

St. Cecilia Catholic Church

P.O. Box 1002
Stanwood, WA 98292
360-629-3737

Dear Bride & Groom:

On behalf of St. Cecilia Catholic Church, we extend our congratulations to you on your upcoming wedding and marriage. It is our hope that your marriage will bring you blessings throughout your lives. The staff at St. Cecilia is happy to assist you in these preparations at this important time in your life together.

This guide is presented to you in order to guide you through the process of marriage preparation required by the Catholic Church. Wedding arrangements are certainly necessary and important but we hope that you will not lose sight of the fact that Marriage is a Sacrament – a sacred sign of your love for each other in Christ. Christ abundantly blesses your love. He enriches and strengthens you to undertake the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity.

Please accept our prayers and sincere best wishes for a happy wedding and a joyous married life.

Rev. James Zakowicz, O.C.D.
Pastor

We acknowledge receipt of this marriage requirement packet and have read all attachments. We understand that the six month waiting period does not start until the return of the necessary paperwork and stipend.

Bride

Date

Groom

Date

Requirements

The Archdiocese of Seattle requires all couples preparing for a Catholic marriage to participate in a marriage preparation program. At St. Cecilia, your preparation consists of meetings with the Pastor, completion of an online compatibility inventory, attending a series of marriage preparation classes and, possibly, a weekend Engaged Encounter Retreat.

As part of marriage preparation, the following documents will need to be provided by each couple:

Forms 29.1 and 29.2 – one of each for bride and groom – attached.

Certificate of Baptism

A recently issued Certificate of Baptism (with notations) is required for all Catholics. If possible, please bring any Baptismal information you have to your first marriage preparation session with the Pastor. At a minimum, this includes the name of the parish and city where you were baptized. Non-Catholic Christians who are baptized are asked to obtain a letter or certificate from the church where they were baptized. Please arrange to have these mailed directly to St. Cecilia (P.O. Box 1002 Stanwood, WA 98292).

Certificate of Confirmation

Readiness for marriage presumes that the Catholic party has received the Sacrament of Confirmation. If one or both parties are not confirmed, preparation for Confirmation is to begin as part of the marriage preparation process in order that Confirmation may be conferred prior to marriage whenever possible.

Declaration of Freedom to Marry

Any previous marriage of either party may require the completion of appropriate forms or a Declaration of Nullity (church annulment). Please advise the priest or deacon immediately of any previous marriages by either party, regardless of where or when they were celebrated.

It is forbidden to set a wedding date before any annulment proceeding is completed.

Marriage License

Requirements:

*Both parties must be 18 years of age or older.

*A witness is not required.

*No blood test, identification, birth certificates or divorce papers are required.

Washington State law requires a 3-day waiting period before the marriage license becomes valid. This means that you must wait at least three full days after the application is filed before the marriage ceremony can be performed. The license is valid for only 60 days. The marriage ceremony must be performed before the 60 day expiration of the license. Licenses are valid for the entire state. You may apply at the most convenient county facility. Please plan to turn in your marriage license to the Parish Secretary two weeks prior to your ceremony.

For general questions regarding marriage licensing call:

425-388-3627 – Snohomish County

360-336-9311 – Skagit County

Compatibility Inventory – FOCCUS

A wedding is a day – a marriage is a lifetime.

The purpose of FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication Understanding and Study) is to facilitate open and honest communication between a couple preparing for marriage. It underscores the seriousness of the lifelong commitment you are about to make. As part of your marriage preparation, we require that each of you complete a self-diagnostic instrument designed to help couples learn more about themselves and their unique relationship. This inventory, called FOCCUS, can be completed online individually in 45-60 minutes. The fee is nominal and can be paid online. Your FOCCUS questionnaire is scanned by a computer. The confidential results are forwarded to the Pastor and will be seen ONLY by him. Please visit www.foccusinc.com and select “Couple” at the menu at the bottom left-hand corner of the screen.

Evenings for the Engaged

The couple may choose to attend a series of three-hour classes at Church of the Assumption in Bellingham. See enclosed schedule. Once the course is complete, a letter will be sent to the Pastor of St. Cecilia. The topics covered are: Commitment; Goods of the Spouses/Procreation; Communication/Conflict Resolution; Finances; Permanence; Sacrament/Marriage Rite.

Engaged Encounter Retreat

The Engaged Encounter Weekend, extending from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon, is held at a local retreat house. Because it is a full weekend program, it affords a focused opportunity for sharing, reflection, and gaining a view of married life that extends beyond the wedding day. Couples are advised to make reservations soon after you have had your first meeting with the Pastor. Reserve your weekend early as they fill up quickly! Please visit www.ceeseattle.org for dates and to register. This requirement may be waived at the Pastor's discretion.

