

# *St. Michael's Catholic Church*

Dear Friends,

Congratulations on your plans to promise each other your lives as husband and wife. Be assured of our prayers as you prepare for marriage. Your wedding day, the first day of your married life, is truly exciting and memorable. It should be a day of meaning, great joy, and gratitude to God. Those in our parish working with you to plan your wedding will do all they can to help. The Wedding Guidelines offered here are meant to respond to the questions most frequently asked about weddings. The priest or deacon presiding at your wedding and others on the parish staff, through their pastoral concern for you and your loved ones, will help you with these Wedding Guidelines. I pray that the Lord, so graciously present at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11), will clearly be present with you at your wedding and throughout your married lives together.

Sincerely in Christ,

Rev. Amal Punganoor

Pastor, St. Michael's Parish

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Cherokee Village, AR  
Church Office: 870-257-2850

# Wedding Policy for St. Michael's Church

## Cherokee Village, AR

### Diocesan Wedding Policy:

1. Couples must meet with the pastor at least 6 months prior to the wedding.
2. The couple will complete a pre-nuptial questionnaire with the pastor giving background information that he will need.
3. The couple will arrange with the Church Office to take the pre-marriage inventory, called FOCCUS. It takes about 30 minutes to complete. This will give the pastor knowledge as to what things need to be covered in your meetings with him.
4. The couple must obtain a current copy of their baptismal certificates from the parishes where they were baptized. These must be issued within 6 months prior to your wedding date. Please tell the parish you are calling that it is needed for your wedding preparation and to please "include the 'notations' on the back" (they will know what that means).
5. If either party has been married before and the former spouse is deceased, we need a copy of the death certificate.
6. If either party has been married before and the marriage has been declared invalid through the annulment process, we need a copy of the Decree of Nullity.
7. If either party will be under the age of 21 at the time of the wedding, the pastor who is preparing the couple for marriage, will be required to have a consultation with the parents as to their readiness. If either party is under the age of 18 at the time of the marriage, the pastor has the consultation with parents and a form will then be submitted to the diocese for the bishop's approval.
8. You must attend a one day pre-marital seminar, called Pre-Cana, usually on a Saturday. Log onto the diocesan website: <http://www.dolr.org/family-life/marriage-education#pre-cana-day>. In the list of "Upcoming Events" along the left margin, choose a date and place, prior to your wedding day, that is convenient for you to attend and click on it. It will bring you to a registration page. At this time online payment is not an option, so please complete the registration and then mail your \$60 registration fee to: Family Life Office, 2500 N. Tyler St., Little Rock, AR 72207. Make checks payable to the Diocese of Little Rock. Registration is not complete until both the fee and this form have been received. If you need to register after the deadline date, please call the Family Life Office at (501) 664-0340. If you do not have computer access, come to the Church Office and we can register for you. If the registration fee will be a hardship, please let the Church Office know, as we do offer financial assistance.
9. Every couple must take a course in Natural Family Planning. We do not have an NFP teaching couple in our parish, so please go to the Couple to Couple League's website: [ccli.org](http://ccli.org); click the "Search/Register for Classes" button at the top, and make your selections. If you have any difficulty signing up for class, or do not have internet access, call the Church Office and we will be glad to assist you. The cost of the course is currently \$140. There is also a diocesan approved Home Study Course from NFP International. Log onto [www.nfpandmore.org](http://www.nfpandmore.org) for more information. The Home Study Course is currently \$70. If the cost of either course is a hardship, the diocese offers financial assistance. Contact the Church Office for a Financial Assistance Request Form. Once you have completed an NFP course, please bring your Completion Certificate to the Church Office.
10. Every couple must obtain a civil marriage license from the local court house prior to their wedding. Please bring it to the parish office one week in advance of your wedding date so it can be prepared with the needed additional information and be ready for the signature of the priest/minister who will be performing your ceremony.

