

MARRIAGE PREPARATION AND WEDDING GUIDELINES

SS. JOHN AND PAUL PARISH (rev. November 2008)

CONGRATULATIONS...

You are preparing to celebrate one of the most important events in your life-- your marriage. You have chosen to do so in the context of the faith community at SS. John and Paul Parish. We want to welcome you and support you on this journey of life and faith.

In the course of the life of the Church, there are moments which the community celebrates with special emphasis and care. We call these moments of parish life the Sacraments. In Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, men and women are initiated into the family of the Church through water and the Holy Spirit. When our relationships with God or each other are tangled and broken, we seek healing in the sacrament of Reconciliation. With solemn call and response, some among us receive the sacrament of Orders for service as deacon, priest, or bishop. When someone is sick, we gather as a community with prayer and the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. Now that you are ready to make a mature, adult commitment to each other in love, we will gather in joyful hope as you become ministers to one another of the sacrament of Marriage.

In our day and age, the focus of time and energy and even finances is often exclusively on the wedding ceremony and wedding day. That wedding day and ceremony are certainly worth taking the care and time to plan, but the Church invites every couple to think even more about the entire marriage and the whole life that will unfold as a married couple. This time of preparation is not just for the one day, in other words, but a time also for you to assess your relationship to one another and this community; to celebrate what is good and strengthen your faith where needed. The information below is provided to help you understand what the Church and, more specifically, SS. John and Paul Parish expects of you, and what you can expect of us, as we prepare for the celebration of your marriage.

A. Marriage in the Catholic Church

Marriage is a "covenant of life and love" between a man and a woman which witnesses to God's covenant of life and love with us. A covenant means that it is more than a legal contract between two parties. Rather it is a way of life, a calling that demands careful thought and reflection. It is a vocation given by God for the sake of humanity and the Church. It is not simply a private choice between two people. It is a *public celebration* of the Church community and the wider human community. Falling in love with another is *not* enough. Building a life together based on mutual respect, on openness to the future, and on willingness to see one's relationship as serving the greater needs of the community is the core of what Marriage is truly about.

For these reasons, not just anybody can celebrate Marriage in the Church. Someone must be old enough and exhibit a maturity and ability to handle the challenges of a life-long marriage. At least one of the couple needs to be a Catholic. This must be the first marriage for both or, if one of the couple has been married previously (even if not in the Catholic Church), an annulment must be sought for the

previous marriage (even if non-Catholic). The couple must be able to communicate effectively with each other. They must have not only the desire but also the ability to be faithful to each other and to enter a permanent relationship with each other. If they are able, they must be open to allowing their love to bring forth new life and to raise and form their children in a responsible manner.

B. Marriage at SS. John and Paul Parish

Who may marry at SS. John and Paul?

Generally speaking, members of our parish who are free to marry may celebrate their weddings at SS. John and Paul. Roman Catholics who live within the boundaries of the parish but have no formal relationship with this community may speak to someone on the parish staff about establishing such a relationship--while anticipating a marriage in the future. Children of active parishioners who have gone away to school or who live elsewhere and wish to celebrate their wedding here may also do so. However, it is not enough that someone was *once* a parish member or that their parents were *once* here or that their grandparents are here. There needs to be a clear, visible connection to the present parish life.

What if I or my fiancée has been married previously?

In all cases of previous marriage, whether it was by a Catholic or non-Catholic, whether done in the Church or not, a Church (not civil) decree of nullity of the previous marriage *must* be completed before a wedding date can be set. Please let the priest or pastoral staff person you meet with know your marital situation immediately. In some cases an annulment can be a relatively simple procedure; in others it is much more time-consuming. No judgment can be made until the details of a particular situation are known.

How do I set a date for the wedding?

Couples must contact a member of the parish staff at least six months in advance of the date on which they hope to celebrate their wedding. The six months time frame is considered a bare minimum. You are welcome to contact someone even further in advance.

