

St. Gall Catholic Church

Elburn, IL

Marriage Preparation and Wedding Policies

effective April 2017; revised January 2019

Dear Engaged Couple,

Congratulations on your engagement! We know that this is such a joyful time for you and your family and friends. It can also be a hectic time filled with plans and arrangements, reservations and appointments.

Please keep in mind that while you have much to do in order to plan the wedding day, you also will be preparing for more than just the wedding ceremony and festivities. You will be preparing to begin a lifelong vocation as a married couple! For two baptized Christians this union is sealed and lived out through the sacrament of holy matrimony. While there are many requirements for your marriage formation these exist so that we can help you to have the best marriage possible!

You have decided to move into the future by promising, with faith in each other and faith in God, to marry for life. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “God himself is the author of marriage” and “the vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator. Marriage is not a purely human institution...” (CCC, 1603). It is absolutely vital that you invite God to your wedding and into your marriage!

We have written these wedding policies to assist you in planning one of the most important events in your life. We have written these guidelines and present them to you so that there are no surprises as to the policies and practices of St. Gall parish, the Diocese of Rockford and the Catholic Church, in general. They have been drawn up so that the sacred ceremonies that celebrate your upcoming marriage might proceed smoothly and with dignity.

Please read through these policies carefully and in their entirety and share this information with those who will participate in your wedding.

Lastly, please read the article on chastity outside and within marriage that is featured at the end of this packet. This important subject will come up in marriage preparation. More than anything else marriage is a vocation or calling to love another person sacrificially so as to help them know God and prepare for heaven. Chastity is the virtue whereby we love as God created us to love and in accord with our state in life. This virtue will be at the heart of a healthy and happy married life together—so please be thinking about this topic now as you prepare for marriage.

We here at St. Gall wish you God’s blessings as you begin your life together in Christ!

Rev. Fr. Christopher P. DiTomo, Pastor

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1. REGISTRATION AND RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS:

In the Roman Catholic tradition, marriage should take place in the home parish of either the bride or the groom (either the parish where they grew up or where they currently live). For a wedding to take place at St. Gall Church, the bride or groom must be a registered and active member of the parish.

If you reside outside of the St. Gall parish boundaries and have a special need, we may be able to make an exception. We, of course, welcome a bride or groom to marry at St. Gall if St. Gall is your home parish or the parish where your parents currently belong. Another legitimate special need might include, for example, the need to plan a wedding that is closer to where many of your family, friends, and guests live.

In the Roman Catholic tradition, the authority to preside at a wedding belongs to the pastor of the parish within whose boundaries either the bride or groom reside. If you have a legitimate special need to marry at St. Gall even though you do not live within St. Gall parish boundaries then you will have to request permission from the pastor of the parish where you reside. The pastor of St. Gall will give you a form that you could submit to him. This is important since, without the written permission from your proper pastor (the pastor of the parish within whose boundaries you reside) no priest or deacon at St. Gall has the authority to validly witness your wedding vows.

2. OTHER GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR MARRIAGE WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Both bride and groom must be at least 19 years of age in order to be married in the Rockford Diocese.

In addition to baptism, Catholics should have received the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation before being married. If a Catholic has not received all of these sacraments they should speak to the priest about how they might be able to prepare to receive them.

Marriage within the Catholic Church has a very specific nature. When we the word “marriage” is used in the secular culture it does not always have the same meaning as Christian marriage.

Marriage in the Catholic Church is the union of one man and one woman where both the groom and the bride make solemn vows to:

- Be *faithful* to each other *for life* (“until death do we part”)
- Be *open to receiving the gift of children from God* (fruitful)
- *freely* enter this union (without being forced in any way).

Christian marriage (or, the sacrament of Holy Matrimony) is a union of two baptized Christians (either two Catholic Christians or a Catholic Christian and a non-Catholic Christian). The sacrament gives a man and woman the grace needed to love and serve each other, to love their children, to grow in holiness, to honor God in this life and prepare for eternal life with Him in heaven. With the grace of the sacrament the love between a husband and his wife becomes a reflection of the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ for His bride the Church.

