



# Saint Clare of Assisi

CATHOLIC CHURCH

## WEDDINGS IN OUR PARISH



*The Wedding Feast at Cana*

Parish Offices: 225 Seven Farms Drive, Suite 100 • Charleston, SC 29492  
Church Address (no mail): 990 Etiwan Park Street • Charleston, SC 29492

Rev 20230627

Dear Friends,

The clergy, staff, and parishioners of Saint Clare of Assisi rejoice with you in your engagement to one another. We will walk with you as you approach one of the most important days in your life, the beginning of the sacred covenant of Christian marriage.

In asking to be married in the Catholic Church, you are publicly proclaiming your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For two baptized persons of all Christian traditions, this union becomes the Sacrament of Matrimony, a tangible sign of Christ's love and life in our midst. The sacred liturgy of your wedding, which begins your married life by your solemn exchange of marital consent, is an act of worship and not a ceremony. We will help you prepare both for that happy day and for the lifetime of marriage that follows your nuptial liturgy.

We appreciate your desire to have every detail of your wedding carefully planned and gracefully executed. We will work with you to ensure that the sacred liturgy is a beautiful and memorable event for you, your families, and your friends. **We ask you to remember that your wedding, although an intensely personal moment for you, is not a private event; rather, it is a liturgy—a public act of worship by the Church. For this reason, we must take care to ensure that the sacred liturgy is celebrated according to the mind of the Church and in conformity with liturgical law and local custom.** You may rely on our decades of experience in guiding and assisting you with how weddings are first and foremost celebrated as **worship**.

May God bless your joy and happiness in this time of anticipation and preparation!

Reverend H. Gregory West  
Pastor

Destination weddings are very popular in Charleston. However, our church is not a destination wedding venue. Rather, this is our spiritual home, a sacred place where we gather to worship, to mark the major events of our lives, beginning with baptism, where we are nourished on the Holy Eucharist, and ending with a funeral. For that reason, the life and needs of our parish come first. Our new church will become a favorite place for celebrating Holy Matrimony. We are pleased to share it. Unfortunately, limitations of time, resources, and personnel prevent us from honoring the requests of every couple.

**Please read this wedding policy entirely.** It should answer all your questions. We employ an application system and appreciate your participation. As you will see, you will need to **assemble and mail** (by post, not email) several documents with a check for the fees to the parish.

**Here is how an engaged couple may apply for a reservation:**

**For Registered and Active Members of Saint Clare of Assisi**

1. Complete and mail FORM A - WEDDING AGREEMENT and a CHECK for \$2,000 payable to Saint Clare of Assisi to the parish offices (see below what the fee includes). If you wish to invite a Catholic priest or deacon to officiate instead of the clergy of Saint Clare of Assisi, you must also submit FORM C – MARRIAGE OFFICIANT AGREEMENT.
2. When the office has verified parishioner status, the Pastor or his designee will contact the couple for the INTAKE INTERVIEW.
3. During this interview, the wedding date and time are discussed and, hopefully, confirmed with the couple. The Pastor or his designee will then complete FORMS B & D with the Catholic party/parties.
4. Do not book wedding services (e.g., a reception venue) until your wedding date is confirmed by the Pastor. Reserving the church is always the first thing you do when planning a wedding.
5. Membership at Saint Clare of Assisi is determined by:

Either the bride or the groom must be (a) a visible and practicing Catholic on Sundays and holy days of obligation, (b) registered in our parish office no less than *two years* before applying to schedule a wedding date, and (c) having a record of financial support of the parish through use of our online giving system. This is all proof of your commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and to your parish community.

Sons and daughters of parishioners who have been registered, active, and contributing for at least two years fall into this category.