No dates will be set over the phone. This means that if you have a date in mind for the wedding and want to reserve a hall and so forth, it is important to contact the parish and set up an initial meeting. Couples will be able to set a date for a wedding after a member of the staff has had sufficient opportunity to meet with the engaged couple, to begin paperwork, and to arrange for their participation in the marriage preparation program.

In general, only one wedding will be scheduled on any one date, due to the many other meetings, funerals, wakes, and Masses that could occur. That means it is best to have a couple of dates in mind, in case your first choice is already taken by another wedding.

What times are available for the wedding celebration?

Since a Church-approved wedding is a celebration not just for the ones getting married but for the whole community, couples are always encouraged to think about celebrating their marriage at one of the main weekend liturgies: Saturday 5:00 p.m., Sunday 8:00, 9:30, or 11:30 a.m. The liturgy for the day and the readings for the day are taken from the regularly scheduled Sunday liturgy, but there can still be an entrance procession into Church of the wedding party and some musical selections that are fitting for a wedding. The front rows will be reserved for the families, and the vows and exchange of rings takes place after the homily, as at a non-Sunday wedding Mass. Decorations are usually simpler, since the Church is prepared for Sunday, but again, some wedding touches can be added, if agreed upon by the parish. This arrangement takes pressure off a couple to spend too much time, energy, and money in connection with the wedding ceremony itself. More importantly, it brings the marriage within the faith community--the most appropriate place for such vows.

Weddings are also scheduled for Friday evenings or on Saturday afternoons, although other weekday evenings and times might be available as well. On Fridays we recommend a time late enough to allow people who work sufficient time to get there--between 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. seems to work best. It violates the public importance of the marriage vows for very few people to be at the wedding and a large crowd to attend the party/reception afterward. If an earlier time is desired, there needs to be sufficient assurance that the majority of guests will actually be at the wedding.

On Saturdays the latest wedding time is 1:30 p.m. so that there is sufficient time for the wedding, pictures afterward, and clearing the Church before the 3 p.m. celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation. An earlier time between 12 noon and 1:30 p.m. can also be scheduled. There are no separate weddings celebrated on Saturday evening at the parish.

Weddings are *not* scheduled during the season of Lent. That season is a time of penance in the life of the Church and that spirit guides our prayer between Ash Wednesday and the Easter Triduum. This needs to be kept in mind if you are thinking of a wedding date in March/April. Check the date of Easter on that year's calendar.

What if we want to be married sooner than the six months or find we need to change our wedding date and be married sooner?

In all such cases, you will need to talk with the priest or pastoral staff person responsible for your marriage preparation. There can be extenuating circumstances that make it acceptable to be married with less than six months preparation. But that needs to be discussed and talked about first.

Pregnancy is not a reason for speeding up a marriage. The decision to marry stands by itself, not because someone is pregnant. Many couples in such a situation go through the pregnancy, work through the adjustments that come with being new parents, and then proceed to move on to marriage. A member of the pastoral staff would be happy to discuss any such issues with you.

C. Preparing for Your Marriage at SS. John and Paul Parish

How many meetings do we have with the priest? What kind of paperwork must be done?

Each couple is asked to participate in a marriage preparation program. Each couple spends time with the priest or pastoral staff person, discussing their relationship and upcoming marriage. In addition, each engaged couple is asked to attend a marriage prep program led by married couples. A list of options will be provided at the initial meeting. The number of meetings is determined by the needs of the engaged couple. To help frame the discussion, each couple is asked to take a pre-marriage inventory test, which asks each party a number of questions about how they view marriage, what they've talked about, what they expect of each other and so on. The results of the inventory are shared with the couple by the priest or pastoral staff person working with them.

