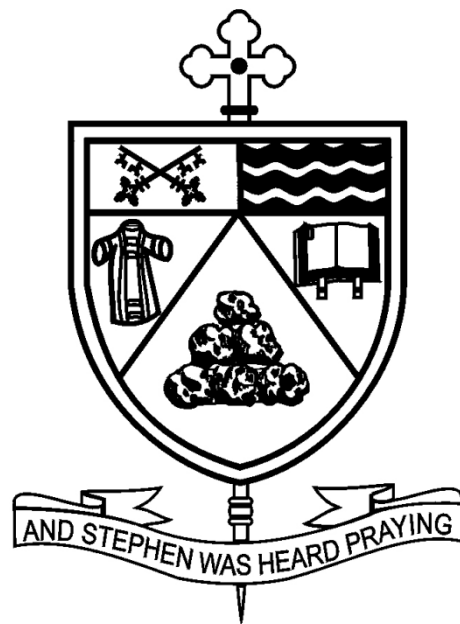


The Marriage Preparation Process

Wedding Policies & Guidelines



Saint Stephen's Church
Kearny, New Jersey



My dear Friends,

On behalf of the priests and deacons of Saint Stephen's parish, let me offer congratulations as you prepare for an important part of your life – your wedding!

I am happy you have chosen to celebrate your wedding at our Church. It is a beautiful structure that our ancestors sacrificed and labored to build right after the Great Depression. However, the Church building is not what will make your wedding special; rather, the love you have for each other and the love God has for you will make your marriage lasting!

This booklet will help guide you through the important preparation process for your wedding. Please take the time to read it carefully and thoroughly. Included here are the basic requirements for marriage in the Catholic Church, the documents you need to provide, parish policies for your wedding day, information on music and offerings and so much more. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call us. We are here to work with you!

All of us pray that your marriage preparation will be a time of growth and renewal for both of you as you strive to be all that God has called you to be.

Yours in Christ,

Father Joseph A. Mancini
Pastor

The Marriage Preparation Process

1. Time of Preparation

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has determined that couples preparing for marriage should contact the church at least six months in advance of the wedding. For those who wish to be married at Saint Stephen's, **please contact the office at least one year or more in advance.** Why? Simply put, the preparation process can take upwards of one year...and we want all of our engaged couples to be adequately prepared for this lifelong commitment.

After the initial contact with Saint Stephen's by the couple, the couple will meet with the pastor to fill out the initial paperwork. The pastor will make sure the couple has no impediments that would prevent the marriage from taking place. The pastor will also review the parish policies as well as the entire preparation process with the couple.

After the initial meeting, and once the date has been secured (*see Section 4e*) the couple will:

- a) meet with the priest or deacon who will witness the wedding. There will be at least two or three meetings so that the priest or deacon can ensure that the individuals are sufficiently mature and properly instructed in the Christian doctrine, particularly on the nature, ends and essential properties of marriage (*Canons 1067 and 1095*).
- b) attend a Pre-Cana session.
- c) attend a preparation session entitled "God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage" (**required for couples marrying within the Archdiocese of Newark**).

While exceptions can be made by the pastor with regards to the one year preparation, such exceptions are very rare. Couples are also reminded that no final plans should be made with the reception hall until the date has been secured with the Church.

2. Parishioner Weddings / Non-Parishioner Weddings

A “parishioner” is defined as someone who is currently registered in the parish census. Individuals should note that the parish census was updated in 2011. Any records prior to that time are no longer in effect. Those over the age of 21 are to be registered as individuals. If only one member of the couple is a registered parishioner, then the couple is granted “parishioner” status.

When both members of the couple are not registered parishioners, the wedding may still take place at Saint Stephen’s. However, in such a case, the individuals in the couple must both be baptized and confirmed Roman Catholics and have never been married before. In addition, both individuals are to provide a letter from the pastor of the parish they belong to, or in whose territory they live, stating that they may be married at Saint Stephen’s. The pastor of Saint Stephen’s reserves the right to determine if “non-parishioners” may be married at Saint Stephen’s Church.

Individuals who register at Saint Stephen’s Church must wait one year before beginning the marriage preparation process. Those whose families are registered parishioners are exempt from this provision.

3. Donations and Stipends

Parishioner Wedding		Non-Parishioner Wedding
\$500.00	<i>Church*</i>	\$500.00
\$200.00	<i>Security**</i>	\$200.00
\$250.00	<i>Organist</i>	\$300.00
\$150.00	<i>Soloist</i>	\$150.00
free-will	<i>Clergy</i>	\$150.00
\$10/each	<i>Servers</i>	\$10/each

* 50% of the Church offering (\$250.00) is to be paid within one week of the initial meeting of the couple with the pastor. The balance is due one month before the wedding.

** The security deposit is to be paid within one week of the initial meeting of the couple with the pastor. The security deposit will be refunded to the couple after the wedding takes place, provided the parish policies are followed and the wedding starts on time.

