

# CELEBRATING MARRIAGE



## **Saint John Paul II Parish**

279 Hamilton Street

Southbridge, MA 01550

(508) 765-3701

[www.popejp2.org](http://www.popejp2.org)

"Love then is not a utopia: it is given to mankind as a task to be carried out with the help of divine grace. It is entrusted to man and woman, in the Sacrament of Matrimony, as the basic principle of their "duty", and it becomes the foundation of their mutual responsibility: first as spouses, then as father and mother. In the celebration of the Sacrament, the spouses give and receive each other, declaring their willingness to welcome children and to educate them. On this hinges

human civilization, which cannot be defined as anything other than a "civilization of love".

*Pope John Paul II*



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Dear Newly Engaged Couple,

Congratulations on your upcoming wedding! This is a wonderful and exciting time for each of you, and your relationship as a couple, in preparing for your marriage. Here at Saint John Paul II Parish, we want to help you make your ceremony a personal and meaningful celebration of your faith and love. We want to help you to make Jesus Christ the center of your relationship, the ground of your marriage, and the joy of your days to come.

Please remember that a wedding is only a day, but your marriage will last a lifetime. The questions and answers that follow are to ease some of your concerns and help you to appreciate how we want to help you prepare for your special day. Please know that already we remember you in prayer, and hope that your love will continue to deepen with each day. After reading through the enclosed material, feel free to contact the parish office with any of your questions or concerns.

In Christ Jesus,

Fr. Peter Joyce  
Slavinskas  
Pastor

Fr. Nelson Rivera  
Associate Pastor

Fr. Jonathan  
Associate Pastor

## **Policy for Marriage Preparation**

Saint John Paul II Parish  
Southbridge, Massachusetts

### ***Who may marry in our parish church?***

In the decree of Bishop McManus that created Saint John Paul II Parish, registered members are to celebrate their wedding at Saint Mary Church. He allowed the pastor to make provisions for weddings to also be celebrated at Notre Dame Church or Saint Hedwig Church. He also made the exception for an additional fee to be paid for weddings that are celebrated in Notre Dame Church because of the added expense of utilities.

Roman Catholics who are not currently members of the parish need to secure permission from their pastor where they currently reside as well as the permission of the pastor of Saint John Paul II Parish if they wish to solemnize their marriage in one of our parish churches.

### ***How do we set the date?***

Couples are expected to contact one of the priests or the deacon preferably one year and no less than six months in advance of the date on which they hope to celebrate their wedding and before making any other commitments with reception halls, musicians, etc. *The date cannot be confirmed until the marriage preparation has begun and no impediments or obstacles to the proposed marriage exist.*

### ***What are the usual times for celebrations?***

For any of the churches, a wedding may take place on a Saturday from 10 AM through 2 PM or after 5:30 PM. A wedding could occur in Saint Hedwig or Saint Mary Church between 3 and 5 PM since the Saturday vigil Mass for Sunday takes place at 4 PM.

A wedding may also occur on a Sunday from 2 PM through 5:00 PM. There is a Mass on Sunday evening at 6 PM. An evening ceremony during the week is also possible upon consultation with one of the priests.

During Advent and Lent marriages are discouraged, due to the specific nature of these liturgical seasons. Rare exceptions would need the permission of the pastor. A Saturday evening wedding with a Mass on weekends of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter and special feasts of the Lord would require use of the assigned readings for the feast. Liturgical law prohibits the celebration of a wedding (with

or without a Mass) during the Sacred Triduum (the weekend of Easter Sunday) or the Feast of All Souls (November 2<sup>nd</sup>).

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***Will the Church refuse to marry us if my future spouse and I are already living together?***

Today some couples choose to live together prior to marriage for many different reasons. While the Church does not encourage or condone this living arrangement, cohabitation is not listed among the impediments for marriage. That is, it alone is not a reason for the Church to refuse to celebrate your marriage. However, it may highlight or be a symptom of other issues that could be a problem in your relationship in the future.

Thus, the choice of cohabitation raises other issues and needs in a couple's relationship that our parish and her ministers want to help you with. Please be honest with the priest, deacon, or couple in your preparation to gain the fullest benefit from the formation offered in preparation for your marriage.