Part of the preparation process will be filling out the necessary paperwork. The questions asked on the paper are part of the process of determining your freedom to marry in the Church. They also become a record of your marriage. The paperwork consists mostly of biographical information, and of your intention to enter into a Christian marriage as envisioned by the Catholic Church. In addition, each Catholic will be asked to supply a recent baptismal certificate (issued within the last six months). A baptized non-Catholic will be asked to supply a record of his/her baptism as well. Since this does not usually take place at the initial interview, but later on in the preparation process, any questions about paperwork can be directed to the pastoral staff person working with you on your marriage.

As the preparation process continues, the couple will be given a copy of a marriage workbook. This workbook will be helpful in preparing your wedding liturgy. In particular, the couple will need to spend time reading together the scripture readings for the liturgy and looking at various options for the prayers.

Each couple will need to meet with the parish' director of liturgical music to discuss appropriate music for the wedding liturgy. This meeting occurs at no cost to the couple, but takes place whether the couple hires the director to do the wedding music or not.

About a month prior to the wedding the couple arranges a meeting with the priest/deacon who will preside at the wedding and they finalize the wedding liturgy. No programs should be printed for the wedding liturgy prior to this meeting with the presider.

What if we are of different faiths?

Sharing a common faith is strongly encouraged and can be a strong foundation for the challenges of married life. However, if a Catholic is marrying a non-Catholic, the Church does not view this as a lesser marriage. Rather, the differences in faith need to be looked at, talked about, and honestly evaluated in the course of marriage preparation. In addition, the Catholic party must make a promise to remain Catholic and baptize and raise the children in the Catholic faith to the best of his/her ability . This will be one of the items discussed in the preparation period.

There is no pressure on the non-Catholic to become Catholic and, in fact, any decision by someone to become Catholic should be separate from the decision to marry.

What if a couple is living together, will the Church allow a marriage?

Such a situation needs to be looked at honestly as part of the marriage preparation process. We do not want anyone hiding that fact for fear that the marriage will be forbidden. By itself it is not sufficient grounds to forbid a marriage. Rather, this situation becomes one of the items that needs to be thoroughly discussed as a couple prepares for marriage. The key question is whether a couple who has been living together without marriage will see marriage truly as something new and will not simply assume existing patterns are sufficient for a healthy marriage. Living together before marriage, although becoming more common, is not a good foundation or good gauge for whether the marriage will succeed.

D. The Wedding Liturgy

What are the main roles at the wedding liturgy? Who needs to be there?

In our Catholic tradition, the bride and groom minister the sacrament of Marriage to one another. A priest/deacon and at least two witnesses are also required to be present.

Ordinarily, the priests/deacons assigned to SS. John and Paul Parish will preside at weddings celebrated here. Since weddings are scheduled so far in advance, we cannot guarantee a specific priest, although ordinarily the pastor will do all wedding Masses. The guarantee is that we will always have someone ready to preside at the wedding.

On occasion, a couple may have a priest friend or a priest relative whom they want to invite to preside at the wedding liturgy. In this case, the couple should mention this to one of the parish priests early in the marriage preparation process. Visiting priests will be asked to observe church law and parish customs regarding the celebration of Marriage. In addition, we will still provide through the parish all the marriage preparation needed.

What if it is an inter-faith marriage, can the non-Catholic minister be invited?

In the case of a Catholic marrying a non-Catholic, the Church allows for the non-Catholic minister to be present at the altar and participate in leading the wedding celebration. The actual wedding vows must be presided over by the Catholic priest/deacon. They can share equally in everything else.

If for pastoral reasons it is better for the marriage to take place in the non-Catholic church, as part of the marriage preparation process the priest can request for the couple a dispensation that allows them to be married in the non-Catholic church, whether or not the priest will be present as a witness. Such a marriage is considered a full Catholic marriage and is recorded as such in the baptismal register of the Catholic party.

Who should be chosen as witnesses?

Witnesses stand with the couple at the wedding and provide support at this important moment in life. Because you are choosing to celebrate your marriage in a community of faith, the Church asks that you consider choosing witnesses who are practicing Christians themselves and who can provide ongoing support for you throughout marriage.

