

## **Guidelines for the celebration of marriage at St. Patrick Catholic Church**

### **Congratulations and Welcome!**

On behalf of our parish community we rejoice with you on your engagement!

We pray that this time of immediate preparation for your matrimony will be filled with divine grace, happiness and joy. We trust that these guidelines will assist you in preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Miami Beach, Florida.

### **Preparing for marriage**

Your preparation for marriage began on the day of your baptism and continued through your years of religious education in a Catholic school or at CCD. It is rooted in your own life of prayer, works of mercy and active participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

You are now entering the final and immediate preparation for your Christian marriage which is marked by its unity, exclusivity and indissolubility.

Please note that any and all planning of weddings at St. Patrick Catholic Church is made with the Bride and the Groom only. You do not need the assistance of a wedding planner or coordinator. If the services of wedding planners/coordinators have been retained, those persons and their associates have no authority on the Church premises. The liturgical norms of the Catholic Church are to be strictly observed and Canon Law will be followed.

In order for you to marry at St. Patrick Catholic Church we need to formally establish that you are free to marry. To establish this fact formally, priests and deacons carry out a pre-nuptial investigation, which requires the collection of certain documents. You cannot reserve a date to marry at St. Patrick until and unless we document that you are free to marry. We also ask you to participate in some programs that we know from experience will greatly enrich your relationship and nurture your spiritual life.

### **Establishing your freedom to marry**

Marriage is an act of the will. It is created by verbally expressing consent following the appropriate form. Therefore, a man and a woman have to be free from coercion and free from impediments to be able to marry. The law of the Church provides for certain procedures to establish that nobody is forcing you to marry against your will. The process is called "pre-nuptial investigation." It consists of the gathering of documentary evidence and statements from the bride and groom.

At least six months before the desired date of marriage, you must contact the parish office to schedule a meeting with a priest or deacon who will conduct the pre-nuptial investigation. Your freedom to marry is established by a formal declaration made by the bride and the groom in the presence of a priest or deacon and by the testimony of two witnesses for each of the parties to marry. In the Archdiocese of Miami, the statements of the bride and groom are recorded in a special document, designated as Form A and the witness statements are provided in a special document, designated as Form B. The

interviewing priest or deacon will explain the meaning of these documents and will ask you some standard questions regarding your intentions and your freedom to marry.

In addition to these statements you have to submit a recently issued copy of your baptismal certificate, no older than six months. This is used to establish that you are Catholic, and thus subject to the discipline of the Church and also that you are not already married. When you marry an annotation is made to your baptismal record in the parish where you were baptized. For this reason, the copy has to be issued within six months of the meeting so that we can have additional evidence that you are not married. You will have to contact the parish where you were baptized in order to obtain a copy of the certificate.

Catholics are bound to follow the discipline of the Church; therefore, without prejudice to the competence of civil authorities concerning the merely civil effects of marriage, a Catholic does not create the reality of marriage through civil marriage. If you are Catholic and had entered into a civil marriage with a person other than your current bride or groom and went through a civil divorce, you never created the reality of marriage with that person because you did not follow the form prescribed by the discipline of the Church, which requires that Catholics freely express their consent before the Church's minister. That "civil marriage" only had the appearance of true marriage and has to be declared null and void for "lack of canonical form" by the Metropolitan Tribunal. If you are Catholic and have entered into a civil marriage with your current bride or groom, you are not validly married until you celebrate your marriage according to the form prescribed by the discipline of the Church.

### **Initial meeting with a priest or deacon**

The first step in your final preparation for marriage is a meeting with a priest or deacon that will take approximately 90 minutes. Both the bride and the groom have to be present at this initial meeting. The priest will complete with you Form A and will ask you to sign it. He will also indicate to you how to provide the testimony of the witnesses.

Before we can make the initial appointment, we must receive the following documents:

1. Permission or release from the Bride's parish if other than St. Patrick
2. Copy of Baptismal certificate for both parties issued no more than six months prior to this meeting
3. If there was one or more previous civil marriages, copies of the marriage certificate, decree of divorce in order to submit the petition for a declaration of nullity to the Metropolitan Tribunal (Please note that the Tribunal assesses a fee of \$100 for every petition for a declaration of nullity for lack of canonical form)
4. If there was a previous attempt to marry in the Catholic Church that was declared null by the Ecclesiastical Courts, you must supply the original Decree of Nullity issued by the Tribunal

If you are going to prepare for marriage in another parish, the couple must submit a letter from the priest or deacon assisting them stating that he is doing the necessary investigation according to Canon Law and that he will submit the complete file and documentation on the freedom to marry of the bride

and groom to St. Patrick Catholic Church in a timely fashion. If the parish is located outside the Archdiocese of Miami, the documents are sent through the Chancery of the home diocese to the Archdiocese of Miami, which in turn sends the documents to St. Patrick Catholic Church in Miami Beach.

