

Getting Married at St. Mary's Cathedral, Kingston



Congratulations on your engagement! The days of your engagement are a special gift from God as you prepare for your married life together – enjoy them!

Congratulations again on deciding to be married in the Catholic Church before God and with the prayers of the Church to support you. Planning a wedding involves many steps – this short guide is meant to help you both with those aspects related to your Catholic wedding at St. Mary's Cathedral.

Please note carefully:

In order to have your wedding Mass celebrated at St. Mary's Cathedral you must be a registered, contributing parishioner for a minimum of one year prior to inquiring about your wedding. However, if you are a practicing Catholic and can provide a letter from your parish priest attesting to this, and have serious reasons to hold your wedding ceremony at the Cathedral, that can be taken into consideration.

Marriage as a Sacrament

A wedding is above all a sacrament for two baptized Christians at least one of whom is a baptized and preferably practicing Catholic. It is also a family celebration, an occasion to host friends and to plan a honeymoon. But all those matters are secondary to the grace that the couple receives in the Sacrament of Matrimony. God's grace is the gift of His own life that He grants you to sustain your married life together. There are hundreds of things that go into planning a wedding – it is important that you keep your mind and heart focused on the most important element, the Holy Sacrament that you will be receiving.

Remember: A wedding is primarily a spiritual reality. That's why all weddings should take place in the Church – the house of the Lord. Catholic marriages do not take place anywhere but in a church. Please do not ask to have your wedding outside, at home or at a hotel or golf club etc.

Freedom to Marry

In order to be married in the Catholic Church, either the bride or the bridegroom must be Catholic, and the other party must have a good understanding of what a Christian marriage is according to the rites of the Catholic Church. Baptismal certificates will be required from both parties.

In addition, both parties must be free to marry, meaning that there is no coercion or other pressures forcing the wedding (such as a pregnancy). Both parties obviously must not be married to anyone else. If you have been married before it is very important to make Father Shawn aware of this at your first meeting. This does not mean you cannot be married in the Church. It means that you are not free at this time unless a declaration of nullity has taken place.

Wedding Date

When you contact the parish, the availability of a specific date was likely your first question. Before the wedding date can be confirmed, you must meet with Father Shawn and he must be confident that you understand what a Catholic marriage is, and that you are in fact free to marry. If either party has been married before, either civilly or religiously, it may not be possible to meet the original date that you proposed. This usually can be worked out.

Wedding Music:

1) The choice of music is a matter of importance. The bride and groom are encouraged to exercise personal choice in the selection of music, but that selection must be governed by the requirements of the liturgy of the Church. Music for the wedding must be suitable for the religious nature of the ceremony and for performance in St. Mary's Cathedral.

2) The cathedral music director, Brent Nuevo, will provide the music for your wedding Mass, including Prelude, Processional, the Ordinary of the Mass, accompaniment for soloists and the Recessional. There is no exception to this. You should contact the organist as soon as possible after your original meeting with Father Shawn, or Deacon Blaine Barclay. Brent can be reached at brent@stmaryscathedral.ca or Liz Ford, the office administrator, will forward your email to him. officemanager@stmaryscathedral.ca He will take you through an array of possible selections of sacred music. Your music selections must be instrumental or be songs that were written to praise God. One of the cathedral cantors will lead the singing. Occasionally a couple requests that a friend or relative play the pipe organ at their wedding. At the Cathedral only our own organists provide the music for weddings and funerals. There are no exceptions to this rule. Secular music is not allowed. 3) The use of any sort of recorded music during any part of the wedding ceremony is not permitted. 4) All music in the church must be sacred music; no secular music is appropriate in the church. Secular selections are more appropriate for your reception. For example the beautiful secular piece called The Prayer is not written to praise God and should be reserved for a first dance or some other time at your reception.

Wedding Attire: (beginning with weddings in 2026)

The bride's gown should be modest and elegantly respectful. Take into consideration that you are in the House of God. The bride's and bridesmaids shoulders must be covered while in the Cathedral (consider a bolero jacket or shawl or sleeves). Agreeing to be married at St. Mary's is contractual for both parties and weddings will not proceed on the day of the wedding if this policy is breached.

FEE SCHEDULE

What does it cost?

The cost for use of the cathedral is \$500

On top of this the following fixed fees are involved:

\$150 stipend for the priest or deacon

\$200 for the organist

\$150 for the cantor

Total Fixed Cost is \$ 1000.00

St. James' Chapel \$ 800.00

A down payment of 50% of the fees (i.e. \$500) is to be made as soon as you have booked your wedding ceremony. The remaining 50% (i.e. \$500) should be paid two months prior to your wedding ceremony. Please make your cheque out to St. Mary's Cathedral or e-transfer to smarys@cogeco.net

Note if the wedding is in the Chapel, the down payment is \$400.00 with the balance of \$400.00 due two months prior to the date of the wedding.

