



Wedding Guidelines
Saint James Catholic Church

Established 1892
905 Park Avenue ♦ Falls Church, VA 22046
703-532-8815 or www.stjamescatholic.org

*“Then the Lord said, It is not good that the man should be alone;
I will make a helper fit for him.” (Genesis 2:18)*

First, congratulations! You have crossed the Rubicon and are about to embark on the most wonderful of life’s experiences. Remember that Christ holds marriage in the highest esteem as he chose the Wedding at Cana to perform his first miracle, thus beginning the public stage of His ministry.

All love comes from God; and as such, the Sacrament of Marriage is, first and foremost, a sign and symbol of this love. The love which a couple has for each other mirrors the love God has for men and women.

*“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things. Love endures.”
(1 Corinthians: 13:7)*

Below are some items to consider when planning your wedding.

Is St. James the proper parish for your wedding?

As a reminder, Church law specifies that the proper place for a baptized Catholic to marry is the parish in which they live. If your residence is within our parish boundaries, you may marry here. Only one person of the engaged couple must meet this requirement.

Those not residing in the parish and not registered will ordinarily be required to marry in the parish in which they reside. However, an exception may be possible if the parent(s) of one person of the engaged couple meets the residence requirement for St. James. Please contact the rectory to verify.

Scheduling your wedding

Before any scheduling can take place, the engaged couple must contact and meet with a priest or deacon. Please contact the rectory to set up an appointment and know **that all engaged couples must contact the rectory at least six months before the wedding** (with some exceptions for unusual circumstances such as military transfers). This is to allow time for our marriage preparation program and procurement of all necessary State and Church documents.

Each bridal party has a scheduled time for both the rehearsal and wedding ceremony. Times for each are listed below. Because of our Confession schedule on Saturdays, the wedding party and all guests must be out of the church by 3:15 p.m.

Weddings during Advent or Lent. Because there are seasons of the Church Year set aside for penitence and spiritual renewal, *wedding celebrations are discouraged during these times*. However, a wedding is allowed if it is in keeping with the character of the season. If you choose to have your wedding during Advent or Lent, please speak with the priest or deacon concerning any liturgical considerations which should be observed during those seasons.

Wedding times

Day for Weddings:	Usually Saturday; another day may be selected, if approved by the priest or deacon.
Time for Weddings:	Saturday wedding times are as follows: 10:00 a.m. (access to the church from 9:30 to 11:15) 12:00 p.m. (access to the church from 11:30 to 1:15) 2:00 p.m. (access to the church from 1:30 to 3:15)
Time for Rehearsals:	Friday evenings at 4:30 p.m., 5:45 p.m., or 7:00 p.m., or at a time mutually convenient to the celebrant and the engaged couple.

Preparing for your wedding:

"They say that it is not worth making a life-long commitment ... 'forever', because we do not know what tomorrow will bring. ... I pray for you. Have the courage 'to swim against the tide'. And also have the courage to be happy."

Pope Francis on Marriage

Contact your parish at least **SIX MONTHS** prior to your proposed date of marriage and set up an initial meeting with a priest or deacon. Coordination with the priest or deacon, the rectory office, and the wedding planners, must be done by the bride or groom.

This is necessary even if you plan to wed outside of the diocese. This meeting should take place before any social arrangements for the wedding are finalized. Please fill out the Wedding Agreement Form and return it to the rectory office with the required deposit as soon after your initial meeting as possible.

Marriage preparation programs: Couples are required to register for one of the following conferences. We suggest that you register as soon as you get engaged to ensure that you will be able to access the conference of your choice. Be sure to speak with your priest or deacon before registering.

- [Conferences for the Engaged](#)
- [Engaged Encounter](#)
- [Three to Get Married](#)

Your priest or deacon may require you to attend Natural Family Planning classes. If he does not, we encourage you to learn more about this organic way to plan a family that also respects the integrity of your marriage.

To learn more and to register for the courses, visit the Diocese of Arlington's Office for Family Life's website at <http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/familylife/marriage.aspx> Each couple will be asked to take the FOCCUS premarital inventory. This is a tool designed to help engaged couples learn more about themselves and their relationship. It will also pave the way for you to discuss many of the topics that are central to ensuring that your marriage lasts a lifetime.

After completing each of these programs, you will receive certificates of completion that should be turned in to the preparing priest or deacon. *Again, please note that these programs must be completed well in advance of your wedding day, especially if your wedding is to take place in a parish other than St. James.*

Documents that you will need

Newly issued copy of Baptismal Certificate: This certificate must be dated no more than six months before the time it is turned in. It is required for the Catholic party only and it needs to be newly issued, not one that was issued shortly after your baptism. You can obtain this by calling the church where you were baptized and asking them for a newly issued baptismal certificate.

Affidavit of Freedom: This form asks the parents or another relative of each of you to be a witness to the fact that you are free to marry. The priest or deacon preparing you will provide you with this form.