### **Marriage preparation and enrichment programs**

The particular law of the Archdiocese of Miami requires that you participate in Pre-Cana, Engaged Encounter/Camino or a similar program. These programs are run by the Office of Family Life of the Archdiocese of Miami. To register, please visit the Family Life section of the Archdiocesan website, [www.miamiarch.org](http://www.miamiarch.org). If you are unable to attend the classes, you can also do it on-line. Once you complete the program, you will need to bring a copy of the certificate for your file.

You are also asked to participate in Fully Engaged, a Couple Inventory program, to facilitate communications within marriage. This program is administered at the parish by the priest or deacon.

In addition, you are required to participate in Natural Family Planning classes regularly offered at St. Patrick Catholic Church and elsewhere in the United States through the Couple to Couple League. To register for the classes at St. Patrick or at any other location, you must visit [www.ccli.org](http://www.ccli.org). If you are unable to attend the class, you can also do it on-line.

### **Wedding Donation**

Our beautiful Church is maintained through the generosity of our parishioners and donations. It is very costly to upkeep the building and its facilities, to run the air conditioner, not to mention other operating expenses. If you do not live within our parish boundaries, you were probably drawn to celebrate your marriage at St. Patrick by the beauty of our Church. We need your suitable contribution so that we can fund our mission, our evangelization efforts and maintain our building. Therefore, we ask you to make a generous donation to the Church on the occasion of your wedding.

We ask that you prayerfully consider making a donation to the Church that is comparable to the other expenses that you will incur in the celebration. We expect a donation of \$1,500 or more. We ask you to make an initial contribution of \$500 or more at the time of your initial appointment and then to contribute at least \$1,000 more as the time of your wedding approaches. The reason why we state an expectation and provide a minimum amount is that in our experience, we find couples who spend a lot of money on wedding planners and the like and are reluctant to make a donation to the parish. If your financial situation is such that you cannot make a donation and you live within our parish boundaries, the priests are available and they will be happy to assist you to prepare for marriage.

### **Reserving the date**

Our weddings are on Fridays with a start time between 5:00 and 7:00 p.m. (one wedding only) and on Saturdays at 2:30 and 6:30 p.m. To reserve the date at the Church, your freedom to marry has to be established or we must receive a letter from the priest or deacon preparing you for marriage informing

us that he is conducting the pre-nuptial investigation and you are free to marry. Once, your freedom to marry has been established we will book the Church for your marriage.

At the time you reserve the date, we ask you to sign an agreement to protect the interests of St. Patrick Catholic Church. The agreement outlines your responsibilities.

### **Planning the ceremony**

Once your freedom to marry is established and you have completed your participation in the programs mandated by the Archdiocese of Miami or the completed file has been received at St. Patrick from another parish, you can begin to plan for the actual celebration of marriage.

If you would like a priest or deacon other than St. Patrick clergy, the priest or deacon must send a letter to the pastor of St. Patrick requesting the delegation mandated by Canon Law to lawfully witness your marriage.

You need to choose the readings for the celebration. As you choose them, we encourage you to read together all of the readings and Psalms available and to meditate on them as a couple. The prayerful reading of Scripture, known as *lectio divina*, is a very ancient practice in the Catholic Church. Prayerfully reading the proposed Scripture passages as you endeavor to choose one for the celebration will be beneficial to you individually and as a couple.

When it comes to the exchange of consent or marriage vows, you may also choose from the different options provided in the ritual. You may not, however, write your own.

If you wish to have music during the celebration, you would have to contact the Director of Liturgical Music who will inform you of the different possibilities and prices that musicians charge. The fee for the wedding music is not included in the wedding donation and is paid separately.

If you wish to have your marriage videotaped or photographed you will have to hire a professional to do that for you.

If you are planning a solemn ceremony with a procession, music and a rehearsal, a marriage coordinator appointed by St. Patrick will assist you in the actual planning of the details and rehearsal. She assesses a fee of \$100 payable directly to her.

### **Marriage license**

If you have not entered into a civil marriage, if the celebration is not a convalidation of an existing civil marriage, you must purchase a Marriage License in the County Clerk's Office. The marriage license can be purchased up to 60 days prior to the wedding and brought into the office at least one week before the date of marriage. Keep in mind that the State of Florida requires that there be a 3 (three) day waiting period for obtaining the Marriage License. The number to call for more information is 305-275-1155 or visit <https://www2.miami-dadeclerk.com/mlsweb/>

Please note that it is against the law for a priest or deacon to celebrate a marriage without a license. They are held personally responsible. Therefore, if you fail to provide a valid marriage license prior to the day of marriage and a valid license is not available on the intended date, the celebration will have to be postponed until you obtain the license from the civil authorities.