If a Catholic wishes to marry a **non-Catholic Christian** (for example, someone baptized within the Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, etc. traditions) the priest is allowed to give permission for this “mixed marriage.”

If a Catholic wishes to marry a **non-baptized person**, the priest can request that the Bishop grant a dispensation (for “disparity of cult,” or, a difference of religion). The dispensation is readily granted. In this case, the marriage would be considered a Church-sanctioned natural marriage and not the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. (If the person received baptism at some point later in their marriage, the marriage would at that moment take on the character of the sacrament of holy matrimony).

If a Catholic wishes to marry a non-Catholic Christian or an unbaptized person, however, the Catholic party must make an agreement that they will make every effort to remain true to their Catholic faith and will do everything in their power to raise their children in the Catholic faith. Their fiancé should understand this promise and be supportive.

If either the bride or groom was interested in either being baptized or entering into full Communion with the Catholic Church, either before or after the wedding, they should bring this up with the priest who would be happy to assist them.

Prior marriages: In addition, both the bride and groom must be free to marry. They cannot have more than one spouse. While civil divorce ends a marriage from the perspective of the state, it cannot end a marriage in the eyes of God. This is true for Catholics, non-Catholics, and even unbaptized persons who have already entered into what is called a “natural marriage.” If a person was married previously the prior bond must have been dissolved by the death of the spouse. A person who was married before is also considered free to marry if they went through a church tribunal process and it was determined their first marriage was invalid (aka an “annulment”). If a prior marriage involved a Catholic and was attempted outside of the Catholic Church then that prior marriage can be declared invalid due to not adhering to the necessary form of marriage dictated in Canon Law. If this is the case, however, this would have to be documented and submitted to the Diocesan Tribunal for the issuance of the declaration of invalidity. If either bride or groom were married previously, they need to bring this up immediately to the priest. No wedding date can be set before it is clear that both parties are free to marry.

3. SETTING A DATE:

Couples wishing to be married at St. Gall need to make arrangements at least six months in advance of the date. Couples should call the office as soon as possible to inquire if the desired date is available. Darlene Biggs is our parish assistant who will help with scheduling weddings (phone 630-365-6030, darlene@stgall.com). A number of meetings with the priest are required to take care of the necessary paper work and the instructions before marriage (see “formal preparation”).

The Diocese of Rockford does NOT permit weddings to be celebrated on Sunday.

Weddings during Lent are discouraged.

4. WEDDING TIMES:

Weddings are generally scheduled at St. Gall on **Saturday** afternoon (though an earlier morning wedding may be possible). Most weddings are scheduled for 2pm at the latest. All picture taking must be completed by 3:30pm so that the church can be prepared for the Saturday evening confessions and Mass.

It may also be possible to schedule weddings on Friday afternoon.

5. PRESIDER:

While the bride and groom are actually the ministers of the sacrament of Holy Matrimony through their exchange of vows, a Church-sanctioned minister is required in order to witness and receive the vows in the name of the Church.

As a general rule, the priest/pastor assigned to St. Gall will preside at the ceremony and witness the marriage. If a couple has a close relative who is a priest or a deacon, he is most welcome to witness your marriage. Priests who have a close family relationship over a period of years may also be asked to witness a marriage. Out of courtesy, such requests should be discussed first with the priest at St. Gall who will be preparing the couple for marriage. If the priest approves of the guest celebrant then the guest priest is to request that his Diocese send a letter to St. Gall a couple of months before the wedding confirming that the priest is in good standing. In some cases, a couple can also ask a deacon to witness their marriage vows.

6. FORMAL MARRIAGE PREPARATION:

-Before a date for a wedding has been officially scheduled with St. Gall, the couple is to speak with the priest/pastor. The priest will want to make sure that the couple understands the basic requirements in order to be married in the Catholic Church (that they are free to marry, that they view marriage as a freely entered lifelong commitment of fidelity that is open to children). Since marriage is a lifelong commitment the Church has the responsibility of making sure that the groom and bride receive proper formation so that they understand the commitment that they are making and are equipped to live it out in a fruitful way.