Civil Marriage License: This is obtained from the County Clerk or City Clerk. There is a three-day waiting period before the license may be used, and it expires in thirty days after issuance. **A wedding ceremony cannot be conducted until you present a valid marriage license.**

Music

Music holds an important place in your wedding liturgy. Our Director of Music, Don Carolina, will assist you in planning the music for your wedding. Please email him at dcarolina@stjamescatholic.org or call, 703-532-8815, to schedule an appointment.

There are parish musicians available to serve as cantors, soloists, or instrumentalists. Please consult with our Music Director about this. **All music must be approved by the Music Director.**

Photography

Professional Photographers are encouraged to contact the Wedding Planner prior to the ceremony to review the policies of the church.

Suitable places for photography

- ☉ Inconspicuously outside the sanctuary between the priests' sacristy and the ambo
- ☉ Choir loft

Places where photography is **NOT** permitted:

- ☉ Anywhere in the center aisle beyond the last row of seated guests
- ☉ Anywhere in front of the sanctuary
- ☉ Anywhere directly in front of the congregation
- ☉ In front of the center aisle near the groomsmen or bridesmaids
- ☉ Near the cantor (if there is one), to the left of the sanctuary

Other Considerations

- ☉ ***No flash photography during the ceremony.*** Flash photography is permitted only during the processional and recessional. Note that the ceremony formally begins with the Sign of the Cross and ends with the Final Blessing, "May Almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit."
- ☉ Videographers are asked to stand in one place during the ceremony either in the center aisle at the last row of seated guests or between the statue of the Sacred Heart and the ambo, outside of the sanctuary railing.
- ☉ Photographers in the choir loft are to be mindful of the organist and other musicians.

Flowers and Decorations

Brides are encouraged to share the cost of flowers when there are two or more weddings on the same day. Elizabeth Hatch, the Chair of our Wedding Coordinators, will notify brides who are being married on the same day so that arrangements can be made for the sharing of flowers. Altar floral arrangements are customarily left in the church as a votive offering.

NOTE: For the safety of all, no runners are permitted nor are flower petals to be dropped by flower girls in the church. To maintain the dignity of the ceremony, signs carried by the wedding party are not allowed. Animals, confetti, birdseed, bubbles, balloons, and rice are not permitted on church property.



Wedding coordination services

St. James has a committee that provides services as a gift to every bride and groom. On your wedding day, two coordinators will be present one hour before the wedding and throughout the entire wedding. If the celebrant of the wedding ceremony is a visiting priest, coordinators are available to attend rehearsals. You must notify the coordinator well in advance if you intend to have your own altar servers.

Our Wedding Coordinators are prepared to assist with everything concerning your wedding ceremony at the church, except for questions concerning the liturgy. Please contact Elizabeth Hatch, Chair of our Wedding Coordinators, at weddings@stjamescatholic.org, to review with you the items and services that the Coordinators will provide. Outside Professional Wedding Coordinators are not necessary at the church.

Before the wedding, the coordinators will:

- 🍷 Put pew bows, bride's accessory basket, ring pillow, and greens in place.
- 🍷 Pin the boutonnieres on the men in the bridal party (The groom and the best man will have that done in the priest's sacristy and the ushers will be pinned in the vestibule of the main entrance to the church).
- 🍷 Pin on corsages for the women in the bridal party.
- 🍷 Hand out programs to the arriving guests, if the bride has supplied them.
- 🍷 Assist the ushers in maintaining an atmosphere of quiet reverence conducive to prayer.

When the wedding begins, the coordinators will:

- 🍷 Give the bridal flowers to the bride and her attendants.
- 🍷 Fluff the veil and gown and arrange the train.
- 🍷 Direct the bridal party when to process down the aisle.
- 🍷 Seat late arriving guests by the side aisles.

The coordinators will also provide the following items and services:

- 🍷 28 white pew bows (placed on the pews, every other row).
- 🍷 A bride's accessory basket (items such as hair spray, static guard, etc.).
- 🍷 Fresh greens will be placed on the altar steps.
- 🍷 Ring pillows for ring bearers (several are available).

Coordinators' experience recommends that:

- 🍷 Your invitations include accurate directions.
- 🍷 Guests turn off all cell phones before entering the church.
- 🍷 Discard any bottled beverages before entering the church.
- 🍷 Your guests are informed either by programs or those distributing the programs that no photographs are permitted during the ceremony by anyone other than your professional photographer.

Your Checklist

- We have received newly issued copies of our baptismal certificates (Catholic parties only) from the churches where we were baptized
- We have completed our FOCCUS
- We have completed our engaged Encounter Weekend
- We have completed our Introduction to Natural Family Planning
- We have contacted the Music Director to arrange our music for the wedding

If you are being married in a church other than St. James, especially a church in another diocese, it is particularly important that you schedule your meeting with preparing clergy several weeks before your wedding date so appropriate dispensations and permissions can be forwarded to the church.

- We have completed our prenuptial investigations with the priest
- We have completed our Affidavits of Freedom
- We have selected our Scripture readings for our Mass or ceremony
- We have obtained our Marriage License
- We have paid all Church and Music fees