

WEDDINGS AT ST. MICHAEL CATHOLIC CHURCH

Gastonia, NC

Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is marriage?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that “The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament” [1601].

Marriage, therefore, is: 1) a lifelong union, 2) between a man and woman, 3) for the benefit of the spouses, as well as the procreation and education of children. In the Catholic Church, Holy Matrimony is one of the seven sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ to sanctify the spouses, the family, the Church, and the world. Holy Matrimony has both a civil (legal) component, as well as a spiritual and sacramental component.

2. Who can be married at St. Michael Catholic Church?

All weddings conducted at St. Michael Catholic Church must be those which are in conformity with the teachings of the Catholic Church. For a couple to be married at St. Michael, one of two conditions must be met:

1. The bride or the groom is a registered, active, and regularly contributing member of St. Michael and has been so for at least 6 months prior to the commencement of their 6-month marriage preparation period. To be an active member means attending Mass every Sunday and supporting the parish financially.

OR

2. The bride or groom is a registered, active, and regularly contributing member of another parish, but one of their parents or grandparents is a registered, active, and regularly contributing member of St. Michael. The pastor of the bride or groom’s home parish must certify that the couple would be eligible for marriage in his parish.

All decisions concerning eligibility for marriage at St. Michael Catholic Church are made by the pastor and no date for a wedding can be reserved until he has done so.

3. When can weddings take place at St. Michael Catholic Church?

Weddings are celebrated on open Saturdays at 10 am or Noon. Evening weddings are not normally permitted at St. Michael Catholic Church.

If the Parish Center or Gym is used for the reception on Saturday afternoon, the reception must end by 4 pm. Please note that in the event that the Parish Center or Gym is used for a wedding-related event, the wedding party must purchase Special Events Liability Insurance coverage from the diocese, which can be obtained in the parish office.

4. Should the wedding be celebrated inside or outside of Mass?

Under normal circumstances, all weddings at St. Michael Catholic Church between a *Catholic* and a *non-Catholic* are celebrated outside of Mass.

Weddings between *two Catholics* can be celebrated within the Mass, but only if both parties and most of their immediate families are genuinely and actively practicing the faith by attending Mass every Sunday. The final decision about this matter is made by the pastor in collaboration with the couple.

5. How is the church reserved and a wedding date decided?

To schedule your wedding at St. Michael Catholic Church, please contact the parish secretary to make an appointment with the pastor at 704-867-6212, ext. 101. This must be done at least 6 months before the intended date.

6. What must be done before the wedding?

A wedding is a simple ceremony lasting only a few moments; a marriage is a lifetime commitment of sacrificial love in a solemn and sacramental covenant. Wedding preparation and marriage preparation are different things, and preparing for the marriage is by far the more important. When you meet with the pastor or deacon, he will explain the requirements for marriage preparation that must be completed before the celebration of the wedding.

7. How much does a wedding cost at St. Michael Catholic Church?

Sacramental grace is free. The Church does not charge for sacraments. It is also assumed that the bride, groom, or both are active, practicing members of our parish family already supporting the Church. However, it is reasonable to plan to make the following donations:

1. To the Church: The amount of the donation to St. Michael Catholic Church is left to the discretion of the couple. Please consider the costs associated with A/C or Heat, water, etc. The amount should be comparable to the fee required by a reception hall.
2. To the Clergy: The amount of the donation to the priest or deacon is left to the discretion of the couple.
3. To the musicians: Please plan to give a donation to the organist (\$150) and the cantor (\$150). If additional musicians are required, the music director will work out payment for any other musicians or singers
4. For use of the Parish Center or Gym: If the Parish Center or Gym is used for the reception, Special Events Liability coverage must be purchased from the diocese at a cost of \$100 per event. The application for insurance is available from the parish office and must be filed at least 3 weeks prior to the event.

8. The Bridal Gown and the Dresses of Bridesmaids

Please remember that your wedding is a sacred celebration taking place in a consecrated place of divine worship. Bearing in mind the reverence and decorum required by the sacred liturgy, we ask that your wardrobe selections reflect the modesty and noble simplicity which the Church expects. The shoulders of all women in the bridal party must be covered by sleeves or a veil of opaque cloth, and this includes the bride, the bridesmaids, the mothers of both the bride and groom, and flower girls. Since your wedding is a public act of worship, no exceptions to this policy are possible.