-**Meetings with the priest:** The priest who will be preparing the couple will also meet with them to complete the necessary paper work for their marriage file and give remaining instruction on the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. The priest will often help the couple examine marriage from the stand point of the theology of the vocation and sacrament of marriage, the spirituality needed to build and sustain a successful marriage, and some of the common challenges to marriage (especially as observed from his perspective of hearing the confessions of married couples and marriage counselling).

-**Paperwork** required for your marriage file:

- Both groom and bride have to contact the parish where they were baptized at in order to request a new **baptismal certificate** dated and signed by the pastor within 6 months of your wedding date (not before). [Note: it is not sufficient to produce an old certificate that was given to your family on the day of baptism—a new certificate must be issued, dated, and signed by the pastor of the church where you were baptized.] Such a sacrament should also include any relevant notations (date of First Communion, date of Confirmation, etc.)
- Both need to select two people each (usually parents, but siblings or grandparents are also acceptable) to make an appointment with the priest to complete a brief interview attesting to their freedom to marry (**witness affidavits**).
- The priest will also explain any **forms of permission or dispensation** that may be required in a particular situation (for example, is either groom or bride is not baptized).
- Lastly, the couple will need to obtain a civil **marriage license** from Kane County and bring it to the wedding rehearsal.

-**marriage inventory/questionnaire:** The priest who will be preparing the couple will first have both bride and groom independently complete the *Fully Engaged* inventory. This inventory will present a series of questions on a range of topics including: personal differences, division of labor, recreation, family background, communication, conflict resolution, catholic identity, finances, intimacy, parenting, vocation and career. The results of the inventory will then provide direction for discussion during marriage preparation meetings.

-The Diocese of Rockford also requires that engaged couples attend a single one-day program entitled ***Gift of Self: Marriage Preparation***, facilitated by the Life & Family Evangelization Office of the Rockford Diocese. This day will include a presentation on Natural Family Planning embedded within the framework of the Church's teaching on the human person and the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. This

program is also applicable for remarriage and convalidation situations. This program is offered at various parishes throughout the Diocese and **costs \$150** (this is paid directly to the Diocese of Rockford, not St. Gall parish). Register online or contact the Life & Family Evangelization Office at 815-387-3377 <http://www.rockforddiocese.org/familylife/>

-Lastly, as is the case before receiving all major sacraments, it is highly recommended that the bride and groom go to the sacrament of **confession** leading up to the wedding day so that they are spiritually well-disposed to receive all of the graces of this powerful sacrament.

7. THE FORM OF THE WEDDING CEREMONY

All weddings that take place in the Catholic Church follow the Church's official liturgical book, the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*.

In a marriage **between two Catholics** it is recommended that the rite of marriage takes place within the context of a Mass (Rite of Marriage Within Mass). It is fitting that a man and a woman enter into the sacred covenant of Holy Matrimony in the midst of the highest prayer of the Church—the Holy Mass. The communion between the two spouses is meant to help them both enter into deeper communion with God—something that is celebrated in a profound way in Holy Mass. (note: a Saturday afternoon wedding Mass does not, however, satisfy one's Sunday obligation).

In **marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person** or a **Catholic and a non-Catholic Christian** we recommend the celebration of the Rite of Marriage Outside of Mass. This rite also involves readings from Scripture, a homily, and the exchange of vows, but does not take place within the context of the Mass. (Only those who are fully in union with the Catholic Church can be admitted to Holy Communion. As both bride and groom would not be able to share in Holy Communion this would introduce an element of disunity into a ceremony that celebrates the two becoming one. This rite would also make more sense if a large number of the guests are not Catholic).

Couples are not permitted to write their own vows. The vows used must be those prescribed in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*.

Catholic parishes are only allowed to celebrate weddings inside the parish church. No alternative options (e.g. outside, at one's home, etc.) are possible.