## **Wedding rehearsal**

The wedding rehearsal time is arranged according to the following schedule depending on the day of your wedding.

- Monday through Thursday weddings, rehearsals will be determined based on the availability of the Church.
- Friday wedding, rehearsal begins at 5:45 PM and ends at 6:30 PM on Wednesday evening.
- 2:30 PM Saturday wedding, rehearsal begins at 5:00 PM and ends at 5:45 PM on Thursday evening.
- 6:30 PM Saturday wedding, rehearsal begins at 5:45 PM and ends at 6:30 PM on Thursday evening.

The wedding coordinator is the only person authorized to manage and arrange wedding procedures at the rehearsal. Personal wedding planners have no authority on Church premises. Liturgical norms, Canon Law and parish guidelines are to be strictly adhered to. The wedding coordinator's stipend is not included in the wedding donation and is paid separately.

It is extremely important that all participating members be on time for the rehearsal. The Church is needed for evening Masses and other planned events and tardiness disrupts the entire schedule. If the wedding rehearsal begins late, it will end promptly at the appointed time.

All participating members of the wedding party are required to be present, including the bride and groom, maid of honor, bridesmaid, flower girls, best man, groomsmen, ring bearers, lectors, parents. However, we ask that you do not invite anyone who is not in the wedding party to the wedding rehearsal.

## **Sacrament of Reconciliation**

It is very important that you go to confession before your wedding, especially if you have been away from the sacramental life of the Church for a long time or if you have not been to confession for a while. You are encouraged to make an appointment with a priest on the day of the rehearsal or you may come to our parish during the regular hours when the sacrament is celebrated and proceed to the confessional to receive the sacrament of reconciliation. You can check the confession schedule at other parishes in Miami by visiting the Archdiocesan website [www.miamiarch.org](http://www.miamiarch.org).

If you are Catholic and are marrying a Christian you will be receiving the sacramental grace of marriage and if you are going to receive Communion, you have to be in a state of grace. If you are aware of a

serious sin, you need to go to confession before you receive communion. If you are not sure consult with a priest or check the appropriate section in our website.

## **Marriage ceremony**

Remember that you will celebrate the mystery of human love in its most exalted form. Marriage is a communion of love and life between one man and one woman, when it is celebrated among Christians it has been elevated by Christ to the infinite dignity of a sacrament.

The day of your marriage is a very joyous occasion for you, your families and the entire Church, and it is only natural that you are excited and overcome with emotions, but we encourage you and your guests to keep a prayerful attitude throughout the celebration. The day of your wedding is an important milestone in your life. Starting a family is the most important project in your life, one that literally lasts for a lifetime. God willing you may have children one day, which you will also have to bring up in our beautiful Catholic faith and you may even want to send to St. Patrick Catholic School.

It is extremely important to be on time on the day of the wedding. If the ceremony is late, it may conflict with other liturgical celebrations in the Church and the priest may have to eliminate some of the non-essential rites to avoid a disruption of parish life.

## **Wedding Music**

As in any other celebration the music should express and reflect the atmosphere of the ceremony. In accordance with the dignity of the occasion, the lyrics of songs to be sung ought to reflect the Christian understanding of love and marriage, the mystery of Christ and the Church. Music from the entertainment industry, pop-culture or similar genres is not appropriate at any time during the celebration of Christian marriage, no matter how beautiful or catchy the lyrics, or how meaningful they may be to your relationship. You may enjoy them in your wedding reception. Only music that has been composed for the liturgy can be used during the celebration. Some pieces of festive classical music, such as Pachelbel's "Canon in D" or Mendelsohn's "Wedding March" are acceptable during the procession.

In addition, all music to be performed at your wedding ceremony will be performed by trained and capable musicians or soloists. We do not at any time allow pre-recorded accompaniments for solo or ensemble singing. We do not allow devices to play recordings. Only live music performance of appropriate sacred, Christian or classical wedding repertoire is allowed.

We have competent and professionally trained musicians on staff to assist the couple with the music. The St. Patrick Choir is also available for your celebration. Please note that musicians will charge a fee that will be collected by the Director of Liturgical Music. The fee for the wedding music is not included in the wedding donation and is paid separately.

Couples wishing to have music played at their celebration must contact the Director of Liturgical Music to make arrangements at least two months before the celebration. The Music Director may refuse to play or perform any music or material that is not liturgically appropriate. His decision is final.

