

Marriage Guidelines

St. Vincent's Catholic Church



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Marriage Preparations Checklist

The items on the checklist that follows must be completed and all the paperwork properly filled out and signed, and turned into the office two months prior to the Wedding Date

- ☐ Signed Prenuptial Investigation
- ☐ Obtained Official Copies of Baptismal Certificates with notations or copies of official certificates for First Holy Communion and Confirmation
- ☐ Copies of previous marriage licenses, divorce decrees, or previous declarations of nullity (if applicable)
- ☐ Wedding Date Set with Front Office
- ☐ Read and Signed Wedding Policy
- ☐ FOCCUS Survey
- ☐ Meetings with Priest
- ☐ Meetings with Sponsor Couple
- ☐ Certificate of Completion for Engaged Couples Class/Retreat
- ☐ Natural Family Planning Class
- ☐ Prenuptial Witness Affidavits of Free Status (Two for Bride, Two for Groom)
- ☐ Civil Marriage License

Guidelines for Weddings at St. Vincent's Catholic Church

Marriage Preparation

The institution of marriage is a covenant by which a man and woman establish a life-long partnership that derives its force, strength, and example from creation, but with the grace of God, it is raised up to the dignity of a sacrament. Marriage is established by God Himself as creator who has endowed the world with its own proper laws. This sacred bond does not depend upon human choice, but upon God who is the Author of marriage who has willed that it should have its own goods and its own ends. The heart of marriage is that conjugal covenant which is the irrevocable consent wherein the spouses give themselves to one another after the example of Christ's love for His Church. This covenant presupposes the complete fidelity of the partners, the indissolubility of the marital bond, and the procreation and formation of children that results from this bond.

To understand fully the nature of Christian marriage and fulfill one's vows solemnly before God at the moment of one's wedding, the Catholic Church requires that couples who seek marriage undergo serious marriage preparation lasting at least seven months. St. Vincent's Church has created a marriage preparation program and these materials will help you understand the requirements. If you choose to follow our marriage preparation program at St. Vincent's or are receiving marriage preparation at another parish, please be sure that all the required information is forwarded to St. Vincent's for review at least two months before your scheduled wedding date.

Necessary Components for Marriage Preparation

Meetings with a Catholic Priest - Marriage preparation at St. Vincent's Church begin when the couple meets the priest for the first time. The priest and the church staff work only with the couple. If there are no impediments to proceeding discovered at the first meeting, the priest will assist the couple to schedule their wedding. Since Christian marriage is a sacrament, that is, the couples fruitfully celebrate the mystery of Christ and the Church, it is essential that the priest become well acquainted with the couple to prepare them for this sacred union. To ensure that engaged couples understand the nature of the marital covenant, the priest meets with the couple in the months leading up to the wedding to prepare them to enter fully into the sacrament. Office hours are preferred but the priests at St. Vincent's will accommodate busy couples on evenings and weekends if necessary. If you cancel or reschedule the date of your wedding and still wish to marry, you may be required to begin the process from the beginning.

FOCCUS Pre-Marital Inventory and the Sponsor Couple Program - The FOCCUS Pre-marital interview is a compatibility survey to help couples grow in their Catholic identity and discuss the challenges of marriage that they will face. It highlights the strong and weak points of their relationship and helps couples to engage in important discussions before they formally contract marriage. The test can be administered at the parish office in person by the priest. For an appointment, you may call (213) 749-8950. The test may also be taken online, and the results will automatically be forwarded to the parish office for the priest. After the scores are reviewed, the priest will meet the couple to evaluate the results. After this, the priest will assign you to a sponsor couple who will give you a book and discuss with you these materials in a series of sessions. You will be responsible for meeting with the sponsor couple to discuss the topics outlined in the program.

Official Sacramental Records – Baptismal records must be produced at the first meeting with the priest with all notations (i.e., where and when one received the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation) with the official seal of the parish of origin. All baptismal certificates must be issued within the last six months with the official seal of the Catholic Church of origin. Baptismal records and other Sacramental records can be obtained from the church where the sacrament was received. If either person is Catholic, but has not received one or more of the sacraments, contact the parish office to enroll in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). If either person in the couple is not Catholic but has been baptized, please provide some documentation for the baptism. If this non-Catholic church does not keep records of baptisms, a signed document from a family member or credible witness will suffice.