9. Church Flowers

Flowers for the sacred liturgy are paid for by the couple. Please contact the wedding coordinator at St. Michael Catholic Church to make arrangements for flowers. The flowers are provided by Fine & Fancy Flowers (1204 S.

York St., 704-867-6369). The flower arrangements are to remain in the sanctuary after the wedding for the parish Masses.

10. Personal Flowers, Corsages, and Boutonnieres

The wedding party is responsible for making all arrangements for personal flowers, corsages, and boutonnieres to be worn or carried by anyone in the wedding. These can be brought to the church by the wedding party or delivered to the church by your florist before the wedding.

No flowers or greenery are permitted in the windows or aisles of the church and no flowers or flower petals may be dropped inside or outside of the church before, during, or after the wedding or rehearsal. No decorations are permitted outside the church.

You may ask your florist to provide up to six floral pew markers, provided that they are of a small, simple design, and tied to the pew. The use of tape, nails, and tacks is not permitted. The wedding party is responsible for removing any pew markers immediately after the wedding.

Aisle runners, rice, birdseed, bubbles, balloons, glitter, and sparklers are not permitted either inside or outside the church at any time.

11. Who plans the wedding liturgy?

Weddings are public liturgical actions of the Church. The celebration of weddings is governed by liturgical law. The basic form of the wedding liturgy is given by the Church and no variation from that form is permitted. Within that basic form, the selection of the Scripture readings and prayers is made by the priest or deacon who will preside at the wedding, after consultation with the bride and groom. A list of possible readings is found in the appendices of this document.

To assure conformity with the Church's wedding liturgy, a final draft of the wedding program, if one is to be used, must be submitted to the church office for review and approval not less than 2 weeks prior to the wedding date.

12. Candles and Liturgical Furnishings

The furnishings for the sacred liturgy are provided by the church; this includes all vestments, books, candles and candlesticks, kneelers, chairs, and other elements as needed. We do not use family heirlooms in the celebration of the sacred liturgy.

In the sacred liturgy of the Church, candles are always a symbol of the Lord Jesus, the "Light of the world." However, the "Unity Candle" (a recent innovation of American Protestant worship services) represents the bride and groom rather than Christ. The "Unity Candle" (also "unity sand" and other similar symbolic rituals) is not a part of the wedding liturgy of the Catholic Church and it may not be used at St. Michael Catholic Church.

13. Who plans the music?

To plan the music for your wedding, you must consult the pastor and music director. Because the celebration of a wedding is a public liturgical action of the Church, only music that is truly sacred is permitted at weddings. All decisions about the music allowed at St. Michael Catholic Church are made under the supervision of the pastor,

including permission to invite visiting vocalists and instrumentalists. Please speak with the music director before arranging for any other musicians, whether hired professionals, or volunteers from among family or friends.

Fees for visiting musicians are the responsibility of the bride and groom; St. Michael Catholic Church does not act in any way as an intermediary for payment of these fees. The wedding coordinator should not be asked to give payment to musicians or vocalists during the rehearsal or the wedding.

No music or accompaniment by recording or automation is permitted before, during, or after the wedding or rehearsal.

14. Visiting Clergy

The pastor or other clergy of St. Michael Catholic Church ordinarily preside at all weddings here; exceptions to this norm may be made only because a member of the family or a very close friend is a priest or deacon from elsewhere. If you desire to invite a Catholic priest or deacon from outside the parish to preside at your wedding, you must first submit a written request to the pastor of St. Michael Catholic Church, giving the name, title, address, and phone number of the cleric you want to invite, along with the requisite "Letter of Suitability" from his diocese or religious order. Only the pastor of St. Michael Catholic Church can grant permission (canonical delegation) for a visiting cleric to preside at a wedding in this parish.

If you desire to invite a non-Catholic clergyman to participate in the wedding liturgy, you must first submit a written request to the pastor of St. Michael Catholic Church, giving the name, title, and address of the clergyman you want to invite. Non-Catholic clergy are permitted to participate in a Catholic wedding by their presence in the sanctuary, but they cannot preside at the liturgy. This means, among other things, that the Catholic priest or deacon must receive the wedding vows and impart the nuptial blessing.