8. MUSIC:

Approximately four months before the wedding the couple should contact Ken Wagman, Director of Sacred Music (ph 630-365-6030 or ken@stgall.com) in order to select the music for the liturgy. In accord with the regulations of the Diocese of Rockford and the liturgical norms of the Catholic Church music chosen for the wedding ceremony must be sacred and liturgical in character befitting the sacred character of the rite. Secular music (including pop music) is not permitted. Music is subject to approval by the priest celebrant. Our Director of Sacred Music generally provides the accompaniment for all weddings. If you wish to have someone particular providing the music this will need to be arranged with the Director of Sacred Music.

9. READINGS:

The couple is encouraged to select the Biblical readings from an array of possible texts in the Rite of Marriage. The priest who prepares the couple will provide a booklet with the possible texts. The couple

can choose to have readers for 3 parts of the marriage rite: the first reading from the Old Testament, the second reading from the New Testament, and the Prayers of the Faithful/General Intercessions.

10. UNITY CANDLE and other non-liturgical customs

-While the unity candle is a common secular feature of weddings in the U.S., its use is *not* provided for within the Catholic Church's official liturgical rite for marriage. The unity candle is best used at the reception and incorporated into the blessing before the meal.

-While some additional customs may have become popular as wedding traditions in our contemporary culture, they are not allowed if they are not provided for within the Church's liturgical rite (e.g. mixing sand, etc.).

-Two customs popular within some cultures (Hispanic, Filipino, etc.)—the blessing and giving of the *arras* (coins) and the blessing and placing of the *lazo* or veil are permitted in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* and can be done.

11. PHOTOGRAPHS AND VIDEO:

1. We ask that the couple keep in mind that the church is a sacred place, not a photographer's studio. Photography must be done in accord with the dignity and sanctity of the Church. These rules are established in order to respect the sacred character of the church and the environment of prayer that is inherent in the marriage rite.
2. During the wedding Mass or ceremony, the photographer may take photographs as long as he or she does not distract from the ceremony (excessively moving locations, sounds or flashes from camera, etc.) and does not enter the sanctuary itself. Flash may only be used before or after the ceremony.
3. Sanctuary furniture, plants or flowers are never to be moved. Absolutely nothing is to be placed on the altar. A couple should also respect the way in which the church will be decorated during certain seasons of the year (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, etc.).
4. Wedding portraits may be taken before and/or immediately after the wedding ceremony. The time utilized for taking pictures after the wedding ceremony should never exceed 30 minutes. Many parishioners come to our church during the hour prior to the start of the evening Saturday Mass in order to go to confession or pray. While a wedding is a joyous day we ask that the wedding party remain reverent and quiet during the photos.
5. Videotaping is allowed but should be set up in the choir area or the area with the baptismal font (the two areas that flank the sanctuary/altar). These areas have the best vantage point. Artificial lighting is not permitted during the ceremony. Please share all of this information with the photographer and videographer.

FLOWERS AND DECORATIONS:

Aisle runners are not permitted.

Flowers are arranged through the florist. Lighted candelabra and bridal arches are not allowed. Any pew decorations are subject to approval. Nothing can be attached to the pews with tape or clips or anything else that can do damage. The dropping of flower petals down the aisle is, likewise, not allowed. In no instance may flowers be placed on the altar. If desired, you may leave the flowers for the church to use after the wedding.

BRIDE'S ROOM:

We do have a bride's room and other classrooms that can be used for members of the party to prepare for the wedding. It is expected that these room will be left in the same clean, orderly condition as they was found. All boxes, coat hangers, plastic covers, etc. should be removed as the party leaves the church. It is a great idea to designate a couple friends to do this for you.

RICE/BIRD SEED/CONFETTI/BALLOONS:

Due to the numerous problems that rice, bird seed and confetti create, they may not be used or thrown on Church property. Due to the danger to wildlife, the releasing of helium balloons is likewise discouraged. Balloons are never allowed in the Church. Bubbles used outside of the church are a great alternative.