The final decision is left to the couple and a minimum of two witnesses need to be chosen. These two witnesses (not the entire wedding party) stand at the side of the couple at the time of the wedding vows.

Who else has an official role at the wedding?

Lectors who proclaim the Word of God can be chosen from family or friends who are able to proclaim the Word clearly and confidently and who believe what they are proclaiming. These same persons should be at the wedding rehearsal so that they may practice in our worship space with our sound system. If you prefer, those who serve the parish as lectors are available to serve in this ministry at wedding celebrations. One of the pastoral staff would be happy to contact them for you.

If the wedding is to be celebrated during Mass, there may be a need for the services of *Ministers of Communion* for the distribution of the consecrated bread and wine. Those who already serve in this ministry in their home parishes and are your family or friends would be excellent choices. If you do not have such people attending the wedding, we will find some communion ministers for you from the parish.

What about the other members of the bridal party and family?

The *ministry of hospitality* is very important and we encourage you to consider using both the groomsmen and bridal attendants as ushers and greeters or select other persons to take on this role. If there are worship aids--pamphlets compiled to help guests participate in our prayer together--they may be distributed by these men and women. In other words, they are part of the liturgy, not simply onlookers and should be invited to act in a way appropriate with that.

Ring bearers and Flower girls are *not* ministries in Catholic liturgies. They are not required for weddings, nor are they prohibited. However, couples need to consider the age of children when choosing them. Very young children look "cute" to adults but should not be expected to perform well in highly structured, formal settings which only increase their anxiety. If children are under seven years of age, we strongly encourage you to have them process in at the very start of the liturgy, rather than in the middle of the procession. They should attend the rehearsal so that our wedding coordinators can gauge whether they will be a distraction or not at the actual wedding liturgy.

What options are allowed for the opening procession?

The opening procession is perhaps the clearest place where cultural expectations clash with the Church's expectations. In our culture it is often seen as a bridal procession. But it is not. It is the beginning of our liturgical prayer and therefore all the people who play a significant role in the liturgy are invited to be part of that procession: the bride and groom, their parents, the witnesses, the groomsmen and bridal attendants, presider, cros, book-bearer, and candle-bearers. It is not an option for the groom and the groomsmen to already be at the front, waiting for the bride and the bridal party. What follows are the two options used at SS. John and Paul Parish. If a couple wants a variation of these, they must receive permission from the preside.

(1) Preferred Option by the Church

Bride and groom as ministers of the sacrament walk in together. They would be preceded by a cross and sometimes candle-bearers (taken from the attendants or members of the family who are not attendants), the presider, the couples' parents, and the wedding party. The official witnesses (Best Man and Maid/Matron of Honor) would be just in front of the couple. The assembly stands as the cross-bearer begins the procession.

Why is this the preferred option by the Church? Because it allows for the groom and the bride to both be available to welcome the guests they have invited as they arrive. The tradition of "hiding" the bride until the procession begins is not part of the Christian tradition and places too high a focus on "seeing how she looks" as the bride enters the church. It turns what is meant to be a liturgical procession into a bridal procession. The back area of the church provides an excellent welcoming space and couples will find that people who are welcomed well and warmly by the couple are more likely to participate fully in the prayer they have been invited to share in. They are less likely to simply be spectators.

(2) Secondary Option

Although the option above is preferred, we realize that some couples see it as a severe hardship. If a couple chooses, a second option is for the cross (and candle-bearers) to begin the procession, followed by the presider, the groom and his parents, followed by the wedding party, ending with the bride and her parents.

The spacing allows for the groom and bride to be separate until they reach the front of the church. Please note that both parents (if alive and present) walk with their son/daughter in the procession. In the Catholic rite of marriage, there is no "giving away" of the bride by the father. That custom comes from a time when the bride was the property of the father until he handed that property over to the husband-to-be. As such, it is inappropriate for today's liturgy. Having both parents, where possible, walking in with their son/daughter, witnesses to the leaving of one family with the blessing of that family, and entering into a new union.

