



*Ave María Catholic Church
Parker, Colorado*

Preparing the Wedding Liturgy Outside the Mass

"To love, honor, and respect"



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Introduction:

Congratulation on your decision to embrace your lives with Christ in the Sacrament of Marriage. The Ave María community is a family of Catholic Christian believers who affirm and support you. Our community believes that marriage is a lifetime covenant, open to Jesus’ invitation to lead fruitful lives of love and service. We confidently believe that you and your future husband/wife- to-be, will live together faithfully for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health truly to the end of your lives. There are 4 distinct and separate stages of marriage preparation: (a) *Remote*: the life-long marriage preparation; (b) *Proximate*: the year before the wedding; (c) *Immediate*: two months before the wedding; and (d) lastly, the actual celebration of the sacrament of matrimony. This marriage preparation process affects all 4 of these stages.

The Necessity of Faith:

Marriage is one of the seven sacraments in the Catholic Church. A sacrament is an outward sign of God’s inward grace upon/within us. Today, theologians would say that the outward sign of this sacrament is the love of the husband and wife and the inward grace is the love of Jesus Christ for His Church. The special grace received in the Sacrament of Matrimony is the continued sharing and fruitfulness of the love of Jesus Christ by a husband and wife.

People can approach such a reality, only if they have faith. Faith exists in different ways. There is a personal faith: a discovery of the mystery of God in life and a response to him with some degree of trust and love. There is a shared faith: the faith of this Christian community, as it lives out its commitment to Jesus Christ.

There is also *institutional faith*: a collection of believers and traditions of the Church and a code of moral conduct. By the time of the actual wedding, you as an individual should have a basic knowledge of the Catholic faith and hopefully, a desire to participate in continued religious education to learn more.

Faith has an added importance in the Sacrament of Matrimony because of the special role that parents have in a family. Not only are you a couple going to help each other grow as Christians, you are the first witnesses of faith to your children. You are your children's first teacher about your faith by what you feel, think do, and say.

Marriage demands an adult commitment of faith that is complete and lasting. This requires a commitment from you and your future husband/wife-to-be in the preparation for this most important part of your lives together.

Marriage Preparation:

If neither the bride nor the groom is a registered member of the Ave María Parish, you should choose to register in our parish. Registration in a parish is important; it says you wish to be a part of a particular faith community. If you are completing your marriage preparation in another parish or city, please have the marriage preparation documents sent to Ave María. A formal process of preparation for all couples is governed by parish and diocese guidelines. Additionally, there are several required documents. Please refer to page 22-25 for a list.

Within the Diocese of Colorado Springs, there is a 12-month marriage preparation process involving the couple who wishes to wed. The process is comprised of six steps or stages, which

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include: (1) An initial parish meeting with the parish's pastor or deacon; (2) FOCCUS inventory; (3) Natural Family Planning (NFP) training; (4) Marriage Preparation Classes; (5) a couple retreat; and finally, (6) A final meeting with the pastor, deacon, or parish level marriage coordinator.

NOTE: If either of you have been married before, regardless of religion, you must contact the Tribunal Office at the Diocese of Colorado Springs (719-636-2345) for an annulment, before you can enter into a sacramental marriage in the Catholic Church and the marriage preparation process. An annulment or dispensation (as appropriate) must be applied for and a favorable finding must be received by the parish and couple, before the marriage preparation process can be started. After you have contacted the diocese, please let the parish office know what has transpired, so we can help you prepare for your marriage.

Wedding Liturgy Planning:

To comply with the published guidelines from the Diocese of Colorado Springs, once you have decided to celebrate your marriage at Ave María Catholic Church, the first step is to contact the parish to arrange a meeting with the pastor or deacon.

During this initial meeting between the pastor or deacon and the couple, the couple will be asked questions regarding how/when they met; how long have they known each other; what sacraments have they received; future plans as a married couple; reviewing the marriage preparation requirements, etc.

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Additionally, the pastor/deacon may also initiate the diocese's marriage preparation checklist forms to determine the suitability of the couple for the sacrament of marriage and to determine if any annulments and/or dispensations from the church's canon law are required from the diocese's bishop.

