

Marriage Guidelines

St. Vincent DePaul Catholic Church



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Guidelines for Weddings at St. Vincent's Catholic Church

Marriage Preparation

Marriage is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, established by God and raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament. Spouses freely and permanently give themselves to one another in a bond marked by fidelity, indissolubility, and openness to children.

Because marriage carries such weight, the Catholic Church requires couples to complete at least seven months of marriage preparation before their wedding. St. Vincent's has developed a program to help you meet these requirements. If you are preparing at another parish, please make sure all required documentation reaches St. Vincent's at least two months before your wedding date.

Necessary Components for Marriage Preparation

Meetings with a Catholic Priest. Preparation begins when you meet with a priest, who works with you throughout the process. If no impediments arise, he will help you schedule your wedding and will meet with you regularly in the months beforehand. Office hours are preferred, but evening and weekend meetings can be arranged. If you cancel or reschedule your wedding, you may need to restart the preparation process.

FOCCUS Inventory and Sponsor Couple Program. The FOCCUS inventory is a compatibility survey that helps you discuss the strengths and challenges of your relationship before marriage. Take it in person at the parish office (213-749-8950) or online, with results sent automatically to the priest. After reviewing your results together, the priest will pair you with a sponsor couple, who will meet with you over a series of sessions using a provided workbook.

Official Sacramental Records. Bring official baptismal certificates — issued within the last six months and bearing the parish seal — to your first meeting with the priest, along with any notations for First Communion and Confirmation. Obtain these from the church where each sacrament was received. Catholics missing a sacrament should contact the office about RCIA. If a non-Catholic party was baptized, please provide documentation; a signed statement from a family member or credible witness will suffice if none exists.

Previous Marriages. Because marriage is sacred, a Catholic party must never have been previously married, and the wedding must take place before an authorized priest or deacon with two witnesses. A Catholic married outside the Church — before a judge, justice of the peace, or non-Catholic minister — needs a bishop's dispensation (a “Lack of Form”) to marry in the Church.

Annulments. The Catholic Church does not recognize civil divorce as ending a marriage. Anyone previously married in the Church must obtain an annulment — a tribunal's declaration that the earlier marriage lacked an essential element of a valid union — before marrying again in the Church. A civil divorce alone does not grant this freedom. The priest can guide you through the annulment process; bring copies of all previous marriage licenses, divorce decrees, and any annulment decrees to your first appointment.

Prenuptial Witness Affidavits. Two witnesses each for the bride and groom — family members who have known them for at least ten years — must complete an affidavit before a priest, attesting that the person is baptized, not currently married, and intends to follow the Church's teaching on marriage.

Archdiocesan Engaged Couple Programs and Natural Family Planning. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles offers Engaged Couple classes and retreats, online and in person; see <https://familylife.lacatholics.org/marriage-prep-programs>. Please provide the priest with your certificate of

completion for your wedding file. St. Vincent's has partnered with a medical doctor to provide classes on Natural Family Planning; see the priest who is preparing you for more information.

Marriage License. You are responsible for obtaining your civil marriage license (check requirements and fees with the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk) and bringing it to the parish office one month before your wedding. Licenses are valid for 120 days; St. Vincent's cannot perform a wedding without a valid license.

Marriage Preparation Checklist

Complete every item below and submit signed paperwork to the office at least two months before your wedding date.

- ☐ Signed Prenuptial Investigation
- ☐ Official baptismal certificate(s), with notations (or certificates) for First Communion and Confirmation
- ☐ Copies of any previous marriage licenses, divorce decrees, or declarations of nullity
- ☐ Wedding date set with the front office
- ☐ Wedding Policy read and signed
- ☐ FOCCUS Survey completed
- ☐ Meetings set with the priest
- ☐ Meetings with sponsor couple
- ☐ Certificate of completion, Engaged Couples Class/Retreat
- ☐ Natural Family Planning class
- ☐ Prenuptial Witness Affidavits of Free Status (two for bride, two for groom)
- ☐ Civil marriage license (obtained one month before the wedding)