Previous Marriages – The Catholic Church believes that marriage is sacred and that it is an essential foundation of the family, the society, and the Church. For this reason, the Church requires that a Catholic party must never have been previously married, and that the marriage take place before a duly authorized priest or deacon in the presence of two witnesses. If a Catholic was married before a justice of the peace, a civil judge, or a minister of another Christian Church, then the marriage is not considered valid, and the bishop must grant a dispensation called a Lack of Form so that the couple may receive the sacrament of marriage.

There is no divorce in the Catholic Church. If you were married in the Catholic Church, it is possible that the marriage was not valid. Every Catholic has a right to ask the Church to investigate the validity of a previous marriage. We must state, however, that a civil divorce does not give you the freedom to marry in the Catholic Church. Every Catholic who was married in the Catholic Church must receive a marriage annulment to contract a Catholic marriage once again. A marriage annulment in the Catholic Church is a declaration by a Church tribunal (that is, a Catholic Church court) that a marriage thought to be valid according to Church law falls short of at least one of the essential elements required for a binding marital union and is therefore not valid and thus non-binding. Since, divorce is a painful reality and can have unfortunate effects in one's sacramental life especially if one remarries civilly, all Catholics have a right to ask the Church to investigate the possibility of marriage annulment so that they may marry in the Catholic Church. If you need a marriage annulment, the priest will be happy to help you through this process. At your first appointment with the priest, please bring copies of all previous marriage licenses, all divorce decrees, and all annulment decrees.

Prenuptial Witness Affidavit Form – In the presence of a priest, two of these forms must be filled out for both the bride and the groom by family members who have known the person for whom they testify for at least ten years. The affidavit is a statement by someone who knows you well, that you are baptized, not currently married to anyone else, and that you plan to follow the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding the Sacrament of Marriage.

Archdiocesan Engaged Couple Programs and Natural Family Planning – Classes and retreat programs are currently offered through the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. For more information about where and when these classes are offered, please visit <https://familylife.lacatholics.org/marriage-prep-programs>. The classes are offered online or in person in a classroom setting. You will receive a certificate for completion of each class. Please provide this certificate to the priest so that it might be added to your wedding file.

Marriage License - Obtaining a marriage license from your County of origin is your responsibility. We require that you bring the license to the parish office one month in advance of your wedding. You will need to check with the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk's office for local requirements and fees. A marriage license in Los Angeles County is valid for 120 days. St. Vincent's Church may not conduct a wedding without a valid marriage license.

Wedding Ceremony Planning Checklist

- ☐ Read and Sign Wedding Guidelines
- ☐ Ceremony Planning Meeting with Father (2 months before the wedding)
- ☐ Meeting with Music Director to Choose the Music
- ☐ Paid Music Director's Fee if Playing at the Ceremony (optional)
- ☐ Paid Cantor Fee (optional)
- ☐ Submit Wedding Program for Review (optional)
- ☐ Contact Wedding Rehearsal Coordinator
- ☐ Certificate for Engaged Couples Class/Retreat
- ☐ Natural Family Planning Class
- ☐ Prenuptial Witness Affidavits of Free Status (Two for Bride, Two for Groom)
- ☐ Marriage License (Obtained one month before the wedding)

Breakdown of Fees and Costs

A wedding at St. Vincent's Catholic Church comes with the following required fees. These fees do not include the procurement of flowers nor photography services. Fees must be paid in cash, debit card or credit card. We do not accept personal checks.

\$1,700	Fee for wedding at St. Vincent's Church
\$225	Fee for Wedding Coordinator

If your wedding is cancelled eight months or more prior to the scheduled wedding ceremony, the couple will receive a refund of \$1,625.00. A \$300 fee will be charged for cancellation, changing the date and/or time. If a cancellation is made less seven months or less prior to the ceremony, a refund will not be issued. Only one cancellation and/or rescheduling is allowed. All fees will be forfeited if there is a second rescheduling or cancellation.

