

I will love you and honor
you all the days of my life.



A Guide for
Marriage Preparation

Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish
Bernardsville, New Jersey

To the Happy Couple

Dear Friends,

Congratulations on your engagement! Be assured of our prayers and best wishes that your love for one another may continue to grow with each passing day.

Your marriage, and your preparation for it, are among the most important things that you will do in your lifetime. In the coming months, you will do much work in laying the foundation of your future happiness. You will begin to define the character of the life and love that you will share with each other for the rest of your days.

The Sacrament of Marriage is meant to be something both sacred and wonderful providing the context in which you can radiate Christ's love to one another, to your family and friends, and to all you meet. Like all the sacraments, Marriage has both a public and a private dimension. In its private dimension, we look to the life, love, and joy which it inspires in the husband and wife. In its public dimension, we focus upon how the life, love, and joy of husband and wife radiate out to brighten the world around them.

These guidelines are meant to inform you of the policies and procedures in force here at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish. We hope that these policies and procedures help us to prepare for your wedding in an effective and holy manner.

Please be assured of our prayers at this special time of your lives.

God bless,

Father John N. Fell
Pastor

Some Preliminaries

1. In order to allow for sufficient time for preparation and reflection, it is necessary that couples make arrangements with the parish at least one year in advance of the anticipated wedding date. While we will try to accommodate requests for weddings with as little as six months advance notice, it is almost never possible to schedule a wedding with fewer than six months notice.
2. The Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help is normally available for weddings only for current and former parish members, graduates of our parish School of St. Elizabeth, and others with close ties to the Bernardsville area.
3. A wedding in a Catholic church is meant to be a statement of faith. It is anticipated that couples seeking to be married here are actively striving to live and grow in their faith.

Wedding Preparation Procedures

1. The Wedding Preparation Process begins when the prospective bride or groom phones our parish secretary (908-766-0079, ext. 3) during business hours (normally Monday through Friday, 8:30 am - 4:30 pm). The parish

secretary will ask some preliminary questions and may advise whether a particular date is open, but the scheduling of a wedding date is done only in a face to face meeting with a member of the parish clergy.

2. Once the parish secretary has taken the preliminary information, she will pass the matter to the pastor who will either contact the couple himself or else arrange for one of the other parish clergy to do so. The appropriate clergy person will then contact the couple to set up a first appointment.

3. During the first appointment, the clergy member will get acquainted with the couple, inquire as to their freedom to marry, begin the wedding paperwork, and explain the remainder of the process.¹ If the couple is free to marry, the clergy person may schedule a wedding date at that time. If the couple is not free to marry (usually this situation arises when one of the parties has been previously married and has not yet received a Decree of Nullity from a church tribunal²), the clergy member will offer suggestions as to how to proceed. The clergy person may not schedule a wedding date, even tentatively, if it appears that a Decree of Nullity may be needed and has not yet been obtained.

3. At the conclusion of the first meeting, the clergy person and couple should schedule a second meeting for the couple to come to the office for a F.O.C.C.U.S. test, a type of marriage inventory. The clergy person will explain the purpose and the instructions for the test.

4. During the first meeting, the clergy person will also explain the requirement of the New Jersey Bishops that all couples complete a Marriage Preparation Program, normally either (1) Engaged Encounter (a full weekend) or (2) two one-day sessions (both a *Marriage Prep* session and a *God=s Plan for Marriage* session). The clergy member will provide the couple with a booklet listing time and place options. We suggest that the couple schedule their participation in one of these programs in the time from 4 to 8 months prior to the wedding date. Couples are encouraged to reserve space early as these programs sometimes fill up.

5. Once the couple has completed both the F.O.C.C.U.S. test and the Marriage Preparation Program, they should contact the appropriate clergy member to schedule a third meeting. At this third meeting, the clergy member will review the results of the F.O.C.C.U.S. test, will discuss the couple=s experience of the Marriage Preparation Program, and will discuss both the church=s teaching and the couple=s views about marriage. The couple should bring the following paperwork to this meeting:

- a. The certificate they received from the Marriage Preparation Program,
- b. Their Baptismal Certificates³ (new originals issued within six months of the wedding date); this requirement is waived for those who were baptized here at the Parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help,
- c. Catholics are also required to submit a copy of their Confirmation Certificate.

¹At this meeting, or at any time thereafter, the clergy member may require additional or alternative measures such as a psychological assessment, premarital counseling, etc.. Such measures are never designed to be punitive or disparaging in nature, but are sincerely intended to insure that the couple has the best possible chance to succeed in forming a loving, lasting marriage.

²Catholic church law may require even a previously married non-Catholic to obtain such an annulment prior to marrying a member of the Catholic church. The clergy member can explain this.

³Additional paperwork may be needed if these certificates are not available; the clergy member will advise the couple if this situation arises.

6. The couple must also schedule a fourth meeting with the clergy person to plan out the details of the wedding ceremony. The clergy person will supply the couple with a booklet from which they can select prayers, scripture readings, etc.. At this meeting, the clergy member and couple will finalize the decision to have a wedding mass or nuptial ceremony.⁴

7. The preparation process concludes with the wedding rehearsal. To insure availability, the rehearsal date and time should be arranged with the clergy member as early in the process as possible. It is important that all those who will take an active role in the wedding ceremony be present at the rehearsal. Also, it is important that everyone be present so that the rehearsal can begin on time; the clergy person will normally book a one hour time slot for the rehearsal; if the tardiness of the participants makes the rehearsal extend beyond the allotted time, the clergy member may be forced to curtail the rehearsal.

The couple must bring their Marriage License⁵ to the rehearsal. The clergy person will then arrange for the completion of the license and its transmission back to the local Registrar.