Wedding Ceremony Planning Checklist

- ☐ Wedding Guidelines reviewed with regard to liturgy and music
- ☐ Wedding liturgy planning meeting with the priest (two months before the wedding), using the planning booklet "Together for Life"
- ☐ Meeting with music director to assist with the choice of music
- ☐ Musicians scheduled and fees paid
- ☐ Cantor and other musicians' fees paid (optional if no cantor or other musicians)
- ☐ Wedding program submitted for review (optional if no program)
- ☐ Wedding rehearsal coordinator contacted and rehearsal scheduled

Breakdown of Fees and Costs

A wedding at St. Vincent's Catholic Church requires the following fees, which do not cover flowers or photography. Please pay by cash, debit, or credit card; personal checks are not accepted.

Fee	Amount
Fee for wedding at St. Vincent's Church	\$2,100
Fee for Wedding Coordinator	\$225

If you cancel eight months or more before your wedding, you will receive a \$2,025 refund (a \$300 fee applies to cancellations, date changes, or time changes). Cancellations made less than seven months before the ceremony are non-refundable. Only one rescheduling or cancellation is allowed; a second forfeits all fees.

The Wedding Ceremony

Liturgy and Music

A wedding is a public act of worship within the Body of Christ, not merely a private or family celebration. Its liturgical rites are ordered to the praise of God. You will meet with the priest during your preparation to plan the details below.

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

- Friday, 4:00 pm (church access 3:30–5:30 pm; time negotiable, contact the priest)
- Saturday, 9:00 am (access 8:30–10:30 am)
- Saturday, 12:00 pm (access 11:30 am–1:30 pm)
- Saturday, 3:00 pm (access 2:30–4:30 pm)

Weddings are not celebrated on Holy Days of Obligation, on August 15 (Assumption) or November 2 (All Souls' Day) if a feast day falls on a Friday or Saturday, or during the Holy Triduum. The parish may restrict other dates according to the liturgical calendar.

Where. Weddings must take place in a Catholic church building — never in homes, outdoors, or other venues. With the bishop's permission, a Catholic marrying a non-Catholic may celebrate the wedding in the non-Catholic party's church.

When a Wedding Mass Is Appropriate. A wedding Mass is celebrated when both parties are practicing Catholics; weddings between a Catholic and a non-Catholic take place outside of Mass.

Readings and Responsorial Psalm. For a Nuptial Mass, you may choose Scripture readings and the responsorial psalm from an approved list, with the priest. If the Mass fulfills a Sunday obligation, the lectionary's Sunday readings apply instead.

Visiting Priests and Deacons. St. Vincent's priests normally officiate. To invite a priest or deacon from elsewhere to preside or assist, please let us know as early as possible; clergy from outside the Archdiocese of Los Angeles need a letter of good standing. Non-Catholic clergy may be present in the sanctuary but may not preside.

Participation of Family and Friends. Family or friends may serve as lectors or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. Lectors must be practicing Catholics in full communion with the Church, competent public speakers, and should attend the rehearsal unless they already serve as lectors at St. Vincent's. Extraordinary ministers should normally already be trained at St. Vincent's.

Wedding Customs. Acceptable customs include placing a bouquet at the Marian altar, the exchange of coins (las arras), the gift of a Bible and rosary, and the wedding lasso (el lazo de boda). Secular traditions such as unity candles or the mixing of sand or spices are not permitted, as they do not originate from Catholic tradition.

Rehearsals. Rehearsals are held on a weekday evening before the wedding, last about an hour, and conclude by 6:00 pm. Please arrive at least 15 minutes early. Everyone with an active role in the ceremony must attend, including:

- The wedding couple
- The best man, groomsmen, maid of honor, and bridesmaids
- Flower girls and ring bearers
- Parents of the couple
- Lectors
- Offertory gift bearers and extraordinary ministers of Communion
- Altar servers
- Ushers and greeters

Parish Wedding Coordinator. The parish assigns a wedding coordinator to organize the rehearsal, arrange the procession, and ensure the ceremony runs smoothly; the coordinator will normally contact the bride to schedule the rehearsal. The \$50 stipend is included in your payment to the church.