Flowers, Decorations, Confetti, Rice

You may bring flowers as you wish. If you wish more elaborate decorations, please check well in advance with Father Shawn about what you are planning. It is customary to leave some floral arrangements in the church for the Sunday Masses after your wedding, even if others are taken to the reception. This is an offering in thanksgiving to God for your married life and it is a sign to the whole parish that a wedding has taken place and a reminder to them to pray for the newly-married couple. Throwing flower petals, confetti, rice or anything else is not permitted on the cathedral property. Please inform your guests of this.

Altar Servers:

If your wedding will include the celebration of the Eucharist the parish can provide altar servers for weddings. It is possible to ask some of our regular altar servers to serve at your wedding. If so, a small stipend should be provided for them by the bridal couple.

Photographs/Video

In order to preserve the sacred character of the wedding, no photography or videography is permitted by anyone in the bridal party or congregation. It is recommended that one “official” photographer be designated for the church, and Father Shawn will indicate where he or she should be positioned during the ceremony. The photographer or videographer should never enter the sanctuary. If you wish a video recording to be made, it should be in a fixed spot where it will not disturb the ceremony. Please alert your videographer and photographer to speak to Father Shawn well in advance of the ceremony. It is our experience that photographers tend to dress somewhat disrespectfully for the sacred space and ceremony which they are photographing. Please remind them to dress modestly and as though they were guests at your wedding.

Marriage Preparation Course

Every couple being married in the Archdiocese of Kingston must take a marriage preparation course. Please contact Father Shawn Hughes to arrange this if you a parishioner and being married at St. Mary’s Cathedral. Otherwise please arrange this with your parish priest. Email rector@stmaryscathedral.ca or 613-546-5521 ext.4

Cohabitation before Marriage

If you are living together already, you should let Father Shawn know immediately. He will advise you to separate before the wedding, or at the very least to cease living as an already married couple and to let others know of this decision. Why will he ask this when it seems so common for couples to live together today?

There are three reasons.

- 1) First, couples that marry after having lived together have much higher divorce rates than couples that don’t. It stands to reason that cohabiting couples’ lives change very little after the wedding – they go on living as they did before. The difference marriage makes is therefore diminished. If you want your marriage to last, Statistics Canada – let alone the Catholic Church – will tell that living together beforehand is a bad idea.
- 2) Second, as you will learn in your marriage preparation sessions, the sexual union of husband and wife is intended to renew their wedding vows. Sex outside of marriage, or prior to it, is not only contrary to the moral law that reserves sexual union for married couples, but it means that

your married sexuality will not be something distinctively marital, thereby weakening your marriage.

3) Third, cohabitation is a public choice – your family, your friends and your parish know about it. Living together without benefit of marriage is a public declaration, at least implicitly; that you think that marriage is not necessary to live as if you are married. Whether you intend it or not, it is a way of saying that your lives together do not need the blessing of the Church or the grace of God, and that you intend to enjoy the married state without the promises and commitment that are at the heart of the marital covenant. Living together is a public statement directly contrary to the public statement that a wedding is supposed to make. The cohabiting couple that arrives at the church for their wedding is saying directly contrary things with their actions, and that is no way to begin a married life together.

A couple that decides to continue living together before the wedding may still go ahead with the wedding, for it does mean an improvement in their situation. However, it would not be appropriate to celebrate such a wedding with all the festivity that would normally be planned. It should be a quieter, smaller, more reserved ceremony. Father Shawn will not celebrate a wedding Mass for a couple who choose to live together until the wedding, but only the wedding ceremony itself.

What then to do if you are living together? Speak honestly with Father Shawn about it and make a sincere effort to live as the Lord Jesus would have you live in preparation for your marriage. It is for your own good, the good of your marriage and it is never too late to make a change. The mercy of God knows no limits – do not be afraid to make a change. God's grace is always strong enough to help us.

Wedding Mass

The usual form of a Catholic wedding is within the offering of the Holy Mass. However, there can be reasons why it is desirable to only have the wedding ceremony itself, without the Mass. If either the bride or bridegroom is not Catholic, or if most of the guests are not Catholic, it might be thought better to have the wedding ceremony alone. Please discuss this with Father Shawn. There are many things to think about for a wedding of course. This guide is intended to help you with some practical matters, and to keep first things first. If you have any other question, do not hesitate to ask Father Shawn.

What now?

The first thing an engaged couple should do, if they have not begun doing so already, is to pray together. Both should already be praying for each other daily, but prayer together is at the core of a Christian marriage and family.

God bless you both,

Father Shawn J. Hughes, Rector of St. Mary's Cathedral. rector@stmaryscathedral.ca

Updated 2025