FOOD AND DRINK:

The use of food or beverages is forbidden throughout the Church. **The introduction of alcohol into the Church building is absolutely forbidden. Any member of the wedding party showing signs of alcohol use before the rehearsal or the wedding will be asked to leave the church. The presider reserves the right to cancel the wedding if members of the wedding party are inebriated.**

ATTIRE AND ETIQUETTE:

Because the Rite of Marriage is a sacred liturgical act celebrated in the house of God in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, attire should be modest and reverent. It is preferred that the bride and bridesmaids have their shoulders covered. Men should not wear hats in church. No one should be chewing gum during the ceremony.

REHEARSAL:

Rehearsals are usually held in the early evening prior to the wedding (though other arrangement can be made). Only the couple and the wedding party are required to attend the rehearsal. The rehearsal will begin on time and will last approximately 1 hour. We ask that all respect the quiet and dignity of the Church. The Priest, a wedding ceremony coordinator or the director of music will conduct the rehearsal. While we are happy to work with any wedding coordinator that you use, the staff at St. Gall will direct the wedding party in the flow of the liturgy and the procession into and out of the church.

LICENSE:

The priest or deacon who witnesses your marriage does so in the name of the Church and also in the name of the county/civil authority. No minister within the Catholic Church is permitted to witness a marriage unless the couple possesses a civil marriage license.

The civil marriage license must be procured from the Kane County Clerk's office.

Both bride and groom must apply in person together at the Kane County Clerk office and show a proof of age. The license will be issued in about 30 minutes.

The Kane County Clerk office is located at 719 S. Batavia Ave, Bldg B, Geneva, IL 60134. Their phone number is 630-232-5950

The marriage license is valid for 60 days.

Couples are to bring the license to the rehearsal. In Kane County the marriage license does not need to be signed by neither the bride/groom nor the witnesses. The priest celebrant will take the license, sign it, and mail it to the County Clerk's office.

More information about applying for the marriage license can be found on the Kane County Clerk website:

<http://kanecountyclerk.org/Records/Marriage/marriagelicense.aspx>

SUGGESTED FINANCIAL OFFERINGS:

Weddings involve a lot of time and effort on the part of the minister, musicians, and cleaning staff. In order to proper compensation a financial offering would be most helpful. Please include the following suggested offerings as part of your wedding budget. All offerings should be placed in separate envelopes. Please give the envelopes to the priest or the wedding ceremony coordinator at the rehearsal.

Church - \$100 (cash or check made out to ST. GALL CHURCH)

Accompanist - \$150 (cash or check made out to the name of the accompanist)

Soloist/cantor - \$125 (cash or check made out to the name of the soloist/cantor)

[If having a Mass, Altar Servers (will usually have 1, possibly 2) \$20/each – can give them cash]

Celebrant (priest or deacon): Some people like to offer the priest or deacon something for his time and efforts in preparing the couple and witnessing the marriage. A customary offering/stipend if **\$100**. However, this is NOT necessary if a couple's finances are tight.

It should be noted, that no couple will be denied the opportunity to receive the sacrament of Holy Matrimony due to an inability to provide fees or offerings. If finances are an issue please bring this up with the priest.

CONTACT US

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Important considerations for the health of your future marriage

Chastity: “Chastity is the moral virtue which... provides for the successful integration of sexuality within the person leading to the inner unity of the bodily and spiritual being” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, glossary). In other words, through the virtue of chastity, one’s physical/sexual being is consistent with and connected to one’s spiritual being.

In the **married state**, chastity means being sexually and emotionally faithful to one’s spouse. It means allowing the marital act to always be open to life. In the married life sex is the physical expression of a couple’s total gift of self to each other in a way that unites the two and allows for the opportunity for new life (in other words, sex is for “bonding and babies”). The marital (or “conjugal”) act is, therefore, a renewal of one’s marriage vows (when you said “I do” and committed all of yourselves to each other).