The first two issues in the wedding liturgy planning concern the *place* and the *date and time* of the wedding.

a. Place: Currently, in the Catholic Church, wedding liturgies are to be celebrated in the parish church in which the bride or groom are registered. Ave María Church is a beautiful building that accommodates most of our parish sacramental celebrations; with a seating capacity of about 400. The church is air conditioned, has a bride's room, and plenty of parking. Liquor in the church or its buildings (including the gym, kitchen, lunch room, etc.) is not permitted before, during, or after the rehearsal or wedding.

b. Date/Time: Generally speaking, a wedding liturgy may be celebrated on any day of the year with certain exceptions (e.g., weddings are not possible during normally scheduled Sunday Masses; non-availability of the church, priest or deacon, and musicians; etc.).

Because the tone of the church's activities and celebrations during Advent and Lent are subdued, scheduling a wedding during these periods is discouraged.

To minimize last-minute scheduling conflicts and unnecessary frustration and anxiety, you have to schedule the date and time of your wedding with the parish priest, deacon, and main office before finalizing/printing invitations or reserving the after-wedding reception facility.

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Personal Preparation:

In the midst of all the wedding preparation activity, it is important to include "personal preparation" which allows for the fruitful reception of the sacrament. The Church recommends that those to be married draw close to the Lord through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Sacrament of Eucharist.

Cohabitation: It has been proven in many studies that couples who decide to live together before marriage have a much higher rate of divorce than couples, who do not live together before marriage. The Church is obviously concerned about the high instance of divorce in this country and must question the need of the rampant practice of cohabitation. Couples should do everything possible to avoid the scandal of cohabitation prior to marriage and should seek to live separately until then.

Required liturgical roles/functions/ministries:

The wedding liturgy has nearly identical requirements for additional individuals (in addition to the presiding priest or deacon) to fulfill required roles (e.g., proclaimers (lectors); gift bearers; musicians; etc.). Weddings also have the unique roles of maid of honor, best man, ring bearer, etc.

Role of the assembly:

Liturgical celebrations are not private functions, but are scheduled and coordinated celebrations of the Church. As such, when the assembly of people are gathered together to celebrate, everyone is encouraged to participate fully and actively throughout the liturgy—otherwise, it becomes more akin to an audience merely watching a show or a play.

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Liturgical rituals/rites (e.g., baptism; wedding; etc.) were designed to be celebrated of a communal nature and in a communal setting. While the wedding liturgy will be especially special to you, your family, and friends, it equally affects the remainder of the local parish and the universal church, as a whole.

The Couple: the “real” ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage:

The couple themselves are the real ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage in that they give each other to each other via the exchanging of matrimonial vows. The priest or deacon is simply the church’s official witness to the marriage.

Since you will be fulfilling the roles of the actual ministers of your own marriage, the Ave María Catholic Church strongly advises against you assuming any other additional ministries during the liturgical celebration (e.g., proclaimer (lector); EMHC; etc.). During the wedding, you are naturally the center of everyone’s attention. By assuming multiple roles in the same liturgy, it causes undue “busy-ness” and you perform roles which others normally perform for you.

The Presiding Priest or Deacon:

If the wedding is to be celebrated within the Liturgy of the Mass, the presider must be an ordained Catholic priest. When the wedding is to be celebrated outside the Mass, an ordained Catholic priest or deacon may preside.

In accordance with church Canon Law, a general rule of thumb within the Roman Catholic Church stipulates that priests or deacons from outside the parish may only preside at weddings with the permission of that parish’s pastor.

Witnesses:

While the entire gathered assembly at your wedding liturgy are technically “witnesses”, and the priest/deacon are the church’s official witness, at least two of your invited friends and/or family fulfill unique roles in the liturgy and for the church’s official records. These two “witnesses” (who need not be Catholics or baptized) stand near or by you during the marriage rite and attest that the marriage actually took place on the date and time. While these two “witnesses” are traditionally one man (“*the best man*”) and one female (“*the maid of honor*”), it is possible to have two males or two females.

Bridesmaids/Groomsmen:

Bridesmaids and Groomsmen are typically members of the wedding party who assist the couple by fulfilling roles or functions during the liturgy (e.g., proclaimers (lectors); ministers of hospitality; etc.) or simply by their presence and full, active participation in the liturgy.