## **For Visitors from Other Catholic Parishes**

1. Complete and mail the:

- FORM A - WEDDING AGREEMENT
- FORM B – MARRIAGE PREPARATION AGREEMENT
- FORM C – MARRIAGE OFFICIANT AGREEMENT
- FORM D – PERMISSION BY PASTOR OF CATHOLIC PARTY/PARTIES
- A CHECK for \$6,000 payable to Saint Clare of Assisi (see below what the fee includes)

2. Once the four forms above and check are received in our office, your requested wedding date and time will be considered. We will notify you **in writing** if they have been approved. Please do not call or email for an approval status.

3. You must **mail** all items listed above to the parish office **together**. If not received together, we will return the items to you and your reservation request will be delayed.

## **For Everyone**

There are no tentative reservations. We cannot “pencil you in.” We can tell you what dates and times are open but our doing so does not mean you can count on your request. Only when you have received approval from us **in writing** should you proceed with planning your wedding date.

If one or both parties has been married previously, and the previous spouse(s) is/are still living, a Decree of Nullity (annulment) must be issued by the appropriate diocesan Tribunal before an application will be considered. There are no exceptions to this.

All arrangements are made between the parish staff and the bride and groom only. We do not plan with mothers, fathers, or others. Relatives, friends, and wedding consultants may assist with other areas pertaining to the wedding.

## **When May Weddings Take Place?**

Weddings may be scheduled on available Saturdays on the hour between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. A wedding on a weekday may be requested for as late as 6:00 p.m.

To inquire about a possible date and time, please email **weddings@clare.church**.

Those days when weddings may *not* be celebrated in our parish are:

- Sundays
- The entire season of Lent
- Holy Days of Obligation
- Easter weekend
- The week after Easter
- Independence Day weekend
- All Souls Day (November 2)
- Thanksgiving weekend
- The entire season of Advent
- The week after Christmas
- New Year's Eve and New Year's Day

We will not schedule weddings on these days. Other dates may be unavailable due to parish events.

## **How Does a Couple Prepare to be Married?**

While planning the wedding is certainly important, marriage is a lifetime commitment of sacrificial love in a solemn and sacramental covenant. We will guide you in planning the wedding but will prepare you for living as a married couple. Preparing for the marriage takes precedence.

The Church requires all engaged couples to attend an approved pre-marriage preparation program (often called "Pre-Cana," named after the village Cana where Jesus and his Mother attended a wedding) because it is important for their life together. Our sole desire is that couples become married in Christ and stay married until they die. Everything the Church does and asks is towards this end. Pastoral experience proves that pre-marriage preparation in the Church leads to stronger relational and marital bonds.

At a minimum and by mandate of our bishop, pre-marriage preparation must begin no less than six months prior to the intended wedding date. For parishioners of Saint Clare of Assisi, information will be given about our parish preparation program during the intake interview with the pastor. Visitors from other places must contact their own parish for a program of marriage preparation.

## **What About the Wedding Liturgy?**

By asking to have your wedding in this Catholic parish, you are choosing a Catholic wedding. The Church is not a passive participant or an unconcerned party to this event. Weddings, like all liturgies, are public, liturgical actions of the Church, and the celebration of weddings is governed by liturgical law to ensure its beauty, sanctity, and validity.

Love for Christ and his holy Catholic Church is the chief reason Catholics desire a Catholic wedding. In fact, Catholics are obligated to be married within the jurisdiction of the Catholic Church (either in a Catholic liturgy or in another place but with the permission of the local Catholic bishop). Otherwise, the marriage is invalid and, because of its serious nature, inhibits the Catholic party/parties from receiving the sacraments, especially Holy Communion, until the invalidity is rectified.

The basic form of the wedding liturgy, then, is given by the Catholic Church, and no variation from that form is possible. When two active Catholics marry, the wedding usually is part of a Nuptial Mass. If the couple is cohabitating before marriage, the wedding will not take place during Mass.

When a Catholic and a person of another tradition, the wedding is always during a liturgy that is not a Mass.

Within that basic form, the bride and groom may select the first and second readings and the Gospel from the set of readings given by the Church, readings which come from Sacred Scripture. No other readings are permitted.