Any variation on the above two options needs to be discussed with and approved by the presider.

Should our marriage take place in the context of the Eucharist?

Ordinarily, when two practicing Catholics marry, they celebrate their marriage in the context of the Eucharist, which is a sign of unity between God and the Church. When couples are not active Catholics or when they enter into an inter-faith marriage, or when one spouse is unbaptized, the wedding ordinarily takes place within a liturgy of the Word rather than the Eucharist. This is not at all to imply a lesser celebration but rather acknowledges the fact that two faiths are present. Since the non-Catholic spouse and the non-Catholics present cannot be invited to participate in communion, a Eucharist at such times can be awkward and signal more disunity than unity. In addition, a non-Eucharistic celebration allows for much more flexibility in sharing with a non-Catholic minister, and involvement of both families.

If a family still feels strongly that the Eucharist is appropriate for a Catholic/non-Catholic celebration or that the Eucharist should not be celebrated for two Catholics, the couple should talk about this with the priest early on in the marriage preparation process.

May our marriage ceremony take place outdoors or in a non-Church setting?

The Church does not allow, except in very rare circumstances, for the wedding ceremony to take place outside of a church building. In the case of a Catholic-Jewish marriage, the Church may grant a dispensation so that the marriage takes place in the Jewish synagogue. If you have questions about this, please ask the pastoral staff person who is helping you prepare for your celebration.

What about including certain cultural/devotional customs in the wedding liturgy?

At times couples want to include certain customs that are not strictly part of the Catholic wedding liturgy. Some seem to be more appropriate than others. We ask that you carefully consider why you want to include the custom and then talk it over with the presider. Such additional rituals are usually done at the end of the liturgy, prior to a final blessing.

- Unity Candle: This is an American cultural custom that has become somewhat popular in recent years. We do not encourage you to include this within the wedding liturgy, because the liturgy already has a primary symbol of the unity that your wedding vows create. These are the *rings*. The Church has a special prayer of blessing for the rings and the exchange of rings is an integral part of the wedding liturgy. A more appropriate place for the unity candle would be at the wedding banquet, just prior to or as part of the grace before your meal. If a presider allows for the unity candle, you must provide your own candles and stand.
- Offering of Flowers to the Blessed Virgin Mary: Devotion to the mother of Jesus is a valuable part of our tradition. In many Catholic countries it was a custom for the bride to offer flowers in honor of Mary as part of the wedding celebration. While this is not an official part of the wedding liturgy, neither is it prohibited. If it takes place, we ask that both husband and wife and not just the bride be part of it.
- Various ethnic customs: Different ethnic groups have certain customs at the time of a wedding. If you wish any of these to be included, you must first discuss them and their meaning with the presider.

E. Photographers, Wedding Planners, and other outside people

It is very important that any outside person understand that the wedding ceremony is a liturgy and that the prayer and the prayerful atmosphere takes precedence over any specific photo or style. Some couples hire a wedding planner to coordinate the wedding. If you do so, be sure to let that person know that they have *no* say in how the Church's liturgy takes place and must accept any guidelines as to music, flowers, and so forth.

Most couples hire a photographer and/or videographer for the wedding day. They can help provide a beautiful remembrance of the day, but they too must follow the church's guidelines. They are

to introduce themselves to the presider before the liturgy so that he can give them any last minute instructions.

Videographers must remain out of the way and stationary. They cannot move their camera by hand or on a stand, once the liturgy begins. The acceptable places for their cameras will be shown to them by the wedding rehearsal coordinator or presider. This means behind the guests who are at the wedding. Also, videographers, once the procession is up front, must use natural lighting only.