The following fees are optional at St. Vincent's Church and are exclusive of the above wedding fees. You may decide to contract the following services through St. Vincent's Church.

\$200	Organist or Keyboardist
\$75	Cantor
\$10	Altar Server

The Wedding Ceremony

Liturgy and Music

A wedding is not merely a personal act or a family celebration. It is a public act that occurs within the Body of Christ according to her rites. The liturgical rites including the Rite of Marriage within the Catholic Church are ordered to the praise and worship of Almighty God.

During the time of preparation for your marriage, you will need to meet with the priest to discuss the details of your wedding liturgy. To prepare for this meeting, you will need to understand the following guidelines and policies.

Scheduling: Weddings at St. Vincent's Church are celebrated at the following times:

- Friday at 4:00 pm (Access to the Church from 3:30 pm to 5:30 pm)
- Saturdays at 12:00 pm (Access to the Church allowed from 11:30 pm to 1:30 pm)
- Saturdays at 3:00 pm (Access to the church from 2:30 pm to 4:30 pm)

There are certain times in the Church's liturgical year when a wedding ceremony is not appropriate. Weddings may not be celebrated on Fridays or Saturdays that are Holy Days of Obligation, on August 15 (Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary) November 2 (All Souls Day) when it falls on a Friday or Saturday, and during the Holy Triduum (Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday). The parish reserves the right to limit weddings on other days as well according to the Church's calendar.

Where: The priests and deacons at St. Vincent's Church follow diocesan policy and long-standing Catholic practice regarding the appropriate place for a wedding. Weddings must take place within a Catholic church building. Weddings cannot be celebrated in homes, outdoors or other public venues. If a Catholic is marrying a non-Catholic, it is possible with permission from the bishop to celebrate a wedding in the church of the non-Catholic party.

When a Wedding Mass is Appropriate: The priest celebrates a wedding mass when both parties are practicing Catholics. All weddings between a Catholic and non-Catholic are celebrated outside of Mass.

Readings and Responsorial Psalm: If you are celebrating your wedding as a Nuptial Mass, you may select the Scripture readings and the responsorial psalm from an approved list of texts which the priest will discuss with you when you plan the mass. If the Mass is meant to count as a Sunday obligation, the readings are determined by the lectionary for that Sunday.

Visiting Priests and Deacons: The priests on staff at St. Vincent's normally perform the weddings at St. Vincent's. If you wish to invite a Catholic priest or deacon from another parish to preside or assist at your wedding, please make this known as soon as possible in the process of planning your wedding. If the priest does not belong to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the priest will be asked to obtain a letter of good standing required by the archdiocese. We will discuss with you the role of the visiting priest or deacon during the wedding if they are not the main celebrant.

Non-Catholic clergy are permitted to participate in a Catholic wedding by their presence in the sanctuary, but they cannot preside.

Participation of Family and Friends in the Wedding Liturgy: Couples may invite family members or friends to serve as lectors or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. Lectors read the texts of the Scripture and the Prayers of Intercession at the Wedding ceremony. Those whom you select should be competent public speakers and must be Catholics in full communion with the Catholic church. They should attend the rehearsal to practice the proclamation of the Word in St. Vincent's Church unless they already serve as lectors at St. Vincent's Church. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may also be family or friends of the couple but should normally be chosen from those who are already trained in this practice at St. Vincent's.

Wedding Customs - There are some important customs, devotions, and traditions that are acceptable to use during the sacrament of marriage. These may include the placement of a bouquet at the Marian Altar, the exchange of coins (la arras), the gift of a bible and rosary, and the wedding lasso (el lazo de boda). Other secular traditions should not be included in the wedding ceremony for example the use of a unity candle or the mixing of sands/spices. These later customs do not originate from Catholic tradition and are not permitted. The Catholic rite of marriage already has many fitting customs and traditions that express our beliefs about the nature of the sacrament of marriage.

Rehearsals - Wedding rehearsals are normally scheduled at the church on an early weekday evening immediately before the date of your wedding and take one hour. The couple should ensure that members of the wedding party arrive at least 15 minutes before the start of the rehearsal. All rehearsals should conclude before 6:45 pm. The rehearsals are conducted solely by the priest and the wedding coordinator. All those with an active role in the procession or the wedding ceremony itself must attend the rehearsal. This should include lectors, extraordinary ministers of Communion and altar servers.