Music. Only sacred, liturgical music, performed live, is permitted — not vocal or instrumental music associated with secular romance (for example, Broadway, popular, or film music). The music director gives final approval on all selections. Outside musicians may not use the church's organ or piano and must bring their own instruments, microphones, stands, and cables; an outlet is available for amplification equipment.

Meeting with the Music Director. Meet in person or by phone with Music Director Risa Larson, (310) 210-2989, at least two months before your wedding to plan the music. She can also refer available cantors and musicians. Mariachi groups or other outside musicians must be approved by her and familiar with the Catholic Mass or wedding rite.

Wedding Program. Please have the priest review your program before it is printed. If your wedding includes a Mass, add a note asking non-Catholic guests not to come forward for Communion — for example: “During Holy Communion, practicing Catholics in a state of grace who have fasted for one hour 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. The bride and groom may each have up to seven attendants (bridesmaids, maid of honor, best man, groomsmen, ring bearers, and flower girls); exceptions require the pastor's approval. Child attendants

must be able to walk the aisle unassisted and should sit with family after the procession. Only trained service animals are permitted in the church.

Dressing and Waiting Areas. St. Vincent's has no dressing room; the bride and her party must arrive fully prepared. No food or drink is allowed inside the church; the narthex serves as the waiting area. Personal belongings must be carried during the liturgy or left in cars beforehand. If the ceremony is delayed 15 minutes or more, the priest may shorten it, omitting planned music or the Mass.

Dress Code. Women's dresses must cover the shoulders; halter tops, straps, and sleeveless styles need a shawl or other covering (which may be removed for photos inside the church). Men should wear collared shirts, dress pants, and hard-soled shoes — jeans, T-shirts, and athletic wear are not permitted. Please share this policy with your photographer and other vendors. Because the wedding takes place in a consecrated church before Almighty God, we ask everyone to dress with corresponding dignity and modesty; there are no exceptions, and anyone in clear violation may be asked not to take part in the ceremony or to leave. Contact the pastor in advance with any questions.

Restrooms. St. Vincent's, a historic church completed in 1925, has no restrooms inside. Facilities are located outside near the parking lot and are open from 30 minutes before the ceremony until 30 minutes after. Please accompany children to the restroom.

Parking. Guests should park in the lot at 2455 South Figueroa Street, marked “Mount St. Mary's University.” Please do not direct guests to the parish offices at 621 West Adams Blvd — that lot is private. There is overflow parking at 2333 South Figueroa Street, at St. Vincent DePaul Primary School.

Alcohol and Illegal Drugs. Alcohol and illegal drugs are prohibited inside the church, on the grounds, and in the parking lot. Anyone found intoxicated or in possession will be asked to leave immediately. An intoxicated bride or groom cannot validly exchange marital vows, and the wedding will be cancelled.

Decorations, Flowers, and Photography

Decorations. St. Vincent's Spanish Baroque architecture, influenced by the California missions, is already richly decorated, so elaborate additions are discouraged. Extra flower arrangements near the high or side altars are optional; please leave any seasonal displays undisturbed. Tape, staples, glue, and pins that could damage wood or stone are prohibited — attach pew bows with string or ribbon only, and remove all decorations before leaving. Nothing may be placed on the main altar.

Flowers. Up to four fresh flower or greenery arrangements are permitted at the high altar, on either side of the Tabernacle, in plastic (not glass) containers. Please leave them in the sanctuary rather than moving them to the reception; there is no additional space for candelabras or other arrangements.

The Church Aisle. Floor runners are not permitted, nor is the scattering of rose petals, rice, confetti, balloons, bubbles, or other plant material during the procession or afterward.

Photography and Videography. To maintain reverence throughout the celebration, please share these policies with your photographer and videographer:

- Outdoor family photos may be taken one hour before the wedding; indoor photos for 30 minutes afterward — confirm timing with the priest and wedding coordinator.
- Photographers and videographers must dress modestly and appropriately.
- Flash photography of the procession is allowed only before the ceremony begins.

- Once the couple enters the sanctuary, photos may be taken only from the pews or side aisles, with minimal movement; photographers may never enter the sanctuary.
- Aerial drones are not permitted inside the church or on the grounds.

Signatures

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 established by the parish.

Bride:

Groom:

Witness:

Date:

Title:

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