Counseling

If, in the judgment of the Pastor, issues surface that could impede a healthy marriage, he will give the couple information on reputable counselors available to help one or both of them address the issues prior to his giving permission for the Sacrament of Matrimony to be celebrated at St. Cecilia Parish.

Couples Who Live Out of Town

A couple who currently lives out of town should arrange to complete their marriage preparation at their home parish. The couple still needs to meet once with the Pastor of St. Cecilia, preferably as soon as possible after setting the marriage date. The couple should have the parish handling their marriage preparation send a letter to St. Cecilia that confirms their preparation is complete. This letter is due at least two weeks prior to the wedding date.

Wedding/Rehearsal Times

Weddings are normally held on Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons for practical reasons. The church will be unlocked at least two hours prior to your ceremony to allow time to dress, take photos and seat your guests. **All weddings will begin on time.** The rehearsal is usually the night before the wedding

ceremony and will be facilitated by the parish wedding coordinators, who will begin promptly at the scheduled time, whether or not all are present.

Visiting Priest or Deacon

With the explicit permission (“delegation”) of the Pastor of St. Cecilia, a visiting priest or deacon may officiate at your wedding. Please discuss this with the Pastor when you meet with him. It is your responsibility to contact the priest or deacon to ask him to officiate. If the priest or deacon is from outside the Archdiocese of Seattle, he must submit a Guest Priest Testimonial that testifies to his good standing.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

It is strongly recommended that Catholics preparing for marriage celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation some proximate time prior to the wedding so that they may fruitfully receive the Sacrament of Marriage. The Pastor can help answer questions in this regard.

Church Decorations

Our church worship area is decorated appropriate to the liturgical season. Liturgical decorations may not be changed for sacramental celebrations, including weddings. These items include, but are not limited to furniture, wall hangings, altar cloths, etc.

Wedding decorations should not impede the approach to or the encircling of the altar, or any of the ritual movement and action.

Nothing is to be taped or otherwise attached to the pews or floor in a manner that will damage them.

All paraphernalia must be removed immediately following the wedding, but you may leave the flowers if you wish. Please designate two or more responsible friends or relatives to be your “setup” and “clean up” crew. They need to check in with the wedding coordinator for specific directions at your wedding rehearsal. No flower petals, fresh or dried, may be scattered. Silk petals may be used, if

arrangements are made for ALL PETALS to be picked up immediately following the ceremony by your own cleanup crew.

It is encouraged that all floral arrangements are prepared by the florist before being brought to the church. If this is not possible, specific arrangements must be made in advance with the Parish Secretary. Any last-minute floral work must be done in the main kitchen. If this room is used, please make sure it is put back in good order.

The worship space and surrounding areas must be left in the condition in which found. Any supplies brought in by a florist must be removed immediately following the ceremony. Any boxes used to carry flowers are to be removed from the church before the ceremony begins.

Candelabra may be used anywhere in the church sanctuary or along the main aisle. Candelabra used on the main aisle must have the flame enclosed by glass protection. St. Cecilia does not have candelabra for loan; they must be supplied by the couple and be free standing.

Dressing Rooms

The downstairs library will be reserved for the women. It is recommended that the men in the wedding party arrive at the church already in their wedding attire. The Wedding Coordinator will show you the appropriate areas at your rehearsal.

Photography

We understand the importance of preserving the memory of your wedding day through photographs and video. However, use of cameras and roving video recorders easily detracts from the sacredness of the liturgy. The photographer is expected to be discreet and judicious in photo taking, so as not to distract from the liturgy.

Alcohol

It is inappropriate for members of the wedding party to consume alcohol (or any other mind-altering substance) before the rehearsal or before the wedding. It is especially important that the bride and groom refrain from drinking before their wedding as it could affect the validity of the marriage itself and could possibly

mean the cancellation of the wedding. Please reserve this for the reception if you intend the serving of alcohol to be a part of your hospitality.

Liturgy

Eucharistic Liturgy – Nuptial Mass

We strongly encourage that all weddings where both the bride and groom are practicing Catholics take place within the Nuptial Mass. The couple will plan this liturgy with the priest who is delegated to witness the wedding.

Non-Eucharistic Liturgy – Ceremony

A marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic is to take place during a wedding ceremony outside Mass. However, if suitable, and with the permission of the Bishop, the rite for celebrating marriage within a Mass may be used. According to the general Church law, Communion is not given to the non-Catholic (Rite of Marriage Introduction #8). A marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person may only take place in a non-Eucharistic liturgy ceremony.