***What if my fiancé is not Catholic; must she or he become a Catholic? And what, if any promises must be made if we should be blessed with children?***

No one who is not Catholic can ever be obliged to become Catholic in order for a marriage to be celebrated in the Church. While we would welcome new members into the Church, it would be because they believe in what we proclaim and live and find in the Church's teachings and sacramental life the grace and guidance to live a better life and grow closer to the Lord Jesus.

With regard to children, the Catholic party assumes a serious obligation to do all that is possible to raise the children in the Roman Catholic faith and assist their participation in the life of the Church and her sacraments. The non-Catholic party must be made aware of this obligation and not stand in the way of the Catholic party's responsibilities. Our hope is that faith and religion would not be a source of conflict, but of unity, and deepen life and love in the family.

***Is there a policy regarding photography and videotaping?***

A professional photographer may take pictures. It should be noted that the photographer is not permitted in the sanctuary at any time. It goes without saying that the photographer should respect the nature of the ceremony as prayer and worship and *should never* be obvious or distracting in any way.

Following the entrance procession, video cameras must remain in one place

throughout the service. No additional lighting may be used. Guests are not allowed to take pictures during the time of prayer. They may take photos during the entrance procession and recessional but should never leave their seats for a photo.

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The availability of the church and especially the sanctuary for a reception line and/or formal picture-taking should be discussed with the priest or deacon doing the preparation to determine the availability of the space beyond the time reserved for the ceremony. Please realize that a Saturday afternoon wedding at Notre Dame Church needs to allow time for your guests to depart and the worshippers for the Saturday vigil Mass to arrive and settle for Mass.

***What if we are already civilly married, but not in the Catholic Church?***

The Church refers to this as a convalidation. Upon proof of your present marriage that is civilly binding, and completion of the other requirements outlined here, the Church would welcome the opportunity to help you deepen your marital relationship and celebrate it sacramentally in the Church. Please consult one of the priests, or the deacon, about how to do this.

***What if one or both of us has/have been previously married and divorced?***

Depending on the circumstances of your previous marriage/s, different laws of the Church may apply that would make it necessary to verify your freedom from any previous bonds of marriage so you could freely marry in the Church. The complexities of individual circumstances recommend that these particulars be discussed confidentially and openly with one of the parish priests. *In these circumstances, a date for your wedding cannot be definite until your freedom to marry in the Catholic Church has been determined by the Diocesan Tribunal.*

***How are we prepared?***

There are various elements that are part of the preparation process. This process is not a testing period, but is designed to help the couple deepen their relationship and make improvements that will enhance and enrich their married life together. The following are some of the elements involved, though not necessarily in this order:

**1. Meetings with Priest and/or Deacon:**

Usually at this meeting, the couple completes the Nuptial Inventory with a priest or deacon. These forms are for biographical information of the couple as well as specifying their freedom from coercion in marrying, and their intent to marry.

In addition, the couple needs to complete the Premarital Inventory, which is a series of questions, answered individually and simultaneously, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship to improve upon. Please note that this is not a test that determines a couple's readiness or worthiness to celebrate the sacrament of marriage.

## 2. Marriage Preparation Instructional Program:

### a. Engaged Encounter

This is designed for couples who are over the age of 25 and/or have experience in living on their own. This is a weekend experience that begins on a Friday evening and concludes on Sunday afternoon. An up to date calendar for when this is offered, specifics on the site, registration forms and fee can be found at the website for the Diocese of Worcester at [www.worcesterdiocese.org](http://www.worcesterdiocese.org). Lodging and meals for the weekend are provided on site.

### b. Couple to Couple

This is arranged locally with a couple in the parish who meet in their home with those intending to marry. Together the couples review their Premarital Inventory and discuss areas and concerns that can help the couple improve their relationship and subsequent marriage. The cost of this preparation is included in the offering to the parish.

### c. Theology of the Body Workshop

This is a special preparation workshop based on the teachings of the late Pope John Paul II, our parish patron, to help couples appreciate the unique nature of marriage and the dimensions of love in their relationship. Details of the workshop, a schedule of dates, and other information can be located on the diocesan website at [www.worcesterdiocese.org](http://www.worcesterdiocese.org).

## 3. Liturgical Preparation & Wedding Rehearsal:

This will involve contacting the musician for the ceremony, making selections, and meeting with the priest or deacon to select readings, prayers, and determine the details of your ceremony. Usually the rehearsal is scheduled the night before the wedding. Please check with the officiant and the office in order to reserve the church, as sometimes there may be a conflict.

