the pastor and Wedding Coordinator to pose at the altar for photos, **the church must be cleared within an hour and a half (1 ½ hours) after the start time for the wedding. This time limit is strictly enforced.** We also remind the couple and the photographer that they are still in the presence of Our Lord, truly present in the Tabernacle. During picture taking, the wedding guests and photographer must maintain an atmosphere of reverence that will not disrupt prayer in the church.

## 50. Are there any rules for guests with cameras?

It is always recommended that guests refrain from photos during the ceremony. It can be a distraction from the sacredness of the ceremony and can interfere with professional photography. Should you choose to allow guests to take photos they are also asked to observe the above rules for photography.

## OTHER CONCERNS AFTER THE WEDDING

### 51. How long may we stay in the church after the wedding?

- 1) For a 10:00am wedding, the church must be cleared by 11:30am.
- 2) For a 12:00pm wedding, the church must be cleared no later than 1:30pm and
- 3) A 2:00pm wedding must be cleared by 3:30pm due to the beginning of Confessions, followed by the Saturday Evening Mass.

Thank you for your cooperation in this regard.

### 52. May we have a “receiving line” after the wedding?

Because of the limited space and time constraints, **no receiving line is allowed at the church.**

### 53. Who is responsible for cleaning up after the wedding?

**The couple is responsible** for arranging for the removal of all the decorations that they have set up for the wedding, as well as all the trash that is directly related to the wedding (loose programs, boxes, bows, etc.). Please delegate this task to someone so that you will not be burdened by cleaning up after your wedding!

## WEDDING FEES

### 54. Is there a fee for our wedding?

St. James requires a \$300 deposit for parishioners to reserve the date for the church. Non-parishioners are required to get permission from the pastor before a reservation can be made. If the request is approved, the reservation fee is \$500.

Fees are due to those individuals who provide professional services in support of the wedding. The fees outlined below are paid no later than **7 days** in advance to the parish office. Payment is made by check payable directly to organist, cantor, or church.

Couples may also choose to make a customary donation to those who volunteer their service in support of the wedding. Such voluntary donations are greatly appreciated and made directly to the individual:

- Priest – a donation of \$150 is customary.
  - \*Please write the check directly to him or note the recipient on the check.
- Altar Boys -\$25 each (scheduled through the parish office)

### 55. If the priest at St. James prepares us but the wedding is in another city or state, is there a fee for his assistance?

There is no fee for this pastoral service. Couples, however, can choose to give a gift to the priest in appreciation of his efforts.