

## Congratulations!

Congratulations on your engagement. Your decision to marry serves as a wonderful sign of hope for our parish community. Such a decision, arrived at thoughtfully and prayerfully, is a first step toward a successful marriage. Our parish community, along with your family and friends, are prepared to support and encourage you not only in the celebration of your wedding but also in your life-long commitment to each other. We pray that this special time of engagement will allow your love to deepen as you learn to share more fully your deepest and most personal hopes, dreams and values.

We hope you will find the following materials genuinely helpful as you prepare for that special wedding day and for your life together of “loving and honoring each other all the days of your lives”. Please take time to read these materials carefully. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

## General Information

Several different staff at St. Thomas More Church (STM) will help you prepare for your wedding. These include the parish administrative staff, who are responsible for much of the administrative work related to your preparation and marriage and manage the preparation; the parish Director of Worship and the priest or deacon, who will preside at your wedding ceremony, who will help you plan the ceremony itself, including choosing the Scripture readings and music; and the parish Wedding Coordinator, who will attend the rehearsal and the ceremony and make sure that things move smoothly.

## Scheduling a Wedding at STM

**If either or both of you were previously married and divorced**, please let us know. You may need to make an appointment with one of the STM priests for further guidance.

In all other circumstances, contact the administrative staff **at least 6 months before your planned wedding** to inquire about available dates.

St. Thomas More schedules weddings on most Saturdays, normally at 11:00am and 2:00pm. We do not schedule weddings on Easter weekend. If you schedule your wedding during Lent, please note that flowers, music, and other festive elements should be restrained.

You can choose to be married either in the main Church or in the small Daily Mass Chapel (seating capacity is approximately 30-40 persons).

Once you have a date acceptable to both you and STM, the administrative staff will give you some paperwork to fill out and return. When you have returned this initial paperwork along with a **nonrefundable deposit of \$250**, STM will hold your date until 90 days before your wedding date. At that time, full payment of the balance of all remaining wedding fees is due. Upon full payment of all fees, the wedding date will be secured through the scheduled date of the ceremony. See “Wedding Fees” below.

## Marriage Preparation Program

Once you have set a date for your wedding, the administrative staff will direct you to an approved marriage preparation program. For a list of approved programs in the Atlanta area, go to:

<https://archatl.com/ministries-services/marriage-family-ministry/marriage-preparation/>. Note that there may be a charge for these programs.

While you are free to register for any approved program, we strongly encourage you to participate in our own marriage preparation program, *Fall In Love, Stay In Love*. We offer this 4-week program three times a year. Drawing from the wisdom of the *Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, the program includes presentations by witness couples; in-class and at-home couple exercises; evening sessions that emphasize communication, intimacy, commitment, discernment, and values; and various tools, rituals, and practices that will aid couples in their marriage together. For more information and to register please contact Andy and Sarah Otto at: [aotto@stmga.org](mailto:aotto@stmga.org).

## **A Catholic Mass or Non-Eucharistic Scripture Service?**

Catholic weddings can take place either in the course of a Catholic Mass or in the course of a non-Eucharistic service. The marriage rite itself is the same in each service, but the non-Eucharistic service does not include a Communion rite.

If both bride and groom are Catholic, you may choose either option. However, if one of you is not Catholic, or if a large number of the wedding guests is not Catholic, we suggest that you choose the non-Eucharistic service for your wedding ceremony.

If you have any questions regarding which form of wedding service is more appropriate for you, the administrative staff will direct you to one of the STM priests for further conversation.

## **The Wedding File**

Once you have scheduled your wedding, the administrative staff will open a wedding file for you. This file will contain all the documentation required for your wedding. This documentation helps establish your ability to enter freely and fully into marriage. We expect you to cooperate in gathering this documentation.

Once you have been married, the wedding file will be kept as a permanent record in the church where your wedding takes place.

## **Required Documentation:**

STM administrative staff will direct you to obtain the following documents early in the preparation process:

- **Baptismal Certificates:** If you were baptized as a Roman Catholic, contact the church where you were baptized and ask for a recently issued certificate of baptism with the seal of the church embossed onto it. This certificate may not be dated more than 6 months before the date your wedding.