Though sometimes used in other places, the “Unity Candle” is not a part of the wedding liturgy or tradition of the Catholic Church, and its use is not permitted. Some couples choose to use the candle during their wedding reception.

In harmony with Catholic tradition, the bride may leave a flower/bouquet at the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, asking the intercession of Our Lady as did the couple at the wedding feast of Cana (see John 2:1-11). Likewise, the groom may leave a flower/bouquet at the statue of Saint Joseph, patron saint of the family.

## **For Couples Already Living Together (Cohabitation)**

Although many couples in our current society live together before marriage, it remains an unacceptable practice for a Christian. Frankly, studies have shown that couples who live together before marriage have much higher rates of divorce and a poorer quality of marital relationship than those who do not.

As a recent pastoral letter explains, the Church’s teaching on cohabitation is not an “arbitrary” rule. Living together before marriage is a sin because it violates God’s commandments. Saint Paul lists this sin – technically called “fornication” – among the sins that can keep a person from reaching heaven (see 1 Corinthians 6:9). Since you are

freely choosing to be married in Christ, it is important to live the commandments He gives us. The Church does not exist merely to provide beautiful ceremonies, but to proclaim through her members the full, life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Your engagement is meant to be a time of grace and growth in preparing for your marriage. Living chastely during your remaining months of engagement will produce bountiful spiritual fruits, helping both of you to grow in the virtues of generous love, sacrificial giving, self-restraint, and good communication. These virtues are essential for a good, lasting marriage.

The Church is here to help assist you to correct your living situation. If a cohabitating couple chooses not to separate, a wedding may be scheduled, at the Pastor's discretion, but it will be a private ceremony of the couple, two witnesses, and immediate family only. To do otherwise suggests to the world that the Catholic Church condones cohabitation. (From *Living Together*, by the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference, 1999.)

### **Candles, Flowers, Furniture, etc.**

The furnishings for the sacred liturgy are provided by the parish. This includes all vestments, books, candles and candlesticks, kneelers, chairs, and other elements as needed. We cannot use family heirlooms in the celebration of the sacred liturgy. Our church's furnishings are fixed and cannot be moved.

Bows, floral arrangements, candles, etc. may not be attached to the pews. Aisle runners pose a hazard and may not be used.

The fee you offer includes two floral arrangements delivered to the church by our florist in a size that accommodates our brass planters atop the rear high altar. Following the wedding, the flowers remain in the church as your gift for our weekend Masses. You may request certain colors for the floral arrangements. We will try to accommodate your request.

To aid in your planning: our church seats approximately 650 people downstairs and has an additional 100 seats available in the balcony.

### **Clergy – Who Will Officiate?**

The Pastor of Saint Clare of Assisi is responsible for every sacramental celebration that takes place in the parish. He is the only one who may delegate this to other Catholic priests or deacons who hold the necessary canonical faculties.

If you are a member of another parish and are borrowing our facilities, you should invite your own priest or deacon to officiate at your wedding. The clergy of Saint Clare of Assisi are not generally available to officiate at weddings of non-parishioners. A visiting priest or deacon must obtain the required delegation from our Pastor, providing proof from his diocesan chancery that he is a priest or deacon in good standing. Delegation (permission) will only be granted when all the required paperwork, permissions, and dispensations have been completed and sent to our parish

offices. The visiting presider must abide by our wedding policies and only celebrate the liturgy according to the approved, Catholic form.

Our parish's wedding coordinator represents our Pastor and is responsible for ensuring our parish policies are honored, including by visiting clergy. She has the final say at the rehearsal and the wedding.

If you desire to invite non-Catholic clergy to participate in the wedding liturgy (but not a Mass), you must submit a written request to the Pastor of Saint Clare of Assisi, giving the name, title, and address of the clergy you want to invite. Non-Catholic clergy are permitted to participate in a Catholic non-Mass wedding by reading one of the Scripture readings (other than the Gospel) and perhaps offer a prayer. The Catholic priest or deacon must read the Gospel, preach the homily, receive the wedding vows, and impart the Nuptial Blessing. The ritual of the Roman Catholic Church is always used, and the form of the celebration will always be the wedding outside of Mass when non-Catholic clergy are present.

