

Requirements for Marriage at Saint Francis Xavier Church

Marriage in the Catholic Church is a sacred covenant and, between two baptized Christians, a Sacrament. The Church requires that couples meet certain spiritual, canonical, and civil requirements before they can marry.

1. Contact the Parish Early

- Couples should contact the parish **at least six to twelve months before** their desired wedding before the desired wedding date.
- No wedding date should be finalized until it has been approved by the Pastor or parish.

2. Freedom to Marry

Both parties must be free to marry according to Church law. This means:

- They are not currently married to another person.
- Any previous marriage has ended by the death of a spouse or has been declared null through the Church's annulment process.
- They are entering marriage freely, without force or grave fear.

3. Capacity to Give Valid Consent

Each person must:

- Understand the nature of Christian marriage.
- Freely exchange consent.
- Intend a lifelong union.
- Be faithful to one another.
- Be open to the gift of children.

4. Baptism

- At least one party must be a baptized Catholic.
- If both parties are baptized Christians, the marriage is a sacrament.
- If one party is not baptized, the Catholic party must obtain a dispensation from disparity of cult through the bishop.
- Catholics must provide a newly issued baptismal certificate (issued within the last six months)
- Non- Catholic Christians should provide proof of baptism if available.

5. Confirmation

Catholics who have not yet received the Sacrament of Confirmation are strongly encouraged to receive it before marriage if it can be done without undue difficulty.

6. Marriage Preparation

Complete the parish or diocesan marriage preparation program. This may include:

- Meetings with the priest
- A marriage preparation program.
- A premarital inventory
- Instruction in the Church's teaching on marriage and family life, including Natural Family Planning.

7. Required Documents

The following documents are commonly required:

- Recent Baptismal Certificate (issued within the last six months) for the Catholic party.
- Confirmation certificate (if not noted on the baptismal certificate).
- Baptismal certificate of the non-Catholic Christian party (if applicable).
- Government-issued photo identification.
- Civil marriage license before the wedding.
- Affidavits or witness statements establishing freedom to marry.
- Any necessary annulment decree or death certificate of a previous spouse.

8. Premarital Canonical Investigation

The priest or deacon will complete the required Church paperwork, including:

- Prenuptial investigation.
- Marriage file.
- Any required permissions or dispensations.

9. Mixed Marriage or Marriage with a Non-Baptized Person (When needed)

If one party is:

- **A baptized non-Catholic Christian:** the bishop's permission for a mixed marriage is ordinarily required.
- **Not baptized:** a dispensation from disparity of cult is required.

10. Proper Form of Marriage

Catholics ordinarily marry:

- Before a Catholic priest or deacon.
- In the presence of two witnesses.
- In a Catholic church or chapel, unless permission has been granted to marry elsewhere.

11. Reception of the Sacraments

Catholics are encouraged to:

- Participate regularly in the Eucharist.
- Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation before the wedding to prepare spiritually.

12. Civil Requirements

The couple must comply with the civil laws governing marriage in their state or country, including obtaining a valid marriage license.

13. Planning the Wedding Liturgy

- Meet with the priest or deacon to plan the wedding liturgy.
- Choose Scripture readings, prayers, and music that are appropriate for a Catholic wedding.
- Discuss whether the wedding will take place within Mass or outside Mass.

Recommended Timeline

Couples should contact their parish **at least six to twelve months before** their desired wedding date. This allows sufficient time for marriage preparation, gathering documents, completing required programs, and fulfilling all canonical and civil requirements.

The Church's preparation process is not merely administrative; it is intended to help couples deepen their relationship with Christ and one another so that they may enter into the vocation of Christian marriage with faith, maturity, and joy.

A rehearsal is normally held a day or two before the wedding with the wedding party, officiant, and others participating in the liturgy.

Marriage in the Catholic Church is more than a ceremony, it is a **sacrament**, a lifelong covenant established by God in which husband and wife become a visible sign of Christ's faithful love for His Church. Careful preparation helps couples begin their married life with a strong spiritual foundation. The Church also asks that the bride and groom freely intend: to enter marriage without coercion, to establish a lifelong union, to remain faithful to one another and to be open to having children from God and raising them up in the Catholic Faith as far as possible.