The Music/Musicians:

In planning any liturgical event (including weddings), the importance of the choice of appropriate musical selections cannot be overstated. A church wedding is first of all a worship service, a celebration of praise and thanksgiving. The norms of liturgy musical selections are that they be: (a) participatory by the assembly, (b) dignified, and (c) befitting of church liturgy. Personal music choices should not contradict the church's understanding and appreciation of marriage. Music must be appropriate for a Christian wedding. The music must express the faith of the Church and of the couple who will be present. The Ave María Catholic Church is staffed with a professional Music Director who is eager to assist you in your musical planning. The wedding liturgy will be well worth the hiring of a professional musician and cantor (at Ave María: \$75.00 each). We request that all musical selections be coordinated through the parish's Musical Director, at least a month in advance of the event, if possible.

Other Ministry Roles/Positions:

a. Proclaimers/Lectors: Specially trained, proficient, and selected parishioners read the Word of God at the Church's Masses. Normal wedding liturgies have two scriptural passages (1 from the Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) and 1 from the New Testament) which will need to be proclaimed (normally by family members or friends). People who serve as "readers" in their home parishes are generally good choices to ask to be lectors at your wedding because of their familiarity with the role. If this is not practical, you may wish to select reader(s) from among the people attending the wedding.

b. Altar Servers:

Although not necessary for a wedding outside the Mass, altar servers may assist the priest or deacon during the liturgy or service. Similar to proclaimers/lectors and EMHCs, servers can be family members and/or friends. Altar servers are an integral part of the scheduled rehearsal before the event. If you (the couple) do not have any individuals who have past training and experience as altar server(s), please contact the parish office for assistance. As a general rule, if a person has no prior experience or formal training as an altar server, it is best not to include them as ministers in this liturgical role/position.

c. Photographers, Photographs, and Videotaping:

For centuries now around the world, still photographs and videotapes of special events in our lives have become our mental photo album and an attractive reminder of these events, especially a wedding. Naturally, we rely on the skills of trained professionals to assist us in this area, since to take the photographs ourselves would seriously interrupt the flow of the event. Over the years, the Church has compiled a set of norms or standards, which we at Ave María Catholic Church request your assistance in following. These include:

1. The couple needs to maintain communication with the designated photographer, to insure they are informed of the correct date and time of the event and any last-minute liturgy and schedule changes or adjustments.
2. The photographer should be positioned discretely to the side and back of the church.
3. The photographer is asked to keep their movement(s) around and within the church to a minimum during the liturgy or service.
4. The photographer is asked to coordinate with the presiding priest before the liturgy begins regarding the taking of photographs during liturgical celebration
5. Opportunity will be afforded the couple, family, friends, and photographer to take or re-take photographs after the service. We ask that you please limit the session to 30 minutes and be sensitive to other weddings or services scheduled afterward.

PLEASE do not interrupt the presiding priest or deacon during the liturgy or service at any time and/or ask them to “do that again, I didn’t get that shot.”

6. Over the years, the more prevalent difficulty during liturgies and services comes not from the professional photographers, but the amateurs in our family or friends. The Ave María Catholic Church asks you to please inform them before the event of these published guidelines to insure that your wedding is indeed a special day without unnecessarily interruptions or incidents.
7. People standing up during the liturgy (e.g., during the scriptural readings; exchange of vows; etc.) not only interrupt the natural flow and distract from of the planned activities, they invariable lock the vision or view of other members of the assembly seated directly behind or next to them.
8. Reverence and discretion are the by-words of the day to insure a pleasant and memorable occasion.

Programs (also referred to as Orders of Service/Worship Aids):

A nicely designed and organized, printed program (in Catholic Churches referred to as “Orders of Service or Worship Aids”) can and often do enhance the gathered assembly’s active and full participation in the liturgy—whether it is the Mass or a service. If you desire to utilize an Order of Service or Worship Aid, we ask that the couple coordinate with the parish’s office or wedding coordinator before it is finalized and sent to print.

Orders of Service or Worship Aids are ordinarily distributed by ushers or bridesmaids at the entry of the church to people as they arrive to attend the liturgy. The parish office may have sample programs, from previous weddings, for you to preview.

A Marriage of a Catholic and a non-Catholic:
(An Interfaith Marriage)

“Years ago, it was not unusual for a non-Catholic engaged to a Catholic to “convert” to Catholicism prior to the wedding. Often this was done to avoid any conflict that a difference of religion may have presented to the marriage and to the upbringing of children.

Today, the situation is somewhat different. While the number of marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics has increased over the past 20 years, more and more of these couples have decided to maintain their different religious affiliations. The Catholic Church’s own policy for receiving new members (the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) is sensitive to this concern and cautions against joining the church only because of an upcoming marriage to a Catholic.