### ***Who are the ministers for the celebration?***

In the Roman Catholic tradition, the bride and groom minister the sacrament of marriage to one another; a priest or a deacon and two other witnesses (usually referred to as the Best Man and the Maid/Matron of Honor) are also required to be present.

If the couple wishes a priest or deacon from outside the parish to preside, that person must be in good standing with the Church and will be given the permission and the delegation of the pastor of Saint John Paul II Parish. A priest or deacon from outside the Diocese of Worcester will need to secure a letter of good standing from his own bishop or religious superior to be forwarded to the Diocese of Worcester in compliance with the specifications of the national charter. In addition, anyone officiating from beyond Massachusetts may need to receive appropriate civil authority from state authorities. He/She must also complete all of the necessary preparation required by the Diocese of Worcester.

One of the parish priests would be happy to assist the couple in facilitating the presence and participation of another priest.

***What music may be played at our wedding?***

The couple will need to meet with the Director of Music to select the appropriate music.

Family musicians are also welcome but they must meet the approval of the Director of Music and the Pastor.

Those musicians who require rehearsal time with the parish Director of Music will be expected to compensate rehearsal time with a stipend of \$25 per hour, payable directly to him or her, with a minimum of one hour.

***What is the offering for the church?***

For those who are registered members of Saint John Paul II Parish, an offering of five hundred dollars (\$500) is requested to cover the cost of the church, materials and music for the wedding.

For those who are not registered members, and are to be married at Blessed John Paul II Parish, the requested fee is six hundred dollars (\$600) for the expenses of the church and music.

Please realize that the expenses involved in using Notre Dame Church and as it was not specified as the site for weddings in the Diocesan Decree, an additional fee of two hundred (\$200) is required to use Notre Dame Church. This fee must be paid two weeks prior to the wedding. Failure to pay the fee in full by this deadline will require the ceremony to be moved to one of the other churches.

If there are any questions regarding the fee, please consult the priest.

***What is required for an ecumenical wedding; Is one possible in the Catholic Church?***

When the bride and groom are of different Christian denominations, the celebration of the Eucharist is not recommended since Eucharistic sharing is not possible. The minister of the non-Catholic is encouraged to be present and is welcome to participate in the ceremony.

If someone from our parish desires to be married outside of our parish church, and wants to have her or his marriage recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, it

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must take place in a suitable setting for Christian worship. In marriages involving a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic party, the wedding must take place in a church, a chapel, or an oratory. This eliminates the possible setting of Old Sturbridge Village, since this is a museum and not an active worship setting. For those who marry non-Christians (Jewish, Buddhist, etc.), other provisions may be made and need to be discussed with one of the parish priests.

***Is there a policy regarding flowers and a white runner?***

Appropriate areas for flowers will be pointed out to the couple. The use of a white runner for the main aisle is discouraged, since it can be hazardous due to the carpeting in the aisles. In particular, given the polished finish of the tile in Notre Dame Church, a runner is not allowed under any circumstances in that setting.

Throwing of flowers or rice in the aisles is forbidden. The priest or deacon should be consulted about using birdseed, bubbles, etc. outside following the ceremony.

***How do we go about getting a license?***

An informational brochure is available in the office that describes the particulars of this procedure. Since the civil government recognizes a Catholic ceremony, a license must be procured with a Town or City Clerk anywhere within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Please be aware that a waiting period of three days is required by state law from when you complete the application until you can pick up the license. In Southbridge, the Town Clerk's office is open Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday until 4PM, Thursdays until 8:00 PM to assist couples who work during the day and Friday until 12 Noon. Their office staff is cordial and helpful with the details.

Please remember that the officiant of your marriage must receive the license before any ceremony can take place by law. Please be sure to hand him the original of your license before the ceremony. Strict penalties for anyone officiating without a license require that the minister have the license in hand. Failure to provide the officiant with the original license beforehand will cause the wedding to be cancelled, even at the last minute, in compliance with Massachusetts state law.

***Is there anything else that we should know?***

A wedding is a special occasion for you and your guests. We want to share that joy and celebrate with you. Please be considerate of our parish staff that has other responsibilities or personal activities on the day of your wedding as well as your own guests so that you arrive in a timely fashion and begin as promptly as possible.

Please inform your photographers and any livery service that starting more than ten minutes after your scheduled time may require changes in the planned ceremony or the unavailability of our staff until the end of your ceremony.