### **Who Helps to Plan the Music?**

Madelaine Beckford, Director of Music and Liturgy  
madelaine@clare.church

All music is planned and coordinated with our Director of Music and Liturgy in consultation with the bride and groom only. (Parents and friends do not accompany the couple.) Our Director or her designee serves as the organist for the wedding. Only sacred, approved music is permitted. The cantor for your wedding, which is not optional, is provided by our music department.

Additional instruments are available upon request to the Director. Only the best local musicians are hired, usually associated with, but not limited to, the Charleston Symphony Orchestra. Each of these musicians charges his or her own independent fee. You are required to pay them through the Director well before the wedding. Because an instrumentalist may suddenly be changed, paying in cash is best.

The music department hires only those vocal and instrumental musicians who have been approved and demonstrate competency in the musical, acoustical, and liturgical complexities of our church. Guest instrumental or vocal musicians are not permitted.

All music and musician contracting is coordinated through our parish's music department. Private contracting or coordinating of music or musicians is not permitted under any circumstances, and such musicians will not be permitted to play or sing.

No music or accompaniment by recording or automation is permitted before, during, or after the wedding or rehearsal.



## **Fees**

The offering made to the parish includes the following:

- Parish wedding coordinator (rehearsal and liturgy)
- Parish organist (Director of Music and Liturgy)
- Cantor
- Priest or deacon officiant
- Two floral arrangements for the high altar (which remain in the church after the wedding)
- Formatting (but not printing) of the Order of Worship
- Cleaning services
- Altar servers

Your check will be deposited only after we have confirmed your wedding date and time.

If the wedding is cancelled more than 60 days from the reserved date, the fee will be refunded minus \$500. If cancelled 60 days or less from the reserved date, the fee will be refunded minus \$1,000.

## **Our Wedding Coordinator**

Our staff Wedding Coordinator provides many important, vital functions before, during, and after the wedding. She serves to help the bride and groom and is totally responsible for implementing the policies of our parish. She represents the authority of the Pastor and has the final say, not the visiting clergy or others.

She will consult with the priest/deacon, conduct the rehearsal, give directions for the procession and placement of the wedding party, and ensure that the altar furnishings, candles, and lights are properly set.

Should you wish to use an outside professional wedding director or wedding planner, that person will have no responsibilities at Saint Clare of Assisi.

## **Do We Need an Order of Worship?**

Yes. The Order of Worship is important for your guests to follow along with the sacred liturgy and to participate actively. The Director of Music and Liturgy will work with you to create a worship aid that is beautiful and appropriate for your wedding. Her fee includes the necessary file or hard-copy document to create your wedding worship aid.

We use a template that works for all weddings with personalization for the couple. You are responsible for printing it and for bringing it to the wedding rehearsal. You may receive this file in .pdf form via e-mail, or you can request a hard copy be mailed to you. It can be printed on any paper that you wish and may include a cover; however,

the interior of the program (the order of the liturgy) will be provided to you and must retain the format we give you.

### **The Witnesses (Best Man and Maid or Matron of Honor)**

While the entire assembly is a witness to your wedding, three individuals have a special role in the sacred liturgy for the Church:

- The priest/deacon acts as the Church's official witness.
- The best man represents the groom. There is only one official best man.
- The Maid or Matron (only one is listed as the witness in church records) represents the bride.
- They need not be Catholic or even baptized.

### **Other Attendants in the Wedding**

For the purposes of order and decorum in the sacred liturgy, the bride and groom are permitted up to eight attendants each, although a smaller number is preferable. The limit of eight each includes the bride's maids and maid of honor, the best man and groomsmen, flower girls and ring bearers, and all honor attendants. Your attendants may be Catholic or non-Catholic. Honorary attendants are seated before the liturgy begins. They do not process in.