If you were not baptized Catholic, but were baptized into in another Christian church, you should contact that church and ask for some writing evidencing that baptism. If such a writing is not available, tell the STM administrative staff.

If you were not baptized, do not be concerned. Simply tell the STM administrative staff.

- A letter or certificate showing that you completed an approved marriage preparation program.
- Affidavits attesting to your freedom to marry: Each of you must obtain *two* signed and dated affidavits from immediate family members or, if no immediate family member is available, from close, long-standing adult friends of long-standing. When signed and dated, these affidavits will attest that each of you is “free to marry,” i.e., you have not been previously married. STM administrative staff will direct you to where you can obtain pre-printed forms useful for this purpose.

You should collect these documents and return them to the STM administrative staff who will keep them in your wedding file.

## Marriage License

If one or both of you are residents of Georgia, you may apply for a marriage license in any county in Georgia.

If neither of you is a resident of Georgia, you must apply for the marriage license in the county where the ceremony is to be held.

The ceremony cannot take place until you have obtained this license and presented it to the priest or deacon who will preside at your wedding. We suggest that you present this license and the return envelope no later than the wedding rehearsal.

## Meeting with the Priest

After you have completed your marriage preparation program and **at least 3 months before your wedding**, the administrative staff will direct you to contact a particular STM priest for a face-to-face meeting. If you are being married at STM, this priest or deacon will likely be the person who will also preside at your wedding. It will be your responsibility to timely contact this priest or deacon and arrange an appointment.

When you meet with the priest or deacon, he will complete any remaining paperwork, including any necessary special permissions or dispensations, and offer you further instruction and encouragement. He will go over the wedding ceremony so that you know what to expect.

## Meeting with the Director of Worship

After you have completed your marriage preparation program, but **not more than 2 months before your wedding date**, you should arrange to meet with the Director of Worship. He will help you choose appropriate Scripture readings, prayers and blessings, and music. See “Music at the Wedding” below.

## **Meeting with the Wedding Coordinator**

After meeting with the Director of Worship, you will want to contact the Wedding Coordinator. She will help you with planning wedding logistics.

## **Wedding Rehearsal**

The wedding rehearsal is an important part of the preparation for the ceremony. It allows members of the wedding party to become familiar with the physical environment of the Church or Chapel and with their liturgical roles. All members of the wedding party and others who have an active role in the ceremony, including lectors and other ministers, should be present for the rehearsal. Wedding singers and musicians normally need not be present for the rehearsal.

Rehearsals are normally scheduled on the Friday evening preceding your wedding. The rehearsal typically lasts an hour or less.

## **The Marriage Ceremony**

The marriage ceremony is a ritual in which the Church celebrates the presence and activity of Jesus within the relationship of husband and wife. It is fundamentally a religious ceremony in which secular actions and symbols are generally not appropriate.

### **Presider**

The administrative staff normally assigns an STM priest to preside at your wedding. This typically happens only after you complete your marriage preparation program.

If you want a particular STM priest to preside at your wedding, you should contact him at least six months in advance. If he is agreeable, inform the administrative promptly.

Clergy of other religious traditions are welcome to assist in the celebration of your wedding. In this case, the Catholic presider will happily consult with the non-Catholic minister to make appropriate accommodations.

### **Music at the Wedding**

Music is an important part of a Catholic marriage ceremony. Music enhances the celebration of Jesus present in this ceremony and supports the active participation of all those who gather. When you meet with the Director of Worship, he will help you choose the music for your wedding. Secular or other popular music, e.g., Wagner's "Here comes the bride," or Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," is not permitted. The songs, hymns, and acclamations chosen should be ones that are familiar and common to many parishes so that the Assembly may actively join in the singing. Certain parts of every wedding service are always sung, including the psalm response after the first reading, and the Alleluia verse before the Gospel. If your wedding takes place in the course of a Mass, certain Mass parts are always sung, including the "Holy, Holy," the Memorial Acclamation, and the Great Amen.