All other donations and stipends are to be paid, **in cash**, one month before the wedding takes place. Additional envelopes will be provided to you by the priest or deacon who is witnessing your marriage.

Please note that checks are only accepted for the Church donation. All other donations are to be paid in cash. Checks may be made payable to “*Saint Stephen’s Church*”. Include the last names of the bride and groom in the memo line.

4. Wedding Date and Time

- a.) Weddings may take place on any day of the week and are usually performed on Fridays (no earlier than 3:00 p.m. and no later than 5:00 p.m.) and Saturdays (2:30 p.m.). As a general rule, only one wedding per day will be performed.
- b.) Sunday weddings are usually not performed. On rare occasions when a Sunday wedding is performed, the wedding Mass will not be celebrated, but rather the simple ceremony.
- c.) On certain days of the liturgical calendar (*i.e. holy days of obligation*) the options for readings, music and prayers will be limited. Please review any liturgical considerations with the pastor when finalizing a date. Also, please be aware that weddings are **not performed** on the following days:
 - any civil holiday
 - Palm Sunday
 - Holy Saturday
 - Thanksgiving Day
 - Ash Wednesday
 - during Holy Week
 - Easter Sunday
 - Christmas Eve and Christmas Day
- d.) The couple is reminded that no final plans for the wedding are to be made until the Church date has been secured.
- e.) A date is considered “secured” and “finalized” only when the security deposit and initial payment of the Church donation (50% or \$250.00) is received. These donations are to be received within one week of the initial meeting of the couple with the pastor.

5. Required Documents

The following documents will be presented by the couple during the preparation process and retained in the marriage file in the parish:

- for Catholics, an updated Baptismal Certificate (*obtained from the Church where the individual was baptized no more than 6 months prior to the wedding*).
- a copy of the Pre-Cana and “God’s Plan...” certificates.
- witness forms (*two for the groom and two for the bride*) that testify to the couple’s freedom to marry. The priest or deacon will supply the forms for you. Family members, relatives or friends are allowed as witnesses.
- if a former spouse has died, a copy of the death certificate is required.
- decrees of nullity or dispensation as circumstances dictate.
- a marriage license must be obtained from the town in which one party resides. The license is to be turned in to the priest or deacon at the rehearsal and is valid for only thirty (30) days.

6. Pre-Cana / God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage

Each couple is required to attend a Pre-Cana seminar **and** the program entitled “God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage”. At the initial meeting with the pastor, the couple will be provided a schedule of these programs for the coming year. Reservations must be made as soon as possible. Saint Stephen’s hosts a Pre-Cana seminar once a year, usually in early March.

Reservations for these programs are made through the Family Life Office of the Archdiocese of Newark. On-line registration is encouraged and the website is: <http://www.rcan.org/famlife/precana.htm> (*for Pre-Cana*) and <http://www.joyfilledmarriagenj.org/started.htm> (*for “God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage”*).

Certificates of completion for both programs will be issued to the couple. The couple should give a copy of both certificates to the priest or deacon who will witness their marriage.

7. Clergy and Visiting Priests

- a) Priests and deacons of the parish are assigned weddings based on their availability. As much as possible, the weddings are distributed among the clergy as evenly and as fairly as possible. While a couple may request a specific priest or deacon to witness their marriage, there is no guarantee that the priest or deacon will be available.
- b) Visiting priests are welcome to witness your marriage. Some couples have a good relationship with a priest from their past and want to include him in their special day. Couples who wish to do so must, after the initial meeting with the pastor, contact the visiting priest themselves.
- c) When a visiting priest has agreed to witness a marriage, the couple is to inform the pastor as soon as possible. The visiting priest is to send a letter to the pastor informing him of his intention to prepare the couple, conduct the rehearsal and perform the wedding. He is also to request delegation according to the norms of Canon Law. A priest from outside the Archdiocese of Newark must also present his “celebret” (*priestly credentials; from the Latin “let him celebrate”*) to the pastor of Saint Stephen’s.

Wedding Policies & Guidelines

1. Preparing the Wedding Liturgy

A. Mass or Ceremony?

The couple is to decide if they wish to celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage within the context of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass or a simple ceremony. The difference between the two is that, within the ceremony, Holy Communion is not distributed.

If the bride and groom are both practicing Catholics, the best choice is to be married within Mass. Of course, with this choice, a priest must preside at the wedding.

The wedding ceremony is best suited for the following situations:

- **one individual in the couple is not Catholic.** This is the best situation because it offers the couple the opportunity to join the two families at the wedding liturgy without fear of excluding members of the congregation who cannot receive Holy Communion.

- **non-familiarity with the Mass.** This is the best option when many of those attending the wedding are unfamiliar with the Mass in the Roman Catholic tradition or are not practicing Catholics.

- **a validation of a previous marriage.** The option of a wedding ceremony is the best choice in this situation because the couple is already married civilly. The “blessing of the Church” is simply a validation of an already legal marriage. The ceremony simply imparts the sacramental character of marriage.