15. Programs

Before you print your wedding program, the final draft must be reviewed and approved by the pastor not less than 2 weeks prior to the wedding.

If Mass is being celebrated, please include in the printed program the *Guidelines for the Reception of Holy Communion* which is found in the appendices of this document.

The program must also include an instruction to your guests not to take photographs or use electronic devices during the wedding. A sample instruction is found at the end of this document.

16. Lectors

At the wedding, the texts of Sacred Scripture must be proclaimed from the ambo, and the person who performs this function is called a lector. Most couples choose one or two persons from among their families and friends to perform this duty. Those whom you select should be good public speakers and must be at the rehearsal to practice the proclamation in the church; all lectors must be Catholics in full communion with the Church.

17. Bride's Room

There is no Bride's Room at St. Michael Catholic Church. The bride and her attendants, as well as the Groom and his groomsmen, should arrive at the church already dressed, and no earlier than 60 minutes prior to the wedding. We will provide a place for the bride and groom to wait prior to the wedding.

Please remember that the parish remains opened during the wedding and St. Michael Catholic Church does not accept responsibility for any items that are lost or stolen.

18. Attendants in the Wedding

The bride and groom are permitted up to 7 attendants each. The limit of 7 each includes the bridesmaids and maid of honor, the best man and groomsmen, flower girls and ring bearers, and all honor attendants. Children under the age of 6 are not permitted to participate in the procession, or to stand in the front of the church, and this includes flower girls and ring bearers.

19. Food, Smoking, and Alcohol

No food or drink is permitted at any time inside the church nave and sanctuary before, during, or after the wedding and rehearsal. Smoking is permitted outside and only in the parking lot.

The wedding party is expected to refrain from using any alcoholic beverages before both the rehearsal and the wedding. The priest or deacon celebrating the wedding reserves the right to remove from the church anyone under the influence of alcohol. Please remind everyone in the wedding party to preserve the sacred character of this event by not abusing alcohol.

20. The Rehearsal

Rehearsals are scheduled for the Friday prior to the wedding. The rehearsal will last less than 1 hour. The priest who will celebrate the wedding, or the wedding coordinator, is in charge of the rehearsal. The bride and groom must both be present and participate in the rehearsal; no proxies or stand-ins are allowed. All bridesmaids, groomsmen, flower girls, ring bearers, and lectors must be present at the rehearsal to practice the wedding liturgy. Normally the rehearsal begins at 5 pm unless other arrangements have been made. Please ask your wedding party to arrive at 4:30 to begin on time.

21. The Marriage License

The bride and groom **MUST** bring the Marriage License to the REHEARSAL. The priest or deacon will complete this legal document with the bride and groom and their witnesses before the rehearsal begins. **No wedding is permitted at St. Michael Catholic Church without this document.** Please be sure to obtain the license at least 1 month before the wedding. St. Michael Catholic Church is responsible for filing this document with the Clerk of Court.

22. Photographs

The requirements for photography at St. Michael Catholic Church may be different from your experience of weddings at other churches. Please give careful attention to these policies and requirements during the planning session with your photographer.

St. Michael Catholic Church reserves the right to exclude from working at our church any photographer who has not abided by these policies in the past.

The photographer may arrive at the church 1 hour before the wedding. All photography, both interior and exterior, must be completed within 45 minutes of the conclusion of the wedding.

Before the wedding, photographs of the groom, his groomsmen, and his family may be taken outside the church, but not inside.

Also, before the wedding, the bride, her family, and the bridesmaids may be photographed outside the church, but not inside.

As the procession begins, the bride may be photographed walking down the aisle from the main door into the church nave, if the photographer can do so from the rear section of the church nave. The *rear of the church nave* must be understood to mean that the photographer should in no circumstance position himself forward of any occupied pew, nor should he position himself in the aisle itself, in front of the advancing procession.

Absolutely no flash photographs are permitted during the wedding liturgy.

The photographer is not permitted to walk about in the church nave or the sanctuary (altar area) during the wedding. Again, he is always to remain behind the last occupied pew of the church. At the end of the wedding, the bride and groom may be photographed walking down the aisle and toward the main door of the church, but the photographer must remain in the rear of the church.