Because faith is an essential element in marriage, the Church has a special concern when people of different faith traditions marry. It is the Church’s concern that the faith of both parties not be hindered or harmed by the union, that each party will respect the conscience of the other, and that the couple will share their faith(s) with their children. To this end, the Catholic party is asked to reaffirm his/her faith, to do all they

can to continue to grow in their faith and share that faith with their children by having them baptized Catholic and brought up in the Church. The non-Catholic party must be aware of the Catholic party’s intention(s).

Additionally, the parish priest or deacon may be required by the Church’s canon law to write to the local bishop to apply for one of the following:

* ***Permission to Enter into a Mixed Marriage*** for a Catholic marrying someone who is baptized, but is not a Catholic.

* ***Dispensation from Disparity of Cult*** for a Catholic marrying someone who is not baptized.

* ***Dispensation from Canonical Form*** is required when someone other than a Catholic priest or deacon is going to receive the consent (vows). Usually, this means that the wedding is going to be celebrated in a non-Catholic Church and the minister that will preside is from a non-Catholic parish.

* ***Permission to Celebrate the Wedding Outside of a Church*** is required, as the title states, when the wedding is to be celebrated in a place other than a Catholic Church. This permission is often sought when a Catholic marries a Jew, Muslim, or other non-Christian” (Covino, 16-17). Note, within the Diocese of Colorado Springs and the Ave María Catholic Church, outdoor weddings or in other than a Church are strongly discouraged—to uphold the appropriate sanctity and reverence due the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Marriage

Marriage Celebrations and Liturgical Rehearsals:

As a general practice at Ave María, the times best suited for marriage celebrations at Ave María's facilities are on Saturdays at 1:00 pm or 2:00 pm. Rehearsals are generally held the day before (Friday) at 5:30 pm. and involves the marriage coordinator, priest/deacon, lector(s); EMHCs; couple, bridesmaids, best-man, escorts, ushers, altar servers, etc.

Forms of Wedding Liturgy

Within the Roman Catholic Church, the Rite of Marriage provides 3 different liturgies for the celebration of marriage:

1. **The Rite of Celebrating Marriage Outside the Mass:**
Is generally used when a Catholic marries a baptized person who is from another Christian denominational church.

GATHERING AND ENTRANCE RITES:

- Gathering of the Assembly
- Procession
- Greeting
- Opening Prayer

LITURGY OF THE WORD:

- Old Testament Reading
- Responsorial Psalm
- New Testament Reading
- Gospel Acclamation
- Gospel
- Homily

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MARRIAGE RITE:

- Address and Statement of Intentions
- Consent and Exchange of Vows
- Blessing and Exchange of Rings
- General Intercessions
- Nuptial Blessing

CONCLUDING RITES:

- The Lord's Prayer
- Blessing
- Recessional



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2. **The Rite of Celebrating Marriage Between a Catholic and an Unbaptized Person:**

Is generally used when a Catholic marries someone who is not Christian.

GATHERING AND ENTRANCE RITES:

Gathering of the Assembly
Procession
Rite of Welcome

LITURGY OF THE WORD:

Old Testament Reading
Responsorial Psalm
New Testament Reading
Gospel Acclamation
Gospel
Homily

MARRIAGE RITE:

Address and Statement of Intentions
Consent and Exchange of Vows
Blessing and Exchange of Rings
General Intercessions
Nuptial Blessing

CONCLUDING RITES:

The Lord's Prayer
Blessing
Recessional



CONSIDERATIONS IN DECORATING

The Environment of the Wedding Liturgy:

Tradition and culture have imported signs, symbols, customs, gestures, and rituals into every church liturgy—including marriage. Some help us to actuate or emphasize the importance of the sacrament and marital unity, while others are outdated and tend to confuse or interrupt the liturgy. “Tradition is the living faith of the dead; [literal insistence of traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. (Covino, 103)”

When we use the word “environment” concerning church liturgy, we are referring to the larger space in which the main activity or actions of the liturgy will occur. A rule of thumb for decorations, lighting, acoustics, etc., is that they need to express a sense of décor, reverence, and be of conservative number and beauty. They are to be emplaced so as to not interfere with the movement(s) of the ministers and assembly. After all, it is the assembly of gathered people who genuinely create the mood or environment for your wedding.