You can contact Br. Mark Spencer FBP by calling the parish office, via e-mail [brharpchef1@gmail.com](mailto:brharpchef1@gmail.com) or his personal cell phone number 305-798-7235.

## **Photographer/Videographer**

It is entirely up to you to hire a photographer or videographer to take pictures of your marriage or produce a souvenir video.

For a fee of \$ 760 we are able to stream HD video of your ceremony through our webpage so that your friends and relatives may watch live anywhere in the world and also provide you with a recorded DVD that your videographer may use in the production of your souvenir video.

The photographer will have approximately 20 minutes following the celebration to take pictures of the bride and the groom. Please inform your photographer of this rule. Also, we ask you to remind the photographer that St. Patrick Catholic Church is a sacred space and, therefore, pictures taken ought to be dignified and appropriate to the space.

We ask you to notify the parish office in writing at least one month before the wedding day of your choice of photographer/videographer. We request that they contact the parish office before the day of the celebration.

Photographers/videographers must dress in a manner suitable to the environment and the occasion. They may not in any way disrupt the ceremony and they ought to be discreet while the celebration is taking place. They are not allowed in the sanctuary (the area around the altar) at any time during the celebration.

## **Flowers**

It is a beautiful gesture for the newlyweds to offer a bouquet to the Blessed Virgin Mary. This can be done, for example, after the prayer after communion, before the final blessing, typically while the Ave Maria is sung. There are two beautiful images of the Blessed Mother in the sanctuary, the Immaculate Conception facing west in the north side and Our Lady of Charity in the south section facing north, we invite you to consider that possibility.

Two flower arrangements are permitted on the altar. These flower arrangements are considered a donation to the Church and will remain in the Church after the wedding ceremony. Flower stands are not necessary or permitted as the Church can provide them free of charge.

The florist ought to be aware that there may be other celebrations taking place immediately before yours which ought not to be disrupted. The florist is advised to contact the parish office ahead of time to

receive an approximate time when they may begin setting up. Flower arrangements, bouquets, women's corsages and men's boutonnieres may not be dropped off in the parish office or church.

St. Patrick Church is not responsible for any unattended floral arrangements. Please note that the air conditioning system is generally turned on one hour before your wedding ceremony, flowers may wither and fade if they are dropped off too early.

Ribbons, flowers, fabrics, bridal veiling and the like are not permitted down the middle aisle – or either of the side aisles. They are not to be hung from the pews in any way either.

Flower girls may not strew or throw flower petals down the middle aisle or throw them anywhere on the floor, inside or outside, at any point in the ceremony. We encourage you to use the money that you would spend on petals to make a donation for flowers to a poor parish in the Archdiocese of Miami or elsewhere.

**If your marriage is taking place during Advent or Lent, please be aware that the church will be decorated in manner appropriate to the season and that those decorations cannot be changed or removed.** We ask that you respect the penitential nature of the seasons and be discreet with the flower arrangements. Florists ought to be reminded that in everything the ritual of the Church, Canon Law and these guidelines ought to be strictly followed, regardless of any instructions given by appointed wedding planners.

### **Other decorations**

Candles are not permitted as decoration of any kind. The use of one Unity Candle is permitted. The stand for the Unity Candle will be provided for you. St. Patrick is not responsible for candles left behind. The couple must designate one person to bring the unity candle to the ceremony and take it away afterwards. Unity candles left behind will be discarded.

The throwing of rice, confetti, bird seed, flowers, flower petals, mini candy hearts, blowing of bubbles, etc. is prohibited inside and outside the Church. Please advise your guests of these restrictions to avoid unpleasant situations before, during and after the celebration. You may want to encourage your friends to make a donation to the St. Vincent de Paul Society at St. Patrick or the Missionaries of Charity Shelter located at 724 NW 17 Street, Miami, instead of wasting food.

### **Prayer**

Throughout the process of immediate preparation for your marriage, the most important element is your prayer for the gifts of holiness, unity and indissolubility. These guidelines are meant to help you prepare for the external aspects of the celebration. However, the most important element is not the ceremony, much less the gown or the banquet, but your own spiritual life. Therefore, we strongly encourage you to meet regularly with the priest or deacon who is helping you to prepare for marriage, to find time for personal prayer and communal prayer with your future spouse and to develop the habit of going to Mass together every Sunday before the date of your wedding and beyond.

Remember, marriage is not a social event, it is not a social construct, it is a communion of love and life between a man and a woman that when it is celebrated between Christians has been raised by Jesus Christ to the dignity of a sacrament, that is, a vehicle of the life and love of God!

**Congratulations and welcome!**