Engaged couples can also continue to grow in appropriate emotional, physical, and spiritual intimacy. However, chastity for engaged couples means respecting the fact that sex (and the things that lead up to sex) is reserved for marriage since sex is the physical and personal expression of a *definitive* commitment made only in a valid marriage. While this period of waiting can be very difficult, especially for couples who already feel very close and very committed to each other, it is good practice for married love. Love involves the sacrificing of one’s own desires for the good of the other, and for the good of your future marriage. By practicing the virtue of chastity now, you are strengthening your love for each other and your future marriage (which will also involve the unique form of marital chastity).

A word about **cohabitation**: I understand that many couples in our culture today live together before marriage.

If you are currently cohabitating I would like you to please prayerfully read the brief article below. The issue of cohabitation will be discussed during your marriage preparation. The best course of action would be to establish separate residences until after your wedding. If this is impossible for economic reasons then you should establish separate rooms in which to sleep and make the commitment to refrain from sexual relations until after the wedding. I understand that this could be considered a radical step to take, and one that might require great sacrifice, but this will provide a wonderful opportunity to grow in your relationship and to prepare for married love—a life of sacrificing one’s own wants for the long-term good of the other. In the long run this will strengthen your relationship and help you to work on other areas of your relationship

(communication, etc.). This also makes the wedding night much more meaningful as it will involve the consummation of the vows that were exchanged in the Church.

If you are not cohabitating than I think that this issue is still one to keep in mind. Some couples feel the temptation to move in together during their engagement period because they are “practically married” already or “almost there.”

Please be assured of my continued prayers as you prepare for marriage.

–Fr. DiTomo

Church Teachings - Cohabitation

<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/catholic-marriage/church-teachings/cohabitation/>

On average, marriage preceded by cohabitation is 46% more likely to end in divorce.

It’s no secret that many couples are cohabiting, that is, living together in a sexual relationship without marriage. Currently, 60% of all marriages are preceded by cohabitation, but fewer than half of cohabiting unions end in marriage.

Many couples believe-mistakenly-that cohabitation will lower their risk of divorce. This is an understandable misconception, since many people are the children of divorce, or have other family members or friends who have divorced. Other reasons for living together include convenience, financial savings, companionship and security, and a desire to move out of their parents house.

What social science says about cohabitation

- On average, marriage preceded by cohabitation is 46% more likely to end in divorce.
- The risk is greatest for “serial” cohabitators who have had multiple relationships.
- Some studies indicate that those who live together with definite plans for marriage are at minimal risk; however, there are no positive effects from cohabiting.
- Cohabitation puts children at risk. Forty percent of cohabiting households include children. After five years, one-half of these couples will have broken up, compared to 15% of married parents.

Cohabitation and Catholic Church teaching

Every act of sexual intercourse is intended by God to express love, commitment and openness to life in the total gift of the spouses to each other. Sexual intercourse outside of marriage cannot express what God intended. Rather, it says something false—it expresses a total commitment that the couple does not yet have. This total commitment is possible only in marriage.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out that some couples claim a right to live together if they intend to marry later on. Although the couple may be sincere in their intention, the

Catechism stresses that human love is not compatible with “trial marriages.” Rather, “it demands a total and definitive gift of persons to one another.”

Cohabitation and marriage preparation

If you are a cohabiting couple who has chosen to marry, the Catholic Church welcomes your decision to marry. Because cohabitation can have an effect on the marriage, couples are encouraged to explore certain questions with the pastoral minister who is preparing them for marriage. These include:

- Why did you choose to live together?
- What did you learn from the experience of living together?
- Why did you decide to marry?
- Why do you wish to marry in the Catholic Church?
- What does marriage as a sacrament mean to you?

Pastoral ministers may encourage cohabiting couples without children to separate for a period before marriage as a sign of their free, loving decision to follow the Church’s vision of marriage and sexuality. Couples are also encouraged to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

People have a right to marry; therefore, cohabiting couples cannot be denied marriage in the Catholic Church solely because they are cohabiting. However, cohabitation may raise questions, for example, about the couple’s freedom to marry, that need to be explored.

For more information:

Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples, an Information Report from the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Marriage and Family