# **Wedding Guidelines**

## ***Catholic Weddings - A Celebration of Love***

Marriage is a lasting commitment that you make to each other freely. The gift of your whole self to the other calls for fidelity, a life-long commitment, and enables you to have and to nurture children in an atmosphere of love. This is what the Church means when it calls marriage a covenant. If marriage were a contract, you would be giving only a part of yourself to each other. In a covenant you give everything. That is why marriage is both a demonstration of God's love for us and our love for God. A married couple becomes a sign of total love. In other words, a married couple is a "sacrament" or a sign to others of God's presence. How well you live this call to be a sacrament is a loving challenge to both of you.

A wedding ceremony expresses the sacred nature of marriage. Everything about the ceremony ought to communicate the spiritual nature of marriage. Clarity about the meaning of marriage guides your decisions. Focusing on the essential aspect of the ceremony, the exchange of consent (marriage vows), helps to tell yourselves and others why you are there. Also, the active participation of those attending your wedding is important, since every sacramental action is an act of the entire Church, the people of God. As you use this guide to plan your ceremony, remember that what you want to communicate to your guests is what God is doing in your life together. Make your celebration a statement about God's loving action in your hearts and lives.

Remember these important values in preparing for the wedding celebration:

- \*Simplicity, not showy display, should be expressed in preparing the wedding celebration.
- \*Present yourselves honestly, joyfully, and humbly.
- \*Avoid the commercialism which society and some wedding counselors may advise.

## ***The Liturgy of Marriage***

The wedding liturgy expresses:

- \*An act of community worship, in which the faith community promises to support the couple, and the couple promises to assist the community. To say that a wedding is for the couple and for others is not only to acknowledge the presence of others in the church, but it implies preparing the wedding in such a way as to encourage their active participation in it.
- \*The couple's public exchange of consent, in which they make promises to each other and to the community.

When two Catholics celebrate marriage, they normally do so during Mass. When a Catholic and baptized person who is not Catholic marry, the marriage should normally be celebrated outside of Mass. In a marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person the marriage is celebrated outside of Mass.

## ***The People in Your Wedding***

The two of you are the center of the wedding, but many other people are a part of it:

### ***The Assembly***

Your family, friends and the faith community. Invite them to participate fully in the liturgy and be witnesses to your marriage.

### ***The Couple***

You minister the Sacrament of Marriage to each other. It is recommended therefore, that you take no additional ministries (e.g. reading the Scriptures) during the ceremony. These roles are best served by other members of the assembly.

### ***Presider (Bishop, Priest, or Deacon)***

Normally, one of the priests on the parish staff presides at your wedding. A visiting priest needs to receive the pastor's delegation and dispensation.

A minister of another Christian faith may act as a witness or offer a blessing after the exchange of consent. If your wedding is celebrated outside of Mass, a minister from another Christian faith may also proclaim either the first or second reading from Scripture.

### ***Witnesses***

While every member of the assembly is a witness to the marriage, Church law says that the official witness is the bishop, priest, or deacon. The law also requires that there are two other official witnesses. Although custom dictates that one of these witnesses is male and the other female, the law says that witnesses may be of the same gender. Witnesses attest to the fact that the marriage took place. They must be capable of comprehending what is happening in the exchange of consent. In a Catholic marriage, it would be ideal if the witnesses were Catholic, but they do not have to be Catholic. In fact, they do not have to be baptized.

### ***Ushers***

These are men and women of the parish who are experienced in hospitality; or they may be the groomsmen, bridesmaids, parents, friends of the couple. They greet people cordially as they arrive in the church, give them a printed program of the service - if there is one - and assist them in finding a seat near other worshippers. Because we gather to celebrate a marriage, it is not necessary to designate a bride's or groom's side of the church.

### ***Lectors***

The lector(s) proclaim(s) the first and second readings from Scripture. The Gospel is always proclaimed by an ordained minister. A lector should be someone with the necessary speaking gifts to proclaim God's word effectively and reverently. If the wedding is celebrated with Eucharist, the reader is usually Catholic. Lectors always read from the Lectionary.