Please refer to the following documents included in this packet: Liturgical Planning Forms and Readings and Prayers of the Faithful for the Wedding Ceremony.

Music

Because the Marriage Rite is a liturgical celebration, it calls for liturgical music. Secular music, such as “Here Comes the Bride” is inappropriate for the wedding liturgy even if it speaks of love or marriage. Classical instrumentals may be appropriate. Questions in this regard may be directed to the Parish Music Director.

Children in the Wedding

A Ring-Bearer and Flower Girl are not required. When they are involved as part of the wedding party, they should not be less than 5 years old, as children of this age tend to panic when they see a church full of people. Please carefully consider whether their presence will add or detract from the joyful solemnity of the liturgy.

Attire of the Wedding Party

When choosing your wedding gown and your attendants' dresses, please keep in mind that the Sanctuary is a holy and sacred place. We hope you will observe some sense of modesty (i.e., no low-cut or backless bodices or very short hems).

Wedding Stipends

All stipends are due at the time the wedding date is set.

- Registered Parishioners: \$150
- Out-of-Parish Fee: \$200

The parishioner rate for weddings is set in order to honor the commitment of participating, contributing members of this community.

Additional Fees

The fee for organist/pianist is usually \$100-150, depending on whether a ceremony or Mass is celebrated, the music selections, and the involvement of other musicians. The fee for each cantor is usually \$50-100, depending on whether a ceremony or Mass is celebrated, the number of sung pieces, etc. Please contact the Parish Music Director at 360-629-3737 for approval of all music selections.

Receptions at St. Cecilia

The Parish Hall is available for wedding receptions at an additional cost. For the average wedding reception of up to 150 people the Parish Hall is satisfactory. For costs and information please call the parish office at 360-629-3737.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: Life After the Wedding

As you begin your life together, it is very important that you become members of a parish. If you intend to live within the boundaries of St. Cecilia, you should now register as a family. Please complete the new parishioner registration form included in this packet. If you move into another parish, it is very important that you register in that parish as soon as possible.

Your wedding ceremony is a time to express your faith and the depth of your love for each other before God and the community. It is not a time to be superficial or showy; you want to be most sincere and honest in what you say and do. You want to plan well so you will mean everything you say and say everything that has meaning for you.

The careful selection of the prayers and readings should articulate your sincere and sound Faith. We will be happy to work with you to make materials available for these selections. Since the religious ceremony is a faith event, this will demand some sharing on both your parts and a willingness to work with those who will help you in the planning of this most important event. What you believe, what you hope and pray for is what you will celebrate on your wedding day.

Additional Resources:

www.seattlearchdiocese.org/CFF/FamilyLife/Marriage (marriage information)

<http://www.seattlearchdiocese.org/CFF/FamilyLife/nfp> (Natural Family Planning)

www.foryourmarriage.org (marriage information & Mass readings)

www.foccusinc.com (FOCCUS pre-marriage inventory)

www.ceeseattle.org/ (Engaged Encounter Weekend schedule & registration)

Addenda:

1. Notice on Cohabitation
2. Initial Marriage Preparation Questionnaire (2)
3. Catholic Marriage FAQs
4. Richstatter, Thomas, “Sacrament of Marriage – Sign of Faithful Love,” Catholic Update, Franciscan Media (C0596).
5. Urbine, William, “Preparing for Marriage – 10 Tools for the Journey,” Catholic Update, Franciscan Media (C0606).
6. Champlain, Joseph, “Cohabitation Before Marriage,” Catholic Update, Franciscan Media, (C0603).
7. Healy, Jim, “Living Together – Why Wait for Marriage (or Marry at All)?” Every Day Catholic, St. Anthony Messenger Press, July 2010.
8. Sartain, Archbishop J. Peter, “Everything I Have is Yours: Understanding God’s Plan for Marriage and the Gift of Life.” ©2011
9. 29.1 (Party) forms (one each for both bride and groom) to be returned with other required paperwork.
10. 29.2 (Witness) forms (one each for both bride and groom) to be returned with other required paperwork.
11. Parish Registration Form
12. Liturgical Planning Forms
13. Readings and Prayers of the Faithful for the Wedding Ceremony

Notice on Cohabitation

The Catholic Church teaches that marriage is a natural institution elevated by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament. The vocation of Christian spouses in society and in the Church is strengthened by the practice of marital chastity.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says sexual intercourse between unmarried persons “is gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of the children” (¶2353).