After the wedding, the photographer may gather the entire wedding party inside the church on the steps of the sanctuary (altar area) for pictures. None of the sanctuary or altar furnishings may be moved for the purpose of this photographic session, and absolutely nothing may be placed on, or removed from, the sacred altar. All inside photographs must be completed within **30 minutes** of the end of the wedding.

If a videotape is to be made, all of the above restrictions also apply.

23. What's this all about?

Some of these policies may seem arbitrary or unreasonable on first reading, but we ask for your patience and understanding. Our policies are written to anticipate many of the most common difficulties that arise today during the planning and celebration of weddings. We know that you want your wedding to be perfect and that you may have been planning this day in your imagination for many years; we also know that some of the things you may have imagined might not coincide with the expectations set forth in these wedding policies. We ask you to remember, though, that while your wedding is an intensely **personal** moment for you, it is not a **private** event; rather, it is a **public celebration** of one of the seven Sacraments given to the Church by the Lord Jesus. For this reason, the pastor, deacon, and staff have a solemn duty to ensure that the sacred liturgy is celebrated according to the mind of the Catholic Church and in conformity with liturgical law.

Our policies are written to help you understand what is possible and what is not possible during the short ceremony that begins your lifetime of sacrificial love in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. The sacred liturgy of your wedding is above all else an act of divine worship and our policies are designed to make your wedding a beautiful and memorable encounter with Christ the Lord for you, your family, and your friends.

APPENDICES

Possible Scripture Readings for the Wedding Liturgy

These readings are all taken from the New American Bible, and that is the only translation permitted for use in the sacred liturgy. The readings selected will be prepared by the church staff and placed on the ambo for the use of the lectors, so it is not necessary that they bring Bibles or photocopies of these readings with them to the wedding. Please review these readings and then discuss them with the priest or deacon who will preside at your wedding; the final choice of the readings is reserved to the cleric who will preside.

Old Testament Reading (first in order)

Genesis 1:26-28, 31a

Genesis 2:18-24

Genesis 24:48-51, 58-67

Tobit 7:6-14

Tobit 8:4b-8

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

Song of Songs 2:8-10, 14, 16a; 8:6-7a

Sirach 26:1-4, 13-16

Jeremiah 31:31-32a, 33-34

Psalms (second in order)

Psalm 33

Psalm 34

Psalm 103

Psalm 112

Psalm 128

Psalm 145

Psalm 148

New Testament Reading (third in order)

Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39

Romans 12:1-2, 9-18

Romans 15:1b-3a, 5-7, 13

1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20

1 Corinthians 12:31-13:8a

Ephesians 5:2a, 25-32

Philippians 4:4-9

Colossians 3:12-17

Hebrews 13:1-4a, 5-6b

1 Peter 3:1-9

1 John 3:18-24

1 John 4:7-12

Revelation 19:1, 5-9a

Gospel Reading (fourth in order)

Matthew 5:1-12a

Matthew 5:13-16

Matthew 7:21, 24-29

Matthew 19:3-6
 Matthew 22:35-40
 Mark 10:6-9
 John 2:1-11
 John 15:9-12
 John 17:20-26

Guidelines for the Reception of Holy Communion-*If you are celebrating a Nuptial Mass, please print the following statement in your program:*

For Catholics, reception of Holy Communion is a most sacred act as we believe that the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ Himself. Therefore, before receiving Holy Communion, Catholics should be in full doctrinal communion with the Church and should have made a good sacramental confession if they have been conscious of any mortal sin. Out of respect for others' faith traditions, the Catholic Church does not offer intercommunion and so does not extend an invitation to Holy Communion for those who are not Catholic. For those unable to receive Holy Communion, we invite you to remain in the pew and pray with us during Holy Communion.

Instruction regarding photographs and the use of electronic devices-*You are encouraged to print this in your wedding program:*

Out of respect to the sacredness of the Marriage Rite, it is asked that all cell phones and other electronic devices be silent, and no pictures be taken during the ceremony. Thank you.

We have received, read, understood, and agree to abide by the wedding photography policies of St. Michael Catholic Church.

Signature of Bride or Groom Date

Signature of Photographer Printed name of Photographer Date

[Once signed, please detach this page and forward it to the church office to establish your date on the church calendar. The remaining fee, along with the final draft of the wedding program (if any), and insurance for the parish center or gym (if needed), must be returned to the church office no later than three weeks prior to the wedding.]