### ***Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion***

Those who serve as Eucharistic Ministers need to be commissioned Ministers from the parish or the assembly. They follow the parish's procedures for the distribution of the Eucharist. Depending on the size of the wedding and whether or not the Precious Blood is distributed to all, you will need 1-3 Eucharistic Ministers.

### ***Altar Servers***

These are members of the parish, familiar with the parish, who assist the presider.

### ***Musicians***

Those who plan and play the music for your wedding should be familiar with the celebration of sacraments in the Catholic Church. They should follow principles in Church documents. Musicians also need to be familiar with the local policies of individual parishes regarding music during weddings.

If vocalists are part of a wedding, their primary role is to assist the assembly in singing. A solo can be sung at an appropriate time.

Musicians from outside the parish need to contact the parish music director for assistance. To assist you and your musicians in choosing appropriate music for your wedding, further remarks on music at weddings can be found later in this guide.

## ***Order of Service***

The couple will be given a “*Together for Life*” booklet from which to choose the optional prayers and readings. Here is an overview of a wedding:

### ***Gathering prior to the Liturgy***

Ushers assist in seating people.

Prelude music should be uplifting and set the tone for the celebration.

### ***Entrance procession***

There are several options, this is only one of many:

Crossbearer followed by the priest, groomsmen and bridesmaids in couples followed by the couple of the best man and maid of honor. The groom accompanied by his parent(s) comes next. Last in the procession is the bride accompanied by her parent(s).

***Greeting***, as given in the Rite of Marriage

***Penitential Rite***, as given in the Rite of Marriage

***Opening Prayer***, (also called the *Collect*) as chosen from the *Together for Life* booklet

***Liturgy of the Word***, readings chosen from the *Together for Life* booklet

You will need to **choose 1 or 2 lectors**.

***Homily***, usually by the presider

**Marriage Rite**, as chosen from the *Together for Life* booklet

Since the bride and groom give consent to each other, during the exchange of consent (vows), they face one another with hands joined.

Speak loudly and clearly when exchanging consent and prayers. You may choose to memorize the words of consent, rather than repeating the words of the presider.

**Your vows must be one of the formulas from the booklet.**

Place the rings on one another's fingers graciously and visibly, and proclaim the prayer for the exchange of rings.

Avoid interrupting the integrity of the Rite by music or other prayers and actions.

**General Intercessions**, keep simple and brief.

There should be no more than four to six intentions. You may **choose 1 person** to read the intercessions.

**Liturgy of the Eucharist**

When both the bride and groom are Catholic, the Liturgy of the Eucharist is celebrated. *If either the bride or groom is not Catholic, and the Eucharist is not celebrated, continue immediately with the Nuptial and Final Blessings.* Please discuss this with the priest who will be presiding over the ceremony.

*Preparation of the Gifts* - The bread and wine are brought to the altar. You would need to **choose 2 persons** to do this.

*Eucharistic Prayers*

*The "Our Father"* - everybody participates in the prayer.

**Nuptial Blessing** - as chosen from the *Together for Life* booklet

*Sign of Peace*

*Communion* - Communion under the form of bread and wine is preferred. Catholics welcome to the wedding celebration those Christians who are not fully united with us. It is a consequence of the sad division in Christianity that they cannot extend to them a general invitation to receive Communion. Catholics believe that the Eucharist is an action of the celebrating community signifying a unity in faith, life, and worship of the community. Reception of the Eucharist by Christians not fully united with Catholics would imply a unity which does not yet exist, and for which we must all pray. You will need to **choose 1-3 Eucharistic Ministers** (the Church Office can assist you).

*Prayer after Communion* - as chosen from the *Together for Life* booklet

**Final Blessing**, as chosen from the *Together for Life* booklet

**Dismissal**

**Recessional**

The couple leads, followed by the groomsmen and bridesmaids. The priest and servers might follow at the end of the procession or remain in the sanctuary.

Festive music should be used.

## ***Decorations and Environment***

\*Decorations should speak of the honest and full message of a husband's and wife's love for each other. A wedding is a religious ceremony and avoids the atmosphere of a pageant.

\*Decorations should also be respectful of the Liturgical Year.

