

St. Mary Magdalen Catholic Church

Dear Friends in Christ,

Praise be Jesus Christ, now and forever!

Your inquiry about getting married at Saint Mary Magdalen Parish is a sign of your commitment to the Lord and your recognition that you desire God, the author of human marriage, to be at the center of your married life. Whether one or both of you are longtime parishioners or visitors, know that you are most welcome here.

The Catholic Church sees marriage as a sacred covenant, a partnership for the whole of life by which a man and woman vow themselves to each other in a relationship defined by faithfulness and ordered toward fruitfulness. As Saint John Paul II wrote: “The very preparation for Christian marriage is itself a journey of faith. It is a special opportunity for the engaged to rediscover and deepen the faith received in baptism [and] in this way they come to recognize and freely accept their vocation to follow Jesus Christ and to serve the kingdom of God in the married state” (*Familiaris Consortio* 51). These policies and procedures are meant to foster just that: a spirit of discernment proper to the period of engagement and the rediscovery and deepening of faith in Jesus Christ.

Due to the presence of several local wedding venues, our parish has grown in popularity for weddings in recent years. For this reason, I ask you to read all of the attached guidelines and procedures before meeting with one of the parish priests or deacons. Doing so will help to clear up any confusion so that the wedding date can be set and you can begin the joyful process of preparing spiritually for your marriage.

May the Lord grant you peace!

Rev. Eric J. Banecker

Pastor

A Couple's Wedding Policy Guide and Timeline for St. Mary Magdalen Parish

Welcome! Congratulations on your upcoming marriage. Below are essential guidelines and a timeline to help you discern, plan, and avoid unnecessary issues regarding your wedding at St. Mary Magdalen.

Verifying 'Freedom to Marry' and Setting the Date

Up to two years before the wedding date.

- Step One:** All inquiring couples must fill out our online [Wedding Inquiry Form \(HERE\)](#), which will ask for basic information, including names, addresses, churches of baptism, and desired date (including whether or not they are flexible on that date).

Wedding Times (standard times, unless otherwise accepted):

- 2:30 p.m. Friday
 - 4:30 p.m. Friday (not available on First Friday of each month)
 - 12:30 p.m. Saturday
 - 2:30 p.m. Saturday
 - 4:30 p.m. Sunday (Nuptial Ceremony only)
- Step Two:** After submitting your inquiry form, our wedding team will contact you regarding the requested date availability. If your date is available, a staff member will set up a 30 to 45-minute meeting with a parish priest or deacon as soon as possible. If the date is unavailable, the couple may choose an alternative date/time before the Initial Wedding Interview.

The wedding date will not be set until the Initial Wedding Interview occurs.

- Step Three:** When the priest or deacon meets with you as a couple, he verifies your 'freedom to marry' (and addresses any issues arising from one or both parties being of a '*sui iuris*' church). He collects the required \$250 wedding deposit along with the couple's signed agreement to adhere to all policies and procedures outlined in this guide. The priest or deacon officially signs off on the wedding and rehearsal date by writing it in the Liturgical Calendar and the newly created wedding file for the couple.

What does "freedom to marry" mean?

There are three basic requirements for a valid Catholic wedding:

1. The couple must be a man and a woman free from impediments preventing them from marriage. The most obvious impediment concerns whether either party has been married previously (though there are others). Depending on the circumstances, a prior bond would delay the scheduling of the wedding date until the situation can be resolved at the Metropolitan Tribunal. The initial meeting with the priest or deacon can clear up any questions in this regard.
2. Both parties must be able to give and accept consent to the marriage freely and irrevocably.
3. The couple must be married according to the laws of the Church, which requires that at least one party be a Catholic in full communion with the Church.

N.B. for family members: We are most grateful for their help and support in encouraging engaged couples to marry at Saint Mary Magdalen. Our parish policy requires us to work directly with the bride and groom on all communications about their marriage preparation, including preparing the nuptial liturgy. This process ensures a clear communication channel and allows the couple to be protagonists in their preparation for marriage.

Couples' Marriage Preparation, Part 1

One year to six months before the wedding date.

- Step One:** After the initial process and date are set, the couple should complete an online **Marriage Preparation Inventory (HERE)** and meet with a priest, deacon, and/or sponsor couple to review the results.
- Step Two:** The couple selects and attends a **Marriage Preparation Course** (often called "Pre-Cana"). For more information on the area's Marriage Preparation options, visit **HERE**.

N.B. If the couple lives at some distance from St. Mary Magdalen and their home pastor has agreed to prepare them for marriage and complete all accompanying paperwork, whatever directives he gives are acceptable.

Couples' Marriage Preparation, Part 2—Completion of Canonical Procedures

Six months before the wedding date.

- Step One:** The couple should contact their churches of Baptism and Confirmation and request new certificates to be sent to Saint Mary Magdalen. For those living outside the parish boundaries, the couple must also request a 'letter of permission' to marry from the parish where they currently reside or are registered (one letter is sufficient).

Once the required certificates are received, our parish office will schedule a meeting with the priest or deacon, who will prepare the couple and accompany them in the final months before marriage. Please note that the meeting does not have to be the priest or deacon who met with them initially. However, it should be the priest or deacon who will preside at their wedding unless they have chosen to have a guest priest officiate.

- Step Two:** The priest or deacon meets with the couple. During this meeting, he gathers the previously submitted Baptism certificates and the Marriage Preparation completion certificate (and, if neither party is a parishioner, a letter of permission to marry). Then, he conducts the **Pre-nuptial Investigation (PNI)** and obtains the names of two witnesses for each party who can verify their freedom to marry. Couples should also bring the results of the Marriage Preparation Inventory as part of their Marriage Preparation (Pre-Cana) Course.

Hospitality Walkthrough & Liturgy Preparation

Two months before the wedding date.

- Step One:** A member of our hospitality/musician team sets up a meeting with the couple to provide a walkthrough tour of the physical spaces, including the room where the bride can go when she arrives and the location of other necessary facilities, along with the procedures for the entrance procession and seating at the wedding.
- Step Two:** A team member will also assist the couple in choosing the musical selections if they have chosen the standard cantor and organist. However, if they select a traditional quartet or more musicians, an additional meeting is required at least four months before the wedding date. The couple should also choose the readings and assign ceremony duties (e.g.; readers, those bringing up offertory gifts).

For information on selecting readings and other Nuptial planning questions, visit [HERE](#).

Couples' Marriage Preparation, Part 3—Review Details, Final Questions, Civil License & Fees

One month before the wedding date.

- The couple sets up a 15-minute phone call with the priest or deacon to review the preparations and discuss any final questions or concerns. The couple must ensure that they have obtained the civil marriage license. All fees are due at this time.

Couples' Marriage Preparation, Part 4—The Wedding Rehearsal

One or two nights before the wedding.

- Be sure to arrive on time for the rehearsal. There are often other rehearsals, liturgies, or events happening in church after rehearsals. Arriving late means the rehearsal may be rushed, which is not ideal. For a Nuptial Mass, the priest will arrange to hear confessions 30 minutes before or after the rehearsal, depending on the schedule.

Your Wedding Day

The day is here! May God continue to bless you as you unite as one in marriage—now and always.

- Step One:** The bridal party should approach the wedding day with spiritual readiness and joyful spirits to celebrate God's goodness and love. While this occasion calls for celebration, members of the bridal party are asked to refrain from alcoholic beverages until after the wedding ceremony. Anyone visibly intoxicated will not be permitted to participate in the sacred celebration. All are reminded to observe the traditional one-hour fast before receiving Holy Communion, which applies to everything except water and medicine.
- Step Two:** Arrive on time! There is almost always another liturgy after the wedding. Failure to arrive on time will limit time for photos after the wedding and, if particularly egregious, may lead to parts of the ceremony being shortened or eliminated.
- Step Three:** The official witnesses, typically the best man and maid/matron of honor, will sign the marriage register and take the civil marriage license (couple's copy) and parish certificate with them when they leave the church. You may keep these documents. We will submit the official marriage license copy to the Orphan's Court in the county where you obtained your license. Additionally, we will inform your baptismal churches of your marriage.

Important Wedding Information

Booking Your Dates

The rehearsal date and time must be booked when the wedding date is written in our book.

Wedding Times

Standard times, unless otherwise accepted:

- 2:30 p.m. on Friday
- 4:30 p.m. on Friday (*not available on First Friday of each month*)
- 12:30 p.m. on Saturday
- 2:30 p.m. on Saturday
- 4:30 p.m. on Sunday (*Nuptial ceremony only*)

Rehearsal Times

Standard times, unless otherwise accepted:

- 4:30 p.m. or 5:30 p.m. on Thursday
- 4:30 p.m. or 5:30 p.m. on Friday (*4:30 p.m. only on First Fridays*)
- 5:30 p.m. on Saturday (*for Sunday weddings*)

Nuptial Ceremony

A Nuptial ceremony consists of an entrance procession, a short prayer, readings from Sacred Scripture, a homily, the Rite of Matrimony (declaration of consent and exchange of vows/rings), the Prayer of the Faithful, the Lord's Prayer, the Nuptial Blessing, the Final Blessing (and if requested, a presentation to the Blessed Virgin Mary).

A bishop, priest, or deacon may preside.

Nuptial Mass

A Nuptial Mass includes all of the above plus the singing of the *Gloria in excelsis* before the Collect, and the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist and distribution of Holy Communion. At times, the couple is limited in what readings may be chosen if the wedding falls on the day of a solemnity. The priest or deacon who books the wedding date will indicate whether this applies to the date they have chosen.

Only a bishop or priest may preside (though a deacon may give the homily in exceptional circumstances).

At Saint Mary Magdalen, couples who practice their faith and have chosen not to live together until they are married are welcome to schedule a **Nuptial Mass**. All other couples are most welcome to have a **Nuptial Ceremony**.

Guest Priests

A note on guest priests: If you have a family member or friend who is a Catholic priest whom you would like to preside at your wedding, please indicate this in the initial meeting with our priest. He is most welcome to preside at the wedding at SMM. We request a letter from the priest indicating his availability to preside over and his willingness to complete all required paperwork and preparations when the date is set. Based on our wedding timeline, he should send the marriage paperwork to our parish (through the Archdiocesan Chancery Office if applicable) accompanied by a letter of good standing (*celebret*) if necessary. He will then receive a delegation to preside at the wedding.

Guest Musicians

Regarding guest musicians: Our parish musicians work hard to ensure that every wedding is of the highest quality, providing beautiful and liturgically appropriate music in consultation with the couple. All weddings include a fee for the organist and cantor, which is standard. For couples who desire additional instrumentalists or a traditional chant quartet, this can be arranged as well. Guest soloists are welcome to sing a prelude, an offertory motet (Nuptial Mass only), or a Marian hymn, but a parish musician will sing the other parts of the Mass.

Guidelines for the Sacred Liturgy

(Adapted from the guidelines of Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, in Philadelphia.)

- Booklet/Program**—A printed booklet or program is optional and the couple's responsibility. Care must be exercised regarding any copyrighted materials you wish to use (e.g., prayer texts, Scripture texts, music, or music texts). You will need the proper copyright permissions.
- Lectors/Readers**—You may have up to three Lectors for the First Reading, Second Reading, and the Prayer of the Faithful. A family member, a friend, or a wedding party member may read. The lector must be a practicing Catholic if the wedding is a Nuptial Mass. If it is a wedding ceremony, a non-Catholic may read it. Arrangements should be made and discussed with the priest celebrant.

- Offertory Gifts (Nuptial Mass Only)**—You may wish to choose one or two people to bring up the bread and wine at the Offertory. They are to be practicing Catholics. Others may accompany this procession, but only two gifts will be carried.

- Music**—The music before, during, and after the wedding liturgy reflects the Christian meaning of the Marriage Rite. Therefore, all music must be taken from the treasury of sacred repertoire. The hospitality team member/musician will meet with you to plan your music selections.

- Confession**—In preparation to receive the Sacrament of Marriage, we encourage you and those in the wedding party to receive the Sacrament of Penance by going to confession. If you would like, you can schedule this with a parish priest, including at the rehearsal if possible.

- Holy Communion (Nuptial Mass Only)**—Catholic couples may receive Holy Communion under both species (the Host and from the Chalice) on the occasion of their wedding. Catholics in attendance who are properly prepared to receive Holy Communion will receive, in the usual manner, the Host only. For those receiving Communion, the Eucharistic Fast is refraining from food and liquid (except water) for one hour before receiving. Please include in your booklet that only Catholics who are properly prepared may receive Holy Communion.

- Prayer before the Shrine of the Blessed Virgin**—A Marian presentation is an option that is traditionally done at the end of the ceremony. The couple is responsible for any flowers presented at this time.

Decorations

Couples are welcome to provide flowers for the sanctuary for their wedding. Traditionally, two arrangements are provided which are placed on either side of the tabernacle. For those who elect a Marian presentation, the florist traditionally provides white roses for this purpose. The couple may also decorate the ends of the pews with flowers; however, no scotch tape is used on the wood pews.

For insurance and sanitation purposes, runners, rice, flower petals, bubbles, balloons, butterflies, doves, sparklers, and pets are strictly prohibited inside St. Mary Magdalen Church.

Photographer/Videographer

If you decide to have a photographer and/or videographer during the Nuptial Mass or ceremony, they must be instructed to be reverent in church and remain outside the sanctuary for pictures. Flash is permitted. The photographer and videographer names, addresses, and phone numbers must be sent to the parish office one month before the ceremony.

Saint Francis Hall for Rehearsal or Reception

Located on the church's lower level

Active parishioners may request the use of Saint Francis Hall (SFH) for the rehearsal dinner and/or the wedding reception. The hall's use is subject to availability. Additional fees apply.

About Civil Marriage Licenses

You must obtain a civil marriage license from any county in Pennsylvania and present it to the priest or deacon no later than the wedding rehearsal, but preferably two weeks prior.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if I/we have been married before?

If one or both parties have been previously married, a date cannot be set until freedom to marry is obtained. The priest or deacon who meets with you can walk you through this process and help you set the date when it is completed.

What if we are living together?

Economic and societal norms have changed in the past sixty years, such that cohabitation before marriage—formally exceptionally rare—has become commonplace, even in Catholic families. Yet studies have shown that in addition to being a near occasion of sin, this living situation increases the likelihood of divorce. Our parish clergy strongly urge you to separate during this time of engagement, so that you may grow in that mutual friendship and understanding which is the necessary basis for the marital relationship. Couples who choose to continue to cohabit may still have a wedding here in the form of a Nuptial ceremony.

- We are parishioners of St. Mary Magdalen, but we are getting married elsewhere. What do we do?**

We are happy to coordinate your preparation along with all necessary paperwork and prepare it to be sent to the parish where you will be married.

- We live far from the parish. Can our home parish take care of all the preparations?**

Yes! Having a relationship with the local parish priest where you live is very important, even if you choose to be married here for other reasons. At the minimum, the parish priest where you live must give permission for his parishioners to be married outside of his parish. But if he wishes to complete the preparation and paperwork, we would just ask for a letter confirming that at least six months before the wedding date, ideally right as the date is set.

Fees and Payment Schedule

- Initial Deposit** (*non-refundable*):

\$250—*This deposit is due at the first meeting with the priest/deacon.*

- Facilities**

- Church**

\$1500 (\$250 deposit + \$1250)

This fee is due one month before the wedding.

- Saint Francis Hall**

\$200 per hour (3 hr. rental minimum)

This fee is due one month prior to the wedding.

Couples can use the church's lower-level main hall for the rehearsal dinner or reception, based on availability. The fee includes basic setup of tables and chairs. Our event hospitality team can assist couples with SFH details and planning. Additional costs/fees may apply (e.g., caterer, servers, food, linen, flowers, and tableware are not included in the above rate). Room rental use and service contract(s) may be required.

Musician Fees

- Cantor & Organist (Standard)

\$700—*This fee is due one month before the wedding.*

- Quartet and/or Additional Instrumentalists (trumpet, violin, harp)

The fee for these is typically \$200-\$300, in addition to the standard cantor/organist fee.

- Chant/polyphonic quartet/violin: \$1250-\$1750 (replaces standard cantor/organist fee)

N.B: In addition, requests for a quartet or additional instrumentalists must be made four months before the wedding date.

N.B: Honoraria for priest/deacon, sacristan, and altar servers are most appreciated but not required.

Date of Wedding: _____

Couple's Signatures

We have read these policies and procedures of St. Mary Magdalen Church and we agree to all terms contained herein.

Signature of Bride

Signature of Groom

Bride Name - Print

Groom Name - Print

Date

Date

St. Mary Magdalen Parish's Marriage Policy as of March 25, 2025.