The following persons are required to attend the wedding rehearsal:

- The Wedding Couple
- The Best Man, Groomsmen, Maid of Honor and Bridesmaids
- Flower Girls and Ring Bearers
- Parents of the Couple
- Lectors (Those reading the scriptures during mass)
- Offertory Gift Bearers, Eucharistic Ministers
- Altar Servers
- Ushers and Greeters

Parish Wedding Coordinator - The parish will appoint one or more wedding coordinators to assist at each wedding. The wedding coordinator will organize the rehearsal, arrange the procession, and ensure that the wedding ceremony goes smoothly in every respect. Ordinarily, the wedding coordinator will contact the bride directly to arrange a time for the rehearsal. The ordinary stipend for the wedding coordinator is \$50 per rehearsal or wedding. This fee is included in your payment to the church.

Music – The celebration of a wedding is a public liturgical action of the Church. Consequently, only sacred, liturgical music is permitted at weddings. St. Vincent's Church does not allow vocal arrangements or instrumental music associated with marriage and romantic love in the secular sense, for example, Broadway tunes, popular music, or movie scores. In addition, the music for the mass must be performed live and not pre-recorded. Admittedly, some music may have meaning for the married couple, but may not be appropriate for a Catholic rite of worship. For this reason, the priest must give final approval for all musical selections in advance of the wedding in consultation with the parish director of music.

Meeting with the Parish Director of Music – It is required that you meet either in person or by phone, the parish director of music Mr. Francisco Flores at least two months before your wedding to plan the music. He can be contacted at (323) 388-8915. He can also provide referrals for other available cantors and musicians. For a \$200 fee payable at the church office, Mr. Flores will play and sing at your wedding. If you wish to engage the services of a mariachi group or other outside musicians or cantors, they must be approved by the music director. They must be familiar with the Catholic mass or wedding ceremony and have formal musical training. After you have contacted the music director, you can contact the priest to plan the wedding ceremony. The musician's fee is due at the time of the meeting with the priest.

Wedding Program – If you plan to print a wedding program, please allow the priest to review the program before it is printed. If your wedding will be celebrated within a Mass, include a paragraph in your program requesting that non-Catholic guests not present themselves for Holy Communion. You may wish to include the following text in your program.

During Holy Communion, those who are practicing Catholics and are properly disposed, in a state of grace and who have fasted for one hour before the mass, may come forward to receive Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. All others are invited to come forward for a blessing or to remain prayerfully in their place.

Attendants, Dress Code, and Church Facilities

Attendants – Both the bride and the groom are permitted up to seven attendants each including the bridesmaids, the Maid of Honor, the Best Man and the groomsmen, the ring bearers, and flower girls. Exceptions to this policy must be referred to the pastor. If children are asked to serve as ring bearers or flower girls, they must be of age to walk unassisted down the church aisle. After the children have taken part in the procession, they should sit with family member for the duration of the liturgy. No animals are permitted in the church, other than those trained as service animals.

Dressing and Waiting Areas – St. Vincent's does not have a dressing room for the bride and her bridal party. A bride and her attendants must come to the Church on time and fully prepared. There is no food or drink allowed inside the Church. The designated waiting area is. The narthex or entrance to the church. All private articles or belongings brought into the church must be either carried by the owner during the liturgy or removed and placed in private cars before the ceremony begins. If the bride or groom is late and the wedding ceremony is delayed fifteen minutes, the priest may abbreviate the ceremony, exclude certain planned music, or exclude the celebration of the mass.

Dress Code – Your wedding gown and the gowns of your wedding attendants and family members must in conformity with the following policy:

Dresses for women must have sleeves that cover the shoulders (i.e., fabric extension of the bodice that caps at the shoulder). Halter-tops, straps, and sleeveless dresses are not appropriate inside a Catholic Church. If the bride, the attendants, or members of the family wish to wear a revealing gown or a gown without sleeves, please wear a shawl or other shoulder coverings. These coverings may be removed for the wedding photos inside the church. Clothing for men should include collared shirts, dress pants, and hard soled shoes. Jeans, T-shirts, gym shoes, and other like casual or sportswear are not permitted.