\*Flowers and decorations need to be real and have integrity.

\*Flowers should not be placed directly on the altar. Flowers can be left at the parish as Sunday decoration, please contact the Church Office for more information.

\*Decorations in the raised worship area must be approved by the pastor.

\*Assign a family member or friend to remove any decorations after the wedding is over.

## ***Photography***

\*During the ceremony, photography should be respectful of the prayer environment. Flashbulbs and unnecessary movement can be disruptive and, therefore, should be avoided.

\*If a video camera is used, it should be placed in an inconspicuous location.

\*Pictures are sometimes taken before the wedding celebration so that you may spend time with your guests at the reception.

\*Please ask your photographer to speak with the presider prior to the start of the wedding for his personal instructions.

## ***Programs***

Printed programs for the wedding serve to enhance the assembly's participation in the ceremony. Programs include simple instructions (stand, sit, etc.) and the order of the ceremony. Printing the full text of the readings and the Rite are not necessary and should not be done. (Please note - programs are not provided by the parish, you would need to print these on your own if you chose to use them.)

## ***Music in the Marriage Liturgy***

"Among the many signs and symbols used by the Church to celebrate its faith, music is of preeminent importance." (Music in Catholic Worship, #23) The Church tells us that every communal celebration of faith should include music and singing. Music at a wedding is integral to the celebration.

Music for a Christian wedding should be appropriate. Wedding music should be prayerful and liturgical. Music should always enhance the sacrament, helping the assembly to participate in prayer. To determine the music you may want to use at your wedding, consider each piece of music from three perspectives: the musical viewpoint, the liturgical viewpoint, and the pastoral viewpoint. Request help of our parish Music Director or pastor in making these judgments. The music proposed for your wedding, as well as non-parish musicians, needs to be approved before final decisions are made. Please contact our Music Director or pastor early in the planning stages.

Sometimes music suggested by couples includes favorite selections from musicals or popular love songs. These pieces might best be used at the reception, but are not appropriate at the wedding ceremony itself.

## ***Stipends and Fees***

**Priest** - *suggest* \$150 (If a priest or deacon other than the presider does your pre-marital counseling, it would be appropriate to give them something to show your appreciation of their time.)

**Church Wedding Coordinator** - *suggest* \$100

**Organist or Guitarist** - *suggest* \$75

**Cantor/Soloist** - *suggest* \$50

**Altar Servers (2)** - *suggest* \$25 each

**Custodial Fee** - \$50

**Church Usage Fee** - No charge for parishioners; \$200 for non-parish members

**Church Hall Fees** (if used for your wedding reception) - The rental fee is \$100 for up to 4 hours, or \$200 if more than 4 hours is needed. There is also a \$50 deposit that will be refunded if the Hall is found clean. There is no charge to decorate the evening before; however, if the kitchen is needed for food preparation the day before, an additional fee of \$50 will be charged. Please contact the Church Office for a Hall Rental Form and other parish policies regarding Church Hall usage.

## **Wedding Coordinator Duties**

It is the responsibility of the Wedding Coordinator to be familiar with the parish wedding policy and to be sure the couple to be married is familiar with it also. She will assist at the rehearsal as well as the wedding ceremony. Responsibilities of the Wedding Coordinator are to see that the small details of a wedding and rehearsal are handled, and that the ceremony proceeds on time. Seeing that most weddings take place on a Saturday, the Wedding Coordinator, with the assistance of the janitor, will make sure that the vestibule, bathrooms, and church are ready for the Vigil Mass after the wedding is over. Some specifics are:

1. Arrive at least 30 minutes prior to and be present at the rehearsal.
2. Arrive at an appropriate time before the wedding to assist the wedding party and the minister. She will stay after the wedding to make sure the church is in proper order.
3. Will coordinate times with florist, musicians, and photographers. Coordinator will ensure that the facilities are ready for the ceremony.
4. Will make sure the church is unlocked the day of the ceremony to accommodate wedding party, florists and others.
5. Will coordinate with wedding party to make sure that all personal items are removed and church area is clean.