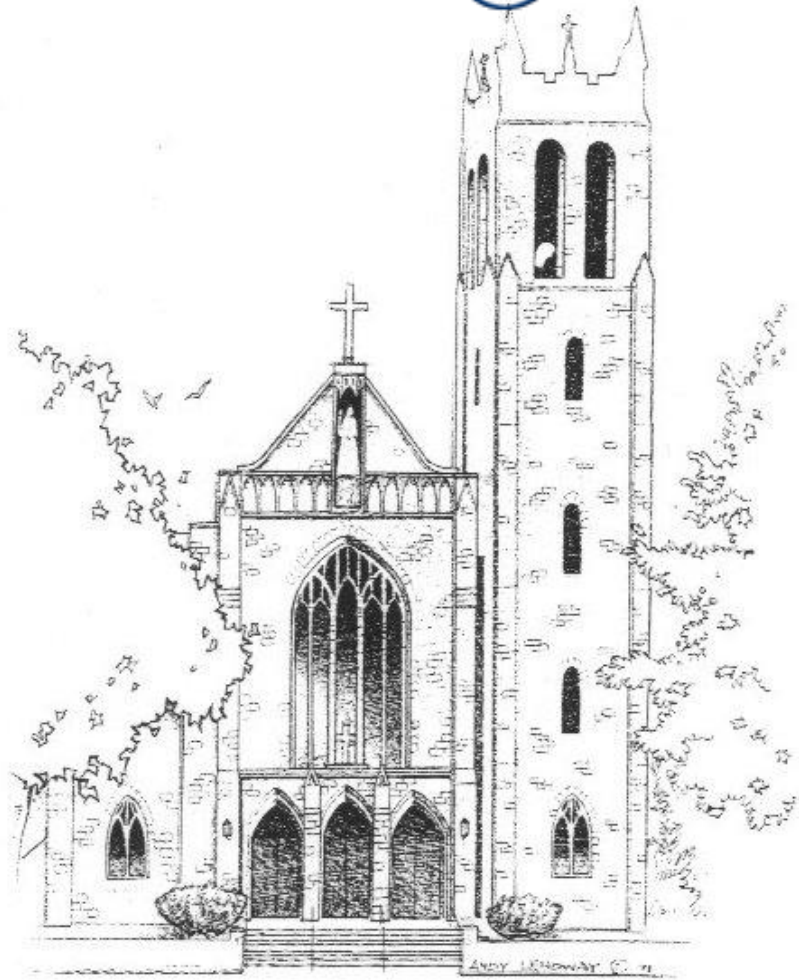


Your Wedding at



St. Thomas the Apostle

Marriage in the Catholic Church

Christian Marriage reflects the covenant between God and his People; a covenant of love based on relationship and fidelity. If the marriage is lived in this context, the couple becomes a sign of Christ's presence to one another, the community, and the world. The marriage covenant is further strengthened



and renewed whenever the couple gathers with the worshiping community to hear God's Word and to share in the ongoing sacramental life of the Church. The Church joyfully celebrates every intimate partnership of married life and love. For we see in every Christian marriage a genuine call to holiness.

Marriage among baptized Christians constitutes a special sacrament. Lived faithfully and well, marriage between Christians is a real incarnation in the world of the never ending love of God for humanity, the unconditional love of Christ for his bride, the Church. The gift of the sacrament is at the same time a vocation and commandment for the Christian spouses, that they may remain faithful to each other forever, beyond every trial and difficulty, in generous obedience to the holy will of the Lord: "What therefore God has joined together let no one separate."

This booklet contains the information you will need if you are planning for marriage and want to celebrate the Sacrament at St. Thomas the Apostle Church.

You have asked to celebrate your marriage at St. Thomas the Apostle. We welcome you most sincerely and offer our congratulations as you make a life-long commitment to each other.

In celebrating your wedding at St. Thomas the Apostle, you do so in faith, seeking God's blessings on your wedded life. Keep upmost in your minds you are exchanging vows in a religious ceremony asking Christ Himself to witness your commitment. While there are



many traditions and customs associated with weddings, we need to always be attentive to the religious nature of a church wedding and of God's presence at your wedding. Nothing should detract from the sacredness of this holy event.

First Steps

- A. To celebrate your marriage at St. Thomas the Apostle, it is normally expected that one of the parties, groom or bride, is a Catholic registered of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, or that your family are registered members. Persons who are not members of St. Thomas the Apostle and who, for good reason request marriage at St. Thomas, may be married here after review by the pastor of St. Thomas and with the permission of their proper pastor.

- B. The guidelines of the Diocese of Wilmington call for a year's preparation program for this serious and life-long commitment. In asking to have your wedding St. Thomas the Apostle, you are accepting the requirements of this preparation which include:
 - a. Effort to attend Sunday Mass weekly.
 - b. Preparation sessions with the priest or deacon who will officiate at your marriage.
 - c. Participation in the Diocesan Pre-Cana or Engaged Encounter Program.

