

# Together Forever



## *A Guide to Weddings*

at St. Mary Church  
178 Greenwich Avenue  
Greenwich, Connecticut

Congratulations from all of us  
at St. Mary Parish on your  
engagement!

We have provided this booklet as  
a guide to the liturgical directives and  
policies surrounding your special day.

By reading this through  
thoroughly, we hope to clear up much  
of the confusion surrounding  
the Catholic Wedding Ceremonies and  
to help you avoid the liturgical and  
procedural pitfalls that others may have  
fallen into. As always, if you have  
questions, particularly ones not  
answered here, do not hesitate to  
contact your priest.

*They are no longer two, but one flesh.  
(Mark 10:8)*

## ***General Considerations***

- ~ Who can get married at St. Mary's? Wedding times are available only in cases where the bride and/or groom have been active, registered parishioners of St. Mary's for at least the past nine months. Wedding times are also extended to the children of registered parishioners. Wedding times are not ordinarily extended to those who have no affiliation with St. Mary.
- ~ All requests for a wedding time, input into the ceremony, and contact with the clergy are to be handled by the future bride and/or groom personally. The clergy will not be able to speak with parents, wedding planners, or other interested parties due to the confusion that this always generates.
- ~ It is required by the Diocese of Bridgeport for preparatory work to begin at least nine months before your intended wedding date. Many couples elect to contact us up to a year in advance in order to secure a particular date or time.
- ~ These nine months will involve classes given by the Diocese (either pre-Cana or Engaged Encounter) as well as a series of meetings with your priest for catechesis and necessary paperwork.
- ~ In cases where there has been a previous marriage, whether religious or civil, and particularly in cases where one or more annulments will need to be granted, no wedding date can even be considered until the concerned parties are canonically free to marry (i.e., an annulment has been granted). This does not apply in the case of a previous marriage where the former spouse has died or if an annulment has already been granted.

- ~ No wedding dates or times can be booked over the phone. While we can tell you if a particular date/time is presently available in that way, no date can be booked or guaranteed until the couple meets personally with the priest who has agreed to marry them.
- ~ Weddings at St. Mary are determined in accordance with the parish calendar and, in general, can be scheduled throughout the year with the exception of Sundays, all Holy Days of Obligation, Holy Week, the day before Easter and Christmas, Easter Sunday, Christmas Day, and civil holidays. On Saturdays, the times available are: 11:00AM, 1:30 or 2:00PM.
- ~ Couples must be aware that there are always other church services on the day of their wedding. Therefore, it is essential that all weddings start on time. Only by adhering to the established schedule can we guarantee time after the ceremony for pictures, receiving line, and to have the next service/Mass start on time. Please be aware that traffic and parking are nearly always a problem here! Plan to arrive early for your wedding to avoid problems.
- ~ Out of consideration for our parishioners and the (often crowded) parish schedule, any wedding Mass which begins 15 or more minutes late (for any reason), will be changed to a service of readings with the exchange of vows. In this case, there will be no Mass or distribution of Holy Communion.



## **Required Prep Work**

*In addition to the civil requirements (blood test and civil marriage license), the Church also requires certain procedures to be completed.*

- ~ It is required by the Diocese for the couple to attend either a “pre-Cana” workshop or an “Engaged Encounter Weekend” to begin their preparations for marriage. This should be completed at least four months prior to the ceremony. Details and enrollment forms are available from your priest.
- ~ Records of all your Sacraments (Baptism, Communion, Confirmation) are also required and must be new certificates, issued not more than six months previous to your intended wedding date. You will need to contact the parish where you were Baptized to obtain these. In the case of a non-Catholic bride or groom, only a certificate of Baptism is required. If a Catholic is lacking any of these sacraments, or has trouble locating the records, it is important for the priest to know as it may become necessary to adjust the wedding date and/or to have you enroll in additional classes such as RCIA.
- ~ In the case of a Catholic marrying a non-Christian, it may be necessary for the non-Christian to be able to certify by affidavit that he/she was never Baptized.
- ~ You will need to have several meetings with the priest who will perform your ceremony for additional paperwork, catechesis, and planning. You will also be given one of two booklets, either “Marriage is for Keeps” or “Together for Life”, which may touch on many issues regarding the Catholic understanding of Marriage as well as help you to plan the ceremony itself.

## ***The Ceremony: General Considerations***

- ~ Your priest and the booklets will help you to plan your ceremony and explain the various options available to you. Ceremonies must always be planned with due deference to the Liturgical Law of the Church and the particular mandates of the Bishop of Bridgeport. Please keep in mind that some options that you may have seen at other weddings may not be appropriate or permitted.
- ~ Guest clergy are always welcome. In the case of Catholic clergy, they are welcome to vest and to serve on the altar. If the couple is close to a particular Catholic priest, he is also welcome to do the entire Mass. Guest priests will have to provide a letter of good standing from their Diocese
- ~ If a guest priest or deacon will be doing your ceremony there is a certain procedure for him to follow. Please consult the priests of St. Mary for further information. It is also expected that the guest(s) will not, in any way, rearrange or disturb the church furnishings.
- ~ In the case of a wedding between a Catholic and a non-Catholic Christian, it is strongly recommended that the ceremony be a “Marriage Outside of Mass” without the distribution of Holy Communion for reasons explained below in the section on considerations regarding Holy Communion.
- ~ In the case of a wedding between a Catholic and a non-Christian (i.e., non-Baptized person), Canon Law does not allow a Mass to be said. In this case, the ceremony must be a “Marriage Outside of Mass” without Holy Communion.