All children within the wedding party must be at least five years old. Flower girls may not drop petals on the floor. Pets are not permitted.

### **Greeters**

Greeters are important to your wedding. They stand at the door to welcome your guests as they enter the church and give them your printed worship program. Your greeters may be Catholic or non-Catholic.

### **Ushers**

The groomsmen usually act as ushers before the wedding. To maintain a spirit of quiet prayer and preparation, they should seat each guest as they arrive and discourage gathering in the narthex.

### **Lectors**

At the wedding, the texts of Sacred Scripture must be proclaimed from the ambo (pulpit), and the person who performs this function is called a lector. The lectors are practicing Catholics and perform this ministry in their home parishes. Those whom you select should be good public speakers and must be at the rehearsal to practice the proclamation in the church.

The Lectors read the First and Second readings. One of them also leads the General

Intercessions which are after the Rite of Marriage. The Cantor leads the Responsorial Psalm, which is sung.

### **Gift Bearers (Nuptial Mass only)**

Two people from the assembly may be invited to bring forward the gifts of bread and wine for a Nuptial Mass.

### **Decorum and Modesty**

Please keep modesty in mind when planning dresses for the bride and her attendants. Strapless, spaghetti strap, backless or other revealing dresses are not appropriate for a church unless the shoulders are covered by a shawl or veil. Our Wedding Coordinator is prepared to offer shawls to those who need them.

Please impress on your guests that their attire must be respectful for a house of worship. A person dressed inappropriately and immodestly may be directed to go to the reception site.

### **Military-Style Weddings**

We welcome our military men and women to wear their uniforms. Military swords and other secular weapons (real or ceremonial) may be worn but are never permitted to be used inside the church. Ceremonial displays, such as the saber or sword arch, are permitted on outside steps and terrace.

### **The Rehearsal**

Please instruct your wedding party to arrive at the church 30 minutes before the scheduled rehearsal time. Traffic jams in Charleston are a daily occurrence. The wedding rehearsal begins at the appointed time even if parties are late or absent.

Who needs to come to the rehearsal? Basically, anyone who has a walking or talking role in the wedding:

- The bride and groom
- The wedding party of bridesmaids, groomsmen, and flower girls and ring bearers
- The lector(s)
- Parents and, if applicable, grandparents

The rehearsal may be completed in as little as 30 minutes. It is best not to invite additional guests to the rehearsal. Let them meet you at the gathering afterwards.

Bring the civil marriage license to the rehearsal. The parish wedding coordinator will have you sign it and will hold onto it until after the wedding.

## **Arriving at the Church on the Wedding Day**

Again, due to unpredictable and frequent traffic jams, even on the weekends, that is why you must encourage your guests to plan to arrive at the church 30 minutes before the scheduled start of the wedding.

The groom and groomsmen must arrive one hour before the wedding. The groom will be sequestered in an area of the church where he may enjoy quiet and prayerful recollection. He will not see the bride prior to the beginning of the wedding.

The bride and bridesmaids must arrive 45 minutes before the wedding. They will go directly to the Parlor where they remain until the beginning of the wedding.

The greeters, lectors, and if a separate group than the groomsmen, the ushers, must arrive 45 minutes before the wedding.

All parties must be fully attired for the wedding. There is no place for changing clothes.

It is essential to begin the liturgy on time, especially out of respect for your guests. The late arrival of the bride or groom may result in the cancellation of the wedding. If an immediate family member is running late, consult with the Wedding Coordinator. She will determine when the wedding begins.

## **Food, Alcohol, Smoking, Cell Phones, and More**

No food or drink (other than water) is permitted in the church or anywhere on the grounds of our parish before, during, or after the wedding and rehearsal. The use of chewing gum or tobacco is always prohibited.