Please communicate this dress code policy with anyone attending your wedding including the photographers and other support service personnel. The nuptial liturgy is a sacred celebration which takes place in a consecrated Temple of Divine Worship before Almighty God. It is for this reason that such an occasion requires corresponding dignity and modesty in all the members of the wedding party. We leave it to the discretion of the bride and groom to apply these policies to your choice of apparel, but if anyone among your wedding party or guests appears in Church in clear violation of the above policy, that person will be asked not to take part in the wedding ceremony and may be asked to leave the church. There are no exceptions to this policy. If you are unsure about violations to this dress code, you may speak to the pastor in advance of your wedding date.

Restrooms – Since St. Vincent’s is a beautiful and historic church completed in 1925, means that there no restrooms fit for use inside the church. Restroom facilities are located outside in the back of the Church near the parking lot. Restrooms will be opened thirty minutes before the nuptial liturgy begins and closed 30 minutes afterward the conclusion of the wedding. We ask that children be accompanied by their parents when going to the restroom.

Parking – Guests are asked to park in the parking lot next to the Church at 2455 South Figueroa Street marked, “Mount St. Mary’s University”. Please discourage your guests from parking at the church offices at 621 West Adams Blvd. This parking lot is private and unavailable for public parking.

Alcohol and Illegal Drugs – Alcohol and illegal drugs are prohibited inside the church, on the church grounds, or in the parking lot. If anyone in the wedding party appears to be intoxicated or in possession of alcohol or illegal drugs, they will be asked to leave immediately. If the bride or groom appears to be intoxicated, the wedding will be immediately cancelled, since intoxication prevents the valid exchange of marital vows.

Decorations, Flowers, and Photography

Decorations – St. Vincent’s Church was constructed in the Spanish baroque style with influence from the California mission architecture. Because of the beauty and highly decorated architecture of the church, we do not encourage elaborate decorations. Couples may choose to place

extra flowers arrangements near the high altar or at the side altars, but this is not required. We ask that any seasonal displays be left undisturbed.

Prohibited are adhesive tape, staples, glue, pins, or any other materials that may damage the wood or stone of the pews, doors, and altars. If you wish to use bows to adorn the pews, they may be attached with string or ribbons, but must not damage the finish. All decorations on the pews must be removed before departure. Nothing may be placed upon the main altar or high altar.

Flowers – Your wedding flowers for the ceremony may include up to four arrangements for the high altar on either side of the Tabernacle. Only fresh, live flowers or greenery may be used. Flowers should be placed in plastic containers; no glass vases allowed. Once placed in the sanctuary, we would highly encourage that they should not be removed and used for the reception or other purposes. There is no space for other candelabras or other flower arrangements.

The Church Aisle – Floor runners are not permitted in the church aisle. St. Vincent's does not allow the scattering of rose petals or any other items/materials during the procession or at the conclusion of the wedding outside the church. Such prohibited items include rice, confetti, balloons, bubbles, and plant material.

Photography and Videography – In order to maintain reverence before, during and after the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage, we ask that you explain these policies to your photographer and videographer:

- Before the wedding, the family photos may be taken on the grounds outside the church one hour before the wedding begins. After the wedding, there is 30 minutes for family photos inside the church at the conclusion of the nuptial liturgy. During the time after the wedding, the wedding coordinators will clean and prepare the church for other events. Please confirm the time for taking pictures when you plan the wedding with the priest and the wedding coordinator.
- Photographers and Videographers must be attired modestly and appropriately.
- The photographer may take flash photos of the procession from the front of the church. There will be no flash photography after the ceremony begins.
- After the bride and groom enter the sanctuary, all photos must be taken in the pews or the side aisles of the sanctuary. Photographers should keep their movements to a minimum during the marriage ceremony. They may never enter the sanctuary.
- No aerial drones may be used inside the church or on the church grounds.

We have read and understand the requirements for the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage at St. Vincent's Catholic Church within the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. We agree to respect and abide by the guidelines for weddings as established by the parish.

Signatures

Bride: _____

Groom: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Title: _____

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