The photographer is allowed to take flash photographs of the procession in and out. However, under no circumstances is he/she to stop the procession in order to get a better picture. Once the procession is up front the photographer must remain along the back of the church and use only natural lighting. After the wedding is over, the photographer has one half hour to take photos of the family and wedding party.

We ask that you fill out the form below, have the photographer and videographer sign it, and turn it in at the rehearsal. In this way we have a record if a problem arises.

(Wedding couple: please fill out, have the appropriate people sign, and return to the parish on the night of the rehearsal. Thank you.)

Names of Wedding Couple: _____ Wedding Date: _____

Name/Address of Photographer: _____

"I have read the parish policies and agree to abide by them."

(signature of photographer)

Name/Address of Videographer: _____

"I have read the parish policies and agree to abide by them."

(signature of videographer)

F. Miscellaneous Items

What are the Marriage Banns I see printed in the Bulletin?

The publication of Banns of Marriage is a notice in the parish bulletin on three successive Sundays of your intent to marry. In the past they functioned as a way for the Church to discover whether indeed you were free to marry or if anyone had any pertinent inside information to tell the priest as to why they couple should not marry! Now they function as an announcement of the upcoming wedding. Such banns are often not necessary and the pastor can omit them, if he chooses. Usually we try to publish them in the three weeks prior to the marriage.

How do we schedule a wedding rehearsal?

If there is to be a wedding rehearsal you can schedule a time for the rehearsal, when you meet with the presider to go over the liturgy. Our parish has a wedding rehearsal coordinator who runs the rehearsal and who is present before, during and after the wedding itself to assist you and the presider in order to make the whole process run much more smoothly

How do I arrange for music at my wedding?

Music is an integral part of any liturgy, whenever the Church gathers to pray. At a wedding liturgy music can greatly enhance the quality of prayer and sacredness of the event. Some couples have favorite popular songs which have a lot of personal meaning for them. These songs are better suited for the wedding banquet than the wedding liturgy. Think about the entire day as the celebration. Some things appropriate to the church would not be at the banquet. Some things appropriate for the banquet celebration would not be appropriate for the church.

In general, all music played at the church is to be suitable church music. The director of liturgical music will go through various possibilities for you. Popular love songs, purely secular songs, "Here Comes the Bride," and other non-liturgical songs are not allowed at the wedding liturgy.

The couple will meet with the Director of Liturgical Music as part of the wedding preparation process. There is no cost to that. He/she will assist you in thinking through the music options for your wedding liturgy. If you then choose to use that person for the actual wedding, that is a separate contract between the couple and the music minister with fees involved. Usually this will also involve hiring one of the parish's cantors for the celebration. It is your responsibility to contact the Director of Liturgical Music well in advance of the wedding.

If you choose to use a different music minister, you must get approval from the preside. You will still be meeting with the parish music minister to talk about your musical options.

Should we have a receiving line at church?

Remember that the photographer has one half hour from the end of the liturgy to be done with the pictures. This is true, whether there is a receiving line or not. A receiving line will cut greatly into the time for pictures. In addition, almost always the couple needs to receive people at the reception and so it duplicates something that will take place later. We invite the wedding party to process out and stay together while the rest of the assembly exits. Then pictures can begin back in the church.

What kind of flower arrangements are we allowed? What about runners, etc.?

Lots of attention to details are called for at weddings. But, the simpler you keep the wedding day and environment, the more relaxed you can be yourselves on that day. The simpler you keep your wedding, the more you can keep things focused on the essentials: your wedding vows together and the sharing of the day with family and friends. The simpler you keep the day, the more you make it a witness to the presence of the Lord in your lives at that time.

The environment of the church is important for any liturgy. You may add to the environment by contracting the services of a florist, but it is not required. Any flowers should be tasteful and not excessive, especially if they are being left as a gift for the rest of the community to enjoy during their prayer. One larger arrangement or two smaller arrangements seem to work best in our church. No one may re-arrange the liturgical decorations to fit the color of the wedding flowers/dresses/etc. Flowers are never placed on the altar. Since the church is not open until about one hour before a wedding, you should let the florist know that.