Couples who live together before marriage can undermine the future success of their marriage. They are strongly encouraged to separate and abstain from sexual relations during the remaining period of their engagement. In addition, the Catholic parties should be encouraged to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation so that they are in the state of grace to receive and confer the Sacrament of Marriage.

“Young people need to encounter the Church’s teaching in its integrity, challenging and countercultural as that teaching may be; more importantly, they need to see it embodied by faithful married couples who bear convincing witness to its truth... In a society which increasingly tends to misunderstand and even ridicule this essential dimension of Christian teaching, young people need to be reassured that “if we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, absolutely nothing, of what makes life free, beautiful and great” (Pope Benedict XVI).

CATHOLIC MARRIAGE FAQs

(www.foryourmarriage.org)

Why does the church teach that marriage is a sacrament?

The sacraments make Christ present in our midst. Like the other sacraments, marriage is not just for the good of individuals, or the couple, but for the community as a whole. The Catholic Church teaches that marriage between two baptized persons is a sacrament. The Old Testament prophets saw the marriage of a man and woman as a symbol of the covenant relationship between God and his people. The permanent and exclusive union between husband and wife mirrors the mutual commitment between God and his people. The Letter to the Ephesians says that this union is a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Church.

Do Catholics ever validly enter into non-sacramental marriages?

Yes. Marriages between Catholics and non-Christians, while they may still be valid in the eyes of the Church, are non-sacramental. With permission, a priest or deacon may witness such marriages.

What is the difference between a valid and an invalid Catholic marriage?

Just as individual states have certain requirements for civil marriage (e.g., a marriage license, blood tests), the Catholic Church also has requirements before Catholics can be considered validly married in the eyes of the Church. A valid Catholic marriage results from four elements: (1) the spouses are free to marry; (2) they freely exchange their consent; (3) in consenting to marry, they have the intention to marry for life, to be faithful to one another and be open to children; and (4) their consent is given in the presence of two witnesses and before a properly authorized Church minister. Exceptions to the last requirement must be approved by church authority.

If a Catholic wants to marry a non-Catholic, how can they assure that the marriage is recognized by the Church?

In addition to meeting the criteria for a valid Catholic marriage (see question #3), the Catholic must seek permission from the local bishop to marry a non-Catholic. If the person is a non-Catholic Christian, this permission is called a “permission to enter into a mixed marriage.” If the person is a non-Christian, the permission is called a “dispensation from disparity of cult.” Those helping to prepare the couple for marriage can assist with the permission process.

Why does a Catholic wedding have to take place in a church?

For Catholics, marriage is not just a social or family event, but a church event. For this reason, the Church prefers that marriages between Catholics, or between Catholics and other Christians, be celebrated in the parish church of one of the spouses. Only the local bishop can permit a marriage to be celebrated in another suitable place.

If a Catholic wishes to marry in a place outside the Catholic Church, how can he or she be sure that the marriage is recognized by the Catholic Church as valid?

The local bishop can permit a wedding in another church, or in another suitable place, for a sufficient reason. For example, a Catholic seeks to marry a Baptist whose father is the Pastor of the local Baptist church. The father wants to officiate at the wedding. In these circumstances, the bishop could permit the couple to marry in the Baptist church. The permission in these instances is called a “dispensation from canonical form.”

If two Catholics or a Catholic and non-Catholic are married invalidly in the eyes of the church, what should they do about it?

They should approach their Pastor to try to resolve the situation.

When a Catholic marries a non-Catholic, must the non-Catholic promise to raise the children in the Catholic faith?

The non-Catholic spouse does not have to promise to have the children raised Catholic. The Catholic spouse must promise to do all that he or she can to have the children baptized and raised in the Catholic faith.

Is it required that a wedding celebration have expensive flowers, clothes and other accompaniments?

The Rite of Marriage makes no reference to any of these cultural elements. The focus of the couple should be on the celebration of the sacrament. Pastors repeatedly point out that a couple do not have to postpone the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage because they cannot afford such things. See [Budgeting for Your Wedding](#).

How much does it cost to get married in the Catholic Church?

Dioceses often regulate the stipend, or offering to the church, that is customary on the occasion of a wedding. Depending on different areas, this might also include the fee for the organist and vocalist. In a situation of true financial difficulty, couples can come to an agreement with their Pastors so that true financial hardship will never prevent a Catholic marriage from taking place. For more information, see [How Much Does it Cost to Marry in the Catholic Church?](#)

What is a Nuptial Mass and when can a couple have one?