- C. Special circumstances may require further preparation. (Examples: marriage of anyone under 18 or marriage of those who were baptized but never raised as Catholics.) Every effort will be made to adjust to special situations and keep the preparation period to one year.

- D. No wedding may be even tentatively scheduled if an annulment of a previous marriage is sought and/or in process. The final decree and completed counseling (if any) must be in hand before a date can be discussed.



- E. Exceptions to the above norms (there are no exceptions to letter D) can be made in cases of age, illness or unusual pastoral circumstances as long as the intent of the guidelines is maintained.

Officiants

Only a priest or deacon with faculties from the Diocese of Wilmington may officiate at your marriage. Normally this will be one of the parish priests.

Visiting priests or deacons in good standing are welcome to officiate with the explicit and written permission and delegation of the pastor of St. Thomas the Apostle. The visiting priest or deacon must agree to prepare the couple for marriage and see that all requirements are fulfilled. If, for a good reason (distance, health, etc.) the visiting officiant is unable to prepare the couple, special arrangements with the pastor should be discussed.

Planning the Ceremony

A. A Mass or Ceremony?

If two Catholics are marrying, celebration of the marriage may take place within the Mass. We encourage a Mass, but it is not necessary. The sacrament, conferred by the couple, is separate from the holy Mass.

If one of the spouses is a baptized Christian of another denomination, the ceremony outside of the Mass is encouraged. This is recommended since the Non-Catholic party may not partake of Holy Communion. If one of the couple is not baptized, the ceremony outside of Mass is the norm.

- B. Wedding consultants are welcome, but all planning must follow the norms of the Church and parish regarding the ceremony itself.
- C. Saturday weddings can be scheduled between 10am and 2pm. (normal times are 10am, 12pm or 2pm). Friday evening weddings can be scheduled as early as 5pm and as late as 7pm. All scheduling is subject to previously scheduled events and the norms of the liturgical calendar (e.g. celebrations are not held on Good Friday or Holy Saturday).

Interfaith Marriages

- A. Church norms require that a Catholic commit to live out his or her faith and do all in his or her power to share the faith with their children. This promise is given by signature. Please discuss with the priest what this means and the purpose of it – it is required but must be explained and discussed to be understood properly.

- B. Marriages of Catholics and non-Baptized people (Jewish, Muslim, etc.) can be celebrated with the blessing of the Church in a “neutral place”.

Witnesses

- A. Two official witnesses are required for valid celebration of Christian marriage. Normally, the best man and the maid/matron of honor serve as these witnesses. The State of Delaware requires witnesses be 18 years of age.

- B. The witnesses must sign the civil license. This should be done at the rehearsal.

Music

- A. Music is an extremely important aspect of weddings and as such, must be planned thoroughly and thoughtfully.



- B. St. Thomas the Apostle employs a professional musician as its Director of Music. St. Thomas the Apostle's Director of Music is responsible for maintaining the religious and musical standards of music programmed for any and all functions at St. Thomas the Apostle Church. Since your wedding will be a function at St. Thomas, our Director of Music must be consulted. Even if you have already planned the service, have a relative who is singing or plan to use outside musicians, our Director of Music must be consulted. All outside musicians and soloists must be approved by the Director of Music.

- C. It is best to contact our Director of Music, approximately three months before the date of your wedding. The Director of Music, Ms. Patrice Roman, may be contacted by calling (302) 798-8377, in the evenings or on weekends. At that time, a meeting will be arranged so our Director of Music may help you plan the music for your wedding.
- D. The fee for our Director of Music is \$200. This includes music planning and consultation, and organist fees for playing at your wedding.
- E. If desired, our Director of Music may also help you find any soloist(s) you might wish to employ. The fee for most soloists is \$150; however, certain instrumentalist and/or vocalists may require a greater amount.

Photography and Video Guidelines



To maintain the religious nature of the marriage ceremony, the following guidelines apply to all picture and video taking at St. Thomas the Apostle. These guidelines are to be given to the photographer and video personnel at the time you contract with them. Please avoid asking for exceptions.

- A. Choir Loft
 - a. Video cameras and operators are permitted in the choir loft. They must respect the needs and space of the organist and soloists.
 - b. Please do not move any furniture, books, etc. without permission from the organist. If permission to move something is obtained, it is expected it will be returned to its original position after the ceremony.
- B. A stationary camera may be placed at a designated location near the Blessed Mother's altar or the St. Joseph's altar

- C. Photographers must remain away from the center aisle at all times both before and during the ceremony. The only exception is during the entrance and exit processions.
- D. The use of flash photography is discouraged except during the entrance and exit processions. Care must be taken by the photographer(s) not to block the entrances to the pews which will be occupied by the wedding party.
- E. Picture taking after the ceremony is limited to 30 minutes, and must be completed by 3:45pm. If another wedding is scheduled to follow, these photographs must be completed 40 minutes before the start of the following wedding.
- F. The Sanctuary furniture and microphones must remain in place. The photographer will be responsible for any repairs needed if this rule is not observed.