- ~ A rehearsal for your wedding will need to be scheduled the night before. Those in attendance should be limited to parents, readers, the wedding party, the bride and groom.
- ~ It is highly recommended that the prospective bride and groom receive Confession at some point before the wedding day, particularly if “it has been a while.”
- ~ Seating within the Sanctuary is limited to the priest, bride and groom, Best Man, Maid (Matron) of Honor. All others are seated in the body of the church due to space limitations.
- ~ The church seats approximately 350 people and the main aisle is 60 feet long. The use of a runner is permitted but discouraged due to the increased possibility of someone tripping and falling.
- ~ Christian modesty and decorum are expected at all times at the rehearsal and at the ceremony itself. Skin tight dresses, mini skirts, and plunging necklines are not considered appropriate and must be avoided. It is also expected that the wedding party and guests will remember the sacredness of the church and act accordingly at all times.
- ~ It is not permitted for bird seed, rice, bubbles, flower petals or the like to be thrown before, during, or after the ceremony due to insurance liability and the fact that they create a huge mess for someone else to clean up.
- ~ Reserved parking in front of the church for your limo must be requested of the Town of Greenwich through the Traffic Division of the Greenwich Police Department.

## ***The Ceremony: Readings and Prayers***

- ~ The readings and prayers for the service are ordinarily selected by the bride and groom in consultation with the clergy. The clergy will provide the appropriate booklet to explain your options.
- ~ Other Scriptural readings, not found in the booklet, may be permitted on a case-to-case basis, if judged appropriate by the priest.
- ~ Non-Scriptural readings, and/or secular texts are never permitted as readings at Mass.
- ~ The Responsorial Psalm is usually sung by the soloist.
- ~ You are welcome to select friends or family members to do the first two readings. Those readers must ordinarily be Catholics. In all cases, the readers must be acquainted with public speaking and prepared to do so.
- ~ The Gospel and Homily are always given by a priest/deacon.
- ~ Wedding Masses which take place on Saturday do not fulfill the weekend obligation to attend Mass.

## ***The Ceremony: Music***

- ~ Music for the Mass is determined in consultation with the Director of Music.
- ~ Guest soloists/organists are welcome, but our own staff must still be paid a “bench fee.”
- ~ Music for the ceremony must be appropriate and religious in nature. Secular songs are never appropriate and therefore are not permitted.

## ***The Ceremony: Flowers and Decorations and Other***

- ~ Flowers are arranged through the florist of your choice. They must be in good taste and not overwhelming in size or number.
- ~ Flowers can be placed: in front of the pulpit, on either side of the altar, or in front of the altar if small enough, and/or on columns or stands against the back wall. They can also be placed at the feet of Our Lady in the Tabernacle area. Small sprays can also be placed on the first few pews.
- ~ Flowers are considered a donation to the church in thanksgiving to God. As such, it is ordinarily expected that they will remain in the church after the Mass.
- ~ Each season of the church year has its own character and so not every type of decoration is appropriate during every season. For example, decorations during the season of Lent and Advent must be simpler and more restrained than during the Christmas or Easter seasons.
- ~ Decorations of any other kind are usually not appropriate. If something else is desired, please consult the priest first. Balloons and the like are never appropriate and cannot be used in the church or vestibule/entryway.
- ~ By decree of the bishop it is not permitted for a Wedding Unity Candle to be incorporated into the marriage ceremony. Those wishing to use one should do so at the reception.
- ~ Those wishing to have a program for their ceremony may do so. Please review the proofs with your priest for accuracy before final printing.

### ***The Ceremony: Photography and Videos***

- ~ Photography and/or video are arranged with the professional of your choice. We ask, for the comfort of all concerned, that only professionals be permitted to photograph or video the ceremony.
- ~ The photographer and/or videographer must consult with the priest just before the ceremony to determine areas which he must avoid.
- ~ The use of flashes, strobes, or floodlights is not permitted.
- ~ Any photographer or videographer who becomes a problem will be directed to leave.
- ~ In no way will it be permitted for photography/video to detract from or interfere with the sacredness of the ceremony.

### ***The Ceremony: Holy Communion***

- ~ Ceremonies which are full Masses will have Holy Communion distributed as at Sunday Mass.
- ~ We welcome to our services those not of the Catholic faith. Catholics believe that Holy Communion is the true Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus as well as a sign of unity among the Catholic Faithful. Therefore, because of the differing beliefs in Christianity regarding the Eucharist and the Church, we are not permitted to admit non-Catholics to receive Holy Communion. We ask that non-Catholics please respect our law in this regard and remain in their pews during the distribution of Holy Communion while praying for the restoration of full unity among us.

- ~ We ask that the couple communicate this to any non-Catholic family members or guests who are expected to attend.
- ~ For the above reasons, we strongly suggest that a wedding between a Catholic and a Protestant not include the distribution of Holy Communion.
- ~ Those non-Catholics belonging to the Eastern Orthodox Church, Polish National Catholic Church, and Assyrian Church of the East, are permitted under Canon Law to receive Holy Communion. However, we ask that members of these churches respect their own particular law in this matter.
- ~ Those Catholics who are not conscious of un-confessed grave sins, who are living a life in harmony with the moral teachings of the Catholic Church, and who strive to live a life of charity toward God and neighbor are permitted to receive Holy Communion as at Sunday Mass. Those wishing to, or needing to, receive Confession are encouraged to make an appointment with a priest several days before the Mass.



## ***Costs and Fees***

- ~ The fee of \$1000 includes a donation to the church and the fees for the organist and soloist.
- ~ There is a “bench fee” if the couple wishes to engage an outside organist and/or soloist.

## ***Special Circumstances***

- ~ In all cases, Canon Law and the particular law of the Diocese of Bridgeport must be followed.
- ~ If special circumstances exist in your case (such as pregnancy, lack of legal age, previous marriage, imminent military service, etc.) please let your priest know as soon as possible. Such circumstance may require the modification of the procedures we follow and may also affect the wedding date.