Couples who are already civilly married and are now seeking the Church’s blessing must carefully consider the extent to which they should be allowed to publicly celebrate the marriage. It would be inappropriate, from the Church’s viewpoint, to go overboard with a large bridal party, gowns, tuxedos, limos and a lavish reception. The reality remains that, while the couple could have, and should have, been married in the Church the first time, they chose the civil, non-religious ceremony. The idea that “the

Church wedding is the one that really counts” has no firm foundation when the Church wedding was not chosen earlier.

2. Liturgy Overview

In the course of marriage preparation, the couple will receive a book titled Together for Life. This book contains the different choices for prayers and readings that the couple can choose. The priest or deacon who is witnessing your marriage will also be a good resource when trying to decide what is best for you.

3. Participation of Family and Friends

A wedding is a joyful event not only for the couple but also for their family and friends. Many couples wish to include certain individuals in their special day. Family members and friends may serve as readers for a wedding but they must be Catholic. They may also bring up the gifts of bread and wine (a wedding Mass only) but, again, they must be Catholic.

A more delicate matter is having family members and/or friends sing a song at the wedding. **It is the policy of Saint Stephen’s parish that no other singers and/or musicians be used during a wedding other than our own parish staff.**

4. Wedding Music

- a) Only approved liturgical music is appropriate for a Church wedding. While Andrea Bocelli, Josh Groban and Celine Dion, to name a few, have beautiful songs and compositions, these are best left for the wedding reception.
- b) The couple is required to meet with our music director, Robert Maidhof, no later than three (3) months prior to the wedding. Mr. Maidhof can be reached at 201-795-9630. He will review the possible music choices for your wedding.
- c) If a couple wishes to have additional instruments, they should discuss this with Mr. Maidhof at their meeting.

5. Wedding Planners / Coordinators

Saint Stephen's Church does not allow professional wedding planners / coordinators to handle any aspect of the Mass or ceremony. The Sacred Liturgy is the responsibility of the priest or deacon. While such planners may assist a couple with other concerns on their wedding day, they are not to have a role in anything pertaining to the Church, including the time immediately before and after the Mass or ceremony.

6. Dress Code

Brides and grooms should remember that the Church is the House of God. As such, the attire of those participating in the liturgy is to be modest and respectful. A bride must seriously consider shawls or other coverings if the ladies in the bridal party will have bare shoulders.

7. Worship Aids (“programs”)

A suitable worship aid will support the full participation of the congregation. **In November, 2011, the English-speaking Church implemented new texts for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Many of the peoples' responses were changed from what people were familiar with at Mass. Due to this change, Saint Stephen's Church will prepare a general worship aid for weddings.**

A couple may choose to prepare a flat panel card (single or double-sided) which contains information specific to their wedding (names, words of thanks, etc.). The priest or deacon witnessing your marriage will help you with this. Couples must remember that the card they choose to include should contain **ONLY** the roles the individuals play in the wedding party and not their relationship to the bride and groom.

8. The Unity Candle / Flowers to Mary / Flowers to Parents

A. The Unity Candle

The Unity Candle is **NOT** a part of the Roman Catholic wedding ritual. While it has become a popular visual symbol for some couples, it is regarded by many as an intrusion into the ceremony because it overburdens the

ceremony and overshadows the primary symbols of the sacrament – the exchange of consent (vows) and exchange of rings. These should stand out above all else.

The practice of the Unity Candle is not permitted for any wedding at Saint Stephen's Church.

B. Flowers to Mary

Like the Unity Candle, the custom of bringing flowers to the shrine of the Blessed Mother is **NOT** a part of the Roman Catholic wedding ritual. A couple must seriously ask themselves **WHY** they wish to present flowers to Mary. Is a devotion to Mary a strong part of the couple's spiritual relationship? Often, a couple has no real devotion to Our Lady and they are simply offering flowers because Mom/Grandma/Aunt Susie says they should. This is not the correct reason!

However, since Mary is the Mother of Jesus and our mother, the Church does not preclude the seed of a devotion to her. **A couple who wishes to present flowers to Mary will be able to do so only after the dismissal by the priest or deacon at their wedding (Mass or ceremony).** The couple will immediately go to the shrine of Our Lady, present the flowers, offer a prayer and then depart to the music they have chosen.

C. Flowers to Parents

By now, the individual or couple reading this guide can guess what the Church's position is regarding the presentation of flowers to the parents of the bride and groom. Any such presentations are to be made **BEFORE** the wedding begins so that the flowers can be carried in procession by the parent(s).

The practice of presenting flowers to the parent(s) at the Sign of Peace of the wedding Mass is no longer an option since it unduly prolongs the Mass.

9. Other Prohibitions

At Saint Stephen's Church, the following are **NOT** allowed at a wedding:

- a) the aisle runner
- b) the throwing of rice, confetti, flower petals, etc.
- only bubbles or bells may be used and only outside after the wedding.
- c) the taping of flowers on pews