Bows on the end of rows are allowed, as long as they do not damage the wood and are removed at the end of the liturgy. Since the aisle is carpeted, no use of runners is allowed. We have had people trip and fall.

It is *never allowed* to scatter rose petals or any other decorations on the floor of the church.

Please do not plan on throwing rice, bird seed, or releasing balloons/doves after the wedding liturgy, and please let family members and guests know that this is not allowed. These customs interfere with the maintenance of our building and grounds. In the case of rice or bird seed, it creates a mess. In the case of balloons, it is environmentally unsound. In the case of doves, it has no place as part of the ceremony at church. Again, think of the wedding day as a whole day. Some things that don't fit the church celebration can be done as part of the reception or dinner time.

When considering such extraneous details, please remember that the most important symbol any time the Church gathers to pray is the people who gather, for we ourselves are the Church. By choosing Scripture readings and music that speak of your faith as a couple, by welcoming people warmly as they arrive, by keeping the day and all of its extraneous costs as simple as possible, and by considering carefully how to make your wedding liturgy prayerful, sacred, and joyful, you will ensure a meaningful day that you will remember, along with your family and friends.

G. Fees

Is there a fee to paid to the church for my wedding?

Sacraments are gladly celebrated here with you because of your connection to the Christian community. There is *no fee* as such. Most couples choose to make a donation to the parish at the time of their wedding for the ongoing work of the parish. Such donations are appreciated but not required.

Please note: Any donation should be made out to "SS. John and Paul Parish." A typical amount for such a donation is \$200-\$300, but there is no expectation of a certain amount. That donation goes to the parish, not the presider. If the presider is the pastor or deacon of the parish, there is no expectation of any further fee. If you are having another priest preside, it is customary to offer that priest a stipend for his involvement

Any fees for the music ministers are dealt with directly by the music ministers.

IN CONCLUSION,

We realize the many details that have to be looked at with respect to the wedding liturgy and we hope the guidelines above help you to take care of many of them. But remember, your real wedding preparation is not for a wedding ceremony alone but for a life of commitment, respect, and sharing of marriage. No number of meetings with a priest or pastoral minister, no amount of reading from books can take the place of open, honest communication between the couple. Put time and energy into your marriage preparation, over and beyond what the church requires and definitely over and beyond planning a wedding day. Our prayers will be with you, even as we challenge you to understand the real serious step you are undertaking.

CHECKLIST FOR A MARRIAGE AT SS. JOHN AND PAUL

- ___ Obtain a copy of these parish marriage guidelines and read them thoroughly.
- ___ Call the parish office and have an initial appointment with the priest or parish staff member. At that meeting a date for the wedding can usually be set.
- ___ Take the pre-marriage inventory and discuss it with the priest or parish staff member involved in the preparation process (usually 2-3 sessions).
- ___ Attend a Marriage Preparation workshop led by trained married couples. A list of such workshops will be given to you at one of the meetings.
- ___ Receive wedding liturgy book and prayerfully reflect on the readings and prayers together. Select which ones you prefer.
- ___ Obtain a recent copy (dated within six months of your marriage date) of your baptismal certificate from the parish or church of baptism (if Catholic and you were not baptized at SS. John and Paul). Or some evidence of being baptized (if Christian but not Catholic).
- ___ Contact the Director of Liturgical Music at least 8 weeks prior to the wedding date to select music and discuss musical options.
- ___ Arrange rehearsal date and time with the parish secretary.
- ___ Call the priest 4 weeks or so before the wedding to schedule a final liturgy preparation session.
- ___ Consult with the county clerk to fulfill all requirements for obtaining a marriage license. Bring that license to the parish office at least 3 days before the wedding, so that the parish secretary can properly complete it.