Since the Director of Worship is responsible for all liturgical music in the parish, including music for weddings, he has the authority to make final decisions regarding your music selections. The Director will also ensure that the liturgical music chosen is performed well and at the appropriate time.

Prerecorded music is not appropriate since the liturgy is the living prayer of a particular assembly of the Church.

#### **Prelude Music:**

Prelude music can enhance the liturgy and prepare the community for worship. Therefore, what is not appropriate during the ceremony is not appropriate in the church beforehand.

#### **Cantor and Organist:**

STM will provide a cantor and organist/pianist for your wedding celebration. The cantor is a trained liturgical music minister who leads the assembly in the singing of all the music for your wedding, including the psalm response to the Old Testament reading and the singing of the Gospel Acclamation. The organist/pianist supports the singing of the assembly.

#### **Instrumentalists and Additional Singers:**

If you want additional musicians and/or additional singers, discuss this with the Director of Worship when you meet with him. He is authorized to make the final decision in this regard. You will be expected to bear any additional cost associated with these musicians and singers, including the cost of any necessary rehearsal time.

If the couple would like a relative or close friend to participate in the music of the liturgy, he or she may sing a prelude selection, upon approval of the Director of Worship.

### **The Wedding Procession**

We encourage you to think carefully about the form your wedding procession will take. We strongly encourage you to organize the procession so that it reflects the unity and equality of the spouses and their families that Catholic marriage symbolizes. Particularly disfavored are processions that suggest that the woman is subordinate to the man, or that the woman is property to be given away.

### **Worship Aid for the Wedding Ceremony**

A well-designed wedding program will help you and your guests participate well in the celebration. The creation and printing of worship aids is the responsibility of the couple to be married. You may wish to contact the Director of Worship or the Wedding Coordinator for help with this.

### **Use of the Church and Chapel**

You should take steps to see that your wedding begins promptly as scheduled. Generally, you have the use of the church or chapel for one hour before the scheduled start time, and for two hours after the start of the ceremony. This applies to all activities related to your wedding, such as arrival of family and placement of flowers, the wedding ceremony, and any post-wedding activities, e.g., taking photographs, collecting floral arrangements, etc.

## Candles

The only candles permitted are those already in place. Additional candelabra, lighted or unlighted, or candles on the altar, in the aisles, or on the pews, are not permitted.

The unity candle or other similar rituals are not permitted during the wedding celebration.

## Ring Bearers

You may have ring bearers. However, their role will be symbolic and not functional. The actual wedding rings should be kept by either the Best Man or Maid/Matron of Honor. In deciding whether to use ring bearers, please consider the ability of the child to make it down the aisle and to stay content during the ceremony.

## Flower Girls/Boys

You may have flower girls/boys. However, they may not throw flowers, petals, rice or anything else as they process down the aisle. In deciding whether to use flower girls/boys, please consider the ability of the child to make it down the aisle and to stay content during the ceremony.

## Outside Professional Consultants

Professional consultants whom you may retain to assist you with your wedding celebration have no proper role in the wedding ceremony itself. While on STM property, they must follow the direction of the STM staff and abide by the policies in this guideline.

## Banners

No banners or signs of any type may be put up in the church or carried in the processional or recessional.

## Alcohol

Alcohol consumption prior to or during the wedding ceremony may jeopardize the validity of the marriage. Alcohol use anywhere on STM property before, during, or after your wedding is prohibited.

## Bubbles/Confetti/Birdseed/Rice

Throwing rice, birdseed, confetti, silk or fresh flower petals, or releasing bubbles inside or outside of the church or chapel is not permitted. Aisle runners are not permitted in the Church or Chapel

## Flowers

Flowers may enhance the beauty and solemnity of your celebration, and you are welcome to provide them at your cost. We ask that you follow the guidelines below.