The wedding party is expected to refrain from using any alcoholic beverages before the rehearsal and the wedding. The Wedding Coordinator has permission from the Pastor to remove from the church anyone under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Please remind everyone in the wedding party to preserve the sacred character of this event. Further, if the bride and/or groom is under the influence before the wedding, the Wedding Coordinator has the authority to cancel the wedding since, by canon law, valid marital consent may be placed only by persons who are not impaired. Should this occur, there will be no refund of the wedding fees.

All cell phones must be turned off so that they may not disturb the sacred liturgy. Please instruct the wedding party and your guests to leave them in their cars. There is to be no cell phone photography, which is always distracting, inside the church. The wedding program will state this.

No rice, birdseed, confetti, bubbles, or flower petals are to be used in the church or anywhere on the property. These objects can be hazardous underfoot and are difficult to clean up.

## **Guests With Hearing Disabilities**

Our sound system offers a headphone system for persons with hearing loss. Please direct them to inquire at the Information Desk in the church Narthex as they arrive.

## **The Civil Marriage License**

You may obtain the South Carolina marriage license in any county in the state. As soon as you receive it, please mail it to our parish offices for safekeeping. Neither the rehearsal nor the wedding liturgy can take place unless the civil license is on hand with the Wedding Coordinator. The bride and groom will sign the license at the rehearsal. The officiating clergy will sign it after the wedding liturgy. The Wedding Coordinator will then give the bride and groom their copy. There is no ceremony around the signing of the civil license. It will be signed in private and never in the sanctuary.

## **The Opening Procession of the Wedding Party**

The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, the official liturgical book of the Catholic Church, calls for the officiant priest or deacon to meet the bride and groom at the front doors of the church where he welcomes them in. Once welcomed, all are to process together to the altar to begin the liturgy. This liturgical action symbolizes our common journey together toward heaven and highlights the new life of husband and wife who are to help one another reach eternal life with God.

In the United States, the common custom is to have the groom and best man appear via a side door and then to have the bridal party process down the aisle with much pomp. Everyone remains seated until the bride arrives. This style of procession does not emphasize the equality of man and woman in marriage and, therefore, is incorrect form for beginning the liturgy.

At Saint Clare of Assisi, we use a form that is faithful to the Church's teachings on the equality of spouses while preserving the custom of the groom and bride not seeing one another on the wedding day. Everyone in the wedding liturgy – officiant, altar servers, best man, groomsmen, groom, maid/matron of honor, bridesmaids, ring bearer, flower girls, bride with escort -- processes together from the Narthex of the church to the altar. The Wedding Coordinator will form the procession. To begin the liturgy, she will ring bells from the rear of the church, the signal for everyone in the congregation, starting with the mother of the bride (if present), to stand for the procession to enter the church. This form is used at all weddings at Saint Clare of Assisi without exception.

Regarding photography, please consult with your photographer before the wedding day to determine what photos you would like. Our photography policy ([found here](#)) will be communicated to your chosen vendor before the wedding day. If desired, we can furnish recommendations of professionals who understand the unique visual aspects of our church and know the flow of Catholic liturgy.

## **During the Wedding**

The wedding liturgy is not a ceremony. The wedding liturgy is an act of prayer and worship of Almighty God. We assemble in a church to focus on and to express our faith in Jesus Christ, and to ask God's blessings on the couple. This is a sacred experience which deserves decorum and respect.

The bride and groom will be provided with chairs and kneelers. Everyone else will be seated in the pews.

When the liturgy concludes, the bride and groom offer one another a simple kiss. We are in a church and in the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. Please make sure your guests refrain from clapping and cheering, and respect the proper protocol for a church wedding.

## **Following the Wedding**

If you have a professional photographer hired, please determine with him or her in advance what shots you wish to have made. There is a 30-minute time limit for photographs.

Our parish offices will mail to you a Certificate of Matrimony signed by the Pastor of Saint Clare of Assisi.

Please have someone designated to check the Parlor and other areas for personal belongings.