Flowers

- A. The wedding couple is responsible for procuring flowers. They may visit the sanctuary with a Rectory staff person to determine what they would like. We do not allow more than four or five vases in the sanctuary (2 on either side of the tabernacle on the high altar; 2 alongside of the altar, and one on the floor in the middle of the altar. If desirable one vase of flowers may be placed on the altar shrine to Mary or Joseph.
- B. No trees, palms or bushes allowed (most couples have 2 vases on the sides of the main altar). The pews may be bedecked with reusable flower arrangements but must be removed by the party immediately after the wedding.



- C. On the day of the wedding, the church is normally open two hours before the scheduled time, so it is expected that proper arrangements will be made with the florist for delivery within that time.
- D. The florist and/or wedding party is expected to remove any boxes or containers used to cart flowers, programs, etc. from the premises.
- E. If your wedding is scheduled to take place during a special liturgical season, such as Christmas or Easter, please note that any wedding arrangements must be planned around the decorations which are already in place for the season.

Other Special Considerations

- A. Wedding or Unity Candle – The Wedding or Unity Candle is not part of the Church’s Rite of Marriage. Too often this non-ritual symbol overshadows the primary symbols of the wedding, the consent and the exchange of rings.

If you intend to use a unity candle, we suggest you incorporate it at the wedding reception or dinner.



- B. No runners are permitted down the center aisle. It has been our experience that they are a “tripping hazard”.
- C. No bird seed, rice, confetti, etc., however the recent trend of bubble blowing is acceptable as long as it remains outside of the church.
- D. If there are special needs, please consult with the parish.

Wedding Offerings

- A. The following is a list of offerings for St. Thomas the Apostle Church.
 - a. The wedding offering for the Church is \$300 for regular contributing members of the parish. The fee for all others is \$500.
 - b. There is a refundable clean-up fee of \$100. This fee will be returned after the ceremony unless there has been misuse of church facilities.
 - c. Organist and soloists fees, see Music heading.

The Rehearsal

We recommend strongly that only those involved with the wedding ceremony come to the rehearsal (bride, groom, bridesmaids, groomsmen, readers of Holy Scripture, ushers, parents)



- A. The rehearsal should be scheduled with the priest as soon as the wedding date is set. Since there may be more than one rehearsal that day, it is essential that everyone involved arrive at the church on time! With everyone's cooperation, the rehearsal should last no longer than one hour.
- B. Please bring your marriage license to the rehearsal.
- C. Readers of Holy Scripture and Prayers of the Faithful should bring the readings to the rehearsal.

Summation

As said in the beginning, all of these norms are meant to serve and emphasize the religious nature of your wedding and your marriage. The purpose behind them is to promote the dignity and respect of everyone involved in your preparations.

When making any arrangements for your wedding, please speak to the parish office directly. Unless there is an emergency, do not ask family members to speak for you.

Please plan to be an active member of St. Thomas the Apostle or the parish community where you plan to live. It will make your marriage more successful and will help the entire human family!

Check out www.catholicweddinghelp.com for some wonderful resources in planning your wedding.

Living Faithfully

The Sacred Scripture passage that many couples choose for their wedding ceremony is a marvelous blueprint for loving.

Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

(1 Corinthians 13 :4-8)

These words of St. Paul are worth daily meditation not only for their insight into the true shape of love, but for strengthening our wills to follow this way of love. The love that he describes flourishes in faithful, stable relationships. This applies, first and foremost, to a marriage.

It is true also for the entire family. When a woman and a man vow to be true in good times and in bad they are confirming a decision to love one another, but, as married couples have taught us, this decision to love is one we have to make over and over again, when it feels good and when it does not. It is a decision to look for, act on and pray for the good of the people we say we love. It is a pledge of fidelity.

Our world today needs living witnesses to fidelity. These are the most convincing signs of the love that Christ has for every human being. Couples who are living faithful lives of mutual love and support - though not without difficulties - have the gratitude of the whole Church.

*-From A Pastoral Message; The U.S. Catholic Bishops to Families
November 17,1992.*

The Newly-Wed's Prayer for Each Other

God our Father, in your own good care and wisdom we have come to know each other.

We have come to discover something of the mystery of each other. We have come to love each other.

Pour out your blessings on (name of spouse), whom I want to love for the rest of my life: blessings for safety, for strength, for joy.



Help us as we form a family together to find a new way to love the families where we have been loved and nourished till now. In these hectic weeks and afterwards, help us laugh when small plans don't work out, and make us willing to support each other in real problems. Let us stay always secure in one another, secure in you and secure in prayer.

Grace our relationship with the gift of your Holy Spirit, so that, day by day, our affection may grow into self-sacrifice, our passion into deep human care and our warm feelings into lasting commitment. Bring to fulfillment the wonder of your ways which you have begun to reveal in us.

We pray this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.