- Free-standing floral arrangements may be placed in the sanctuary in ways that do not obstruct movement around the altar and other furnishings. They may never be placed on the altar.
- The flowers you provide belong to you and you are free to take them with you after the ceremony. However, you may wish to consider donating your flowers to the church.

- If you wish to place flowers or other decorations on the pews, these must be attached without the use of tape, other adhesives, tacks or nails.
- Church furnishings or seasonal decorations may not be altered or moved under any circumstances.
- During the liturgical seasons of Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter, the sanctuary has a particular seasonal atmosphere which may not be altered. Flowers and other decorations must reflect the atmosphere of the season.

To avoid expensive mistakes, we suggest that you consult the Wedding Coordinator before ordering flowers and other decorations.

## Photography and Videography

Photographers, videographers, and their associates must respect the sacred character of the wedding ceremony and space. They must behave discreetly and reverently and strictly follow the policies in this guideline.

Specific requirements include:

- No flash photography or special/additional lighting is permitted at any point during the ceremony, including the processions into and out of the church.
- No photographer, videographer, or assistant is permitted in the sanctuary area at any time.
- Before the ceremony, the photographer may work in the outdoor areas, the narthex, Family Room, and hallways outside the sacristy.
- During the ceremony, the photographer must remain in the side aisles no closer to the sanctuary than the first pew, or in the center aisle behind the wedding guests. During the processional and recessional the photographer may be in the center aisle but must remain unobtrusive and out of the way.
- Photographers and videographers should dress appropriate to the occasion. No shorts, jeans, T-shirts, or sneakers are permitted.

It is the responsibility of the wedding couple to ensure that photographers and video personnel receive these policies and abide by them. If you or your photographer has any questions on the wedding day, he/she should consult the Wedding Coordinator.

## Wedding Fees

The fee for a wedding at STM which we ask of a couple, at least one of whom is a registered and active STM parishioner, is \$1,000.

A “registered and active STM parishioner” refers to either bride or groom who has been registered as a parishioner for at least one year before the date of the wedding and has during that year participated regularly at Sunday Eucharist at STM, participated meaningfully in parish activities and ministries, and given reasonable financial support to the parish.

The fee for a wedding at STM for a non-parishioner is \$1,600.

This fee includes the \$250 non-refundable deposit that is due at the time your wedding is scheduled and payments to the STM organist/pianist and cantor. The fee does not include the cost of the marriage preparation program, any fee requested by a non-STM priest or deacon, or any costs related to additional musicians or singers whom you may wish to employ.

Upon payment of the non-refundable deposit, we will hold the date until 90 days before the wedding date. At that time, the full balance of your fee is due. Upon timely full payment, we will hold the date through the day of the wedding. Failure to timely pay the balance may result in your losing the reserved date and time for your wedding.

St. Thomas More will refund any wedding fee already paid *less the non-refundable deposit* provided you cancel the wedding in writing at least 90 days before the ceremony.

Note: STM priests who preside at your wedding do not ask for or expect a fee for their service. However, if you have arranged for a visiting priest or deacon to preside at your wedding at STM, he may expect a stipend in addition to the STM fee. You should speak with him regarding his expectations.

## **Logistics**

### **Parking:**

St. Thomas More has limited off-street parking, including parking for persons with disabilities, in front of the church accessible from W. Ponce de Leon Avenue, and in the large the parking lot behind the church accessible from W. Trinity. Place. In addition, there is limited on-street parking in front of the church on W. Ponce de Leon Ave.

### **Accessibility:**

The church building is accessible by persons with disabilities and those traveling in wheelchairs.

### **Restrooms:**

Restrooms are available in the narthex of the church.

### **Addresses:**

The mailing and delivery address of the church is:

St. Thomas More Catholic Church 636  
W. Ponce de Leon Ave.  
Decatur, GA 30030

## **Contact information**

Administrative staff: 404-378-4588

Director of Worship: Joe Messina, [jmessina@stmga.org](mailto:jmessina@stmga.org), 404-378-4588, ext.120

Wedding Coordinator: Terri Tirella, [ttirella@stmga.org](mailto:ttirella@stmga.org)