A Nuptial Mass is a Mass which includes the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage. It has special readings and prayers suitable to the Sacrament of Marriage. The Sacrament of Marriage between two baptized Catholics should normally be celebrated within Mass.

If the situation warrants it and the local bishop gives permission, a Nuptial Mass may be celebrated for a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized person who is not a Catholic, except that Communion is not given to the non-Catholic since the general law of the church does not allow it. In such instances, it is better to use the appropriate ritual for marriage outside Mass. This is always the case in a marriage between a baptized Catholic and a non-baptized person.

Are weddings permitted on Sundays or during Lent?

Church law allows weddings to be held during most days of the year, except the Triduum. However, many parishes do not schedule weddings on Sundays because of the conflict with regularly scheduled Masses and other parish activities. In addition, some dioceses and parishes do not allow weddings during Lent, a season of penance.

What should a couple do when they decide that they want to marry in the Catholic Church?

They should contact their parish as soon as possible and make an appointment to talk with the priest, deacon or staff person who is responsible for preparing couples for marriage. This person will explain the process of marriage preparation and the various programs that are offered.

Why does the church require engaged couples to participate in a marriage preparation program?

Marriage preparation offers couples the opportunity to develop a better understanding of Christian marriage; to evaluate and deepen their readiness to live married life; and to gain insights into themselves as individuals and as a couple. It is especially effective in helping couples to deal with the challenges of the early years of marriage.

What kinds of marriage preparation programs does the church offer?

Depending on the diocese and the parish, several may be available. Programs include a weekend program with other couples, such as Catholic Engaged Encounter, a series of sessions in large or small groups or meetings with an experienced married couple. Some programs may be offered in Spanish and other languages. Specific programs address particular circumstances, such as remarriage, children brought into the marriage and marriage to a non-Catholic. As part of their preparation, many couples complete a premarital inventory, such as FOCCUS, to identify issues for further discussion.

What key issues are covered in marriage preparation?

Marriage preparation programs help couples to understand the Christian and the human aspects of marriage. Typical topics include: the meaning of marriage as a sacrament; faith, prayer and the church; roles in marriage; communication and conflict resolution; children, parenthood and Natural Family Planning; finances; and family of origin.

Is there a cost for marriage preparation programs?

Most programs charge a modest fee to cover the cost of materials. Programs that require an overnight stay will include an additional cost for rooms and meals. Assistance is frequently available for couples who would otherwise be unable to participate.

Does the church offer any programs to help couples to improve their marriage?

Yes. Peer ministry for married couples is widespread. Many couples meet in parish-based small groups; ministries such as Teams of Our Lady, Couples for Christ, and Christian Family Movement also use the small group approach. The Marriage Enrichment Weekend Program is offered in several states. Some parishes sponsor a retreat day or evening of reflection for married couples. Others offer a mentoring system that matches older couples with younger ones. Throughout the country, many couples participate in Marriage Encounter, which offers a weekend experience and ongoing community support.

What can a couple do if their marriage is in trouble?

Parish priests, deacons and other Pastoral ministers are available to talk to couples and to refer them to counselors and programs that can assist them. Retrouvaille (Ree-tru-VEYE) is an effective program that helps to heal and renew marriages in serious trouble. The Third Option is another program that is available in some parts of the country.

What is an annulment?

An annulment is a declaration by a tribunal (Catholic church court) that a marriage thought to be valid according to Church law actually fell short of at least one of the essential elements required for a binding union (see question #3). Unlike civil divorce, an annulment does not erase something that was already there, but rather it is a declaration that a valid marriage was never actually brought about on the wedding day. A declaration of nullity does not deny that a relationship ever existed between the couple, or that the spouses truly loved one another.

How can a couple married 20 years get an annulment?

The annulment process examines the events leading up to, and at the time of, the wedding ceremony, in an effort to determine whether what was required for a valid marriage was ever

brought about. While a marriage of 20 years provides evidence that a couple had some capacity for a life-long commitment, the duration of their relationship in itself does not prove or negate the existence of the marriage bond.

If a marriage is annulled are the children from it considered illegitimate?

No. A declaration of nullity has no effect on the legitimacy of children, since the child's mother and father were presumed to be married at the time that the child was born.

Are annulments expensive?

Fees associated with the annulment process vary within the U.S. Most tribunals charge between \$200 and \$1,000 for a standard nullity case. Fees are typically payable over time, and may be reduced or even eliminated in cases of financial difficulty. Other expenses may be incurred when consultation with medical, psychological, or other experts is needed.

How long does it take to get an annulment?

It usually takes 12 to 18 months to complete the entire process.