Additional Considerations

Time and Date: The clergy member will set the date and time of the wedding and rehearsal, normally at the first meeting. Wedding scheduling must conform to the prior scheduled activities of the parish. Weddings slated for Saturdays cannot begin later than 3:00 pm; wedding participants and guests are expected to completely vacate the church no later than 90 minutes after the scheduled starting time of the wedding. Also, while a 5 or even 10 minute delay in beginning the wedding is certainly understandable, longer delays are inconsiderate for the guests and the clergy person; if a wedding is delayed because of the tardiness of the wedding couple or guests, the clergy person may have to curtail the ceremony to insure that the wedding does not infringe on other scheduled events.

The most common times for weddings are Friday evenings and Saturday mornings and early afternoons. With the consent of the pastor and clergy person officiating at the wedding, weddings may also be scheduled at other times. When permission is given for a Sunday wedding, it is understood that the rehearsal will be on the preceding Friday night.

Weddings are not scheduled on Palm Sunday weekend or during Holy Week. Weddings scheduled during Advent or Lent must take into account the especially sacred character of these seasons.

⁴When 2 Catholics are marrying each other, we normally suggest a Wedding Mass. When a Catholic and Non-Catholic are being married, we suggest a Nuptial Ceremony. Exceptions can be made; please speak with the clergy member officiating at your wedding. Church law does not allow for a Wedding Mass at the marriage of a Catholic and a non-Baptized person.

⁵Clergy are never permitted to witness a marriage without a Marriage License. If the bride lives in New Jersey, the Marriage License is usually obtained at the Municipal Hall in the municipality where she resides. If only the groom lives in New Jersey, the license would be obtained at the Municipal Hall where he resides. If neither bride or groom is a New Jersey resident, the license must be obtained at the Bernardsville Borough Hall. The couple must go in person to apply for the Marriage License; in addition to themselves, they must take a third person who can testify as to their identity. The license is usually issued 3 days after application is made and is valid for 30 days thereafter.

Music The Parish Music Minister is available to assist the couple in the planning of their wedding music. All music for the wedding must be appropriate for use within a Catholic worship service. The Parish Music Minister will organize the music and perform at each wedding in the parish; the couple is responsible for contacting him at least six months prior to the wedding to be sure that they are on his schedule. The Parish Music Minister can arrange for additional musicians at the request of the couple. The fee for the Parish Music Minister and any other musicians he arranges will be discussed with the couple when making arrangements. All fees are due to the clergy person at the time of the rehearsal.

When requested, a member of the OLPH clergy may grant permission for musicians other than the Parish Music Minister to be involved in the wedding. These musicians must contact the Parish Music Minister to receive the guidelines for weddings here at OLPH. Such outside musicians are expected to have a substantial knowledge of Catholic liturgy which will allow them to accompany the service with dignity and without distraction.

Flowers and Other Decorations All flowers and other decorations must respect church guidelines with regard to placement and design (for example, flowers or other decorations may never be placed on the altar table or in any other place where they would obstruct the celebrants view or movement), and must harmonize with any other flowers or decorations in place at the time of the wedding.

The clergy member involved in the wedding can advise the couple with regard to the usual placement of flowers and other wedding decorations. Except during Advent and Lent, the church gratefully receives the flowers left behind as a gift.

Aisle runners are a safety hazard and are thus never permitted in the church.

Pew candles are available for rental from the church. Please discuss this with the clergy member officiating at your wedding if you are interested in these.

Flowers and bows may be placed on pews in such a way as to insure that no damage is done to the pew. Tape, pins, tacks, and the like can damage the pews and are not permitted.

The clergy member and parish staff reserve the right to remove and discard without notice any flower arrangements or other adornments that violate these guidelines.

Photography Wedding couples are permitted to have their wedding recorded by either a still or video photographer or both. Photographers should check in with the clergy person officiating at the service prior to the time for the wedding. Photographers are expected to avoid causing any distraction during the service and are never permitted to enter the sanctuary area (raised area in the front of church).

Couples are permitted to return to the church for photographs following the ceremony. Such photography must be concluded no later than 90 minutes after the scheduled beginning time of the wedding.

Visiting Clergy. Couples with close ties to other Catholic clergy in good standing may invite them to participate in or officiate at weddings here at OLPH. Such involvement in OLPH weddings must be preceded by contact with the appropriate parish clergy person. Permission for such involvement is granted with the expectations that the visiting clergy will follow all OLPH policies and, if serving as the officiant, will be present to direct the rehearsal.

Couples with close ties to non-Catholic clergy may invite them to participate in the wedding with the permission of the officiant.

Flower Petals, Rice, Confetti, Birdseed. The throwing of flower petals, rice, confetti, birdseed, or anything that falls to the ground is not permitted either inside or outside the church.

Flower girls may carry baskets of flowers up the aisle during the wedding procession but are not permitted to toss the flowers on the floor.

Some couples have asked their guests to celebrate their emergence from the church building by ringing bells, blowing bubbles, or releasing balloons. This is permitted as long as they are not brought inside the church.

Decorum. The possession, use, or consumption of tobacco or alcoholic beverages on church property is strictly forbidden. Consumption of alcoholic beverages prior to the ceremony by the bride, groom, or witnesses may call into question the validity of the marriage. If the officiant has reason to believe that the bride, groom, or witnesses are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, he must postpone the wedding.

All those in attendance at the wedding are expected to conduct themselves as appropriate in a sacred place.

Church Fee. Church fees are separate from musicians= fees and the rental of the pew candles.

At the present time, the church fee is set at \$350.⁶ This money is not kept by the clergy person but is put into the church=s general fund where it is used to support various spiritual, educational, and social ministries. All fees are due and payable at the rehearsal.

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⁶Of course, if this fee would be a hardship to any couple, please just speak with the clergy member officiating at your wedding.