The temptation to traditionalism is probably no-where more difficult to overcome than in creating an environment for the ‘perfect’ wedding. Simply put, in our culture a great deal of money rides on keeping certain customs intact and an engaged couple overspending. However, you know from your own experience that when you are guests in someone’s home, it is not the lavishness of the surroundings or the richness of the food that makes for a memorable occasion. Rather, what matters most is the care with which all is prepared and the attention given to you as guests. Hospitality is primary.

Rice/Birdseed/Balloons/Bubbles: Because of safety concerns, rice and birdseed are not permitted in the Ave María Church or on the church grounds. Balloons are permitted outside of the building, but may not be brought inside.

Candles: Two altar candles will be provided by the church. A unity candle may also be part of the ceremony. The couple must provide the candelabra and the candles, holders, etc., for the unity candle. These can be purchased from local retailers and/or catalogs. You may also wish to rent items for your wedding.

Decorations: You may find the sanctuary already decorated for a given liturgical season of the church year. Please plan to decorate the sanctuary without moving or rearranging decorations already in place.

Flowers: Flowers may be placed on the sanctuary floor. You are invited to do this before the ceremony starts. To decorate pews with ribbons and/or flowers, please use loops of ribbon to hang around the top or edge of the pew. Please do not use tape, pins, or nails of any kind—as these methods can damage the pew surface(s). Note: The Ave María Parish has pew decorations for you to use, if you wish. Often times, decorations/flowers can be set up before or after the rehearsal. We ask that you please coordinate this with the marriage coordinator.

CHECKLIST OF REQUIRED ACTIONS & DOCUMENTS

_____ The wedding should be scheduled with the parish office at least one year before the anticipated actual date and the one-year marriage preparation process started.

_____ A celebrant must be chosen. At the Ave María Parish, the pastor or parochial vicar can assist you with this if needed. An initial meeting with the parish priest/deacon will need to be scheduled.

_____ Both Catholic party(s) will need a newly issued baptismal certificate (within 6 months of the date of the wedding).

* This certificate can be obtained from the parish of baptism. It is one of the proofs of your freedom to marry which the Church requires. It is the responsibility of the engaged couple to obtain this documentation. The parish office can assist in obtaining addresses and telephone numbers of other Catholic churches, if needed.

_____ The engaged couple will each need a witness, usually a parent or sibling, to attest to their freedom to marry.

_____ Speak/meet with the parish's FOCCUS couple.

_____ Documentation of completion of FOCCUS training.

_____ Speak/meet with couple/team hosting the Natural Family Planning (NFP) classes.

_____ Documentation of completion of Natural Family Planning (NFP) classes.

_____ Speak/meet with the couple/team hosting the Marriage Preparation classes.

_____ Documentation of completion of Marriage Preparation classes.

_____ Speak/meet with the couple/team hosting the Engaged Encounter weekend or equivalent.

_____ Documentation of completion of Engaged Encounter weekend or equivalent.

_____ Speak/meet with the Marriage Coordinator and parish Music Director (if needed), at least 4 to 6 weeks before the wedding, to make arrangements for:

_____ Lectors/Proclaimers.

_____ Altar servers

_____ Musicians (organist/pianist, cantor, etc)

_____ Obtaining a list of fees for the cantor, organist/pianist, etc.

_____ Final meeting with parish priest/deacon (no later than one month prior to the wedding).

* All required documents must be prepared and submitted to the parish office.

_____ A newly issued baptismal certificate within 6 months of the date of the wedding obtained from the church of baptism).

_____ Regardless of the faith of BOTH the bride and groom-to-be, pre-nuptial testimony and testimony from a witness is needed for each party; testifying to their freedom to marry.

_____ For an Interfaith Marriage, a diocesan document of approval (handled by the Ave María Parish Pastor).

_____ The FOCCUS questionnaire and evaluation.

_____ Proofs/certificates of completion for Engaged Encounter; Marriage Preparation classes and Retreat(s); Natural Family Planning (NFP) classes; etc.

* This is the time to also discuss the details of liturgy and your choice of scriptural readings with the priest/deacon.

_____ The engaged couple will need to obtain a marriage license from the El Paso County Clerk's Office, sometime during the 30 days prior to the marriage. PLEASE bring the marriage license to the rehearsal and give it to the celebrant. Without the license, your marriage cannot take place.

* Upon completion of the ceremony, the parish office will imprint the license with our church's official seal and sent it to the County Clerk's Office for recording. The County Clerk's Office will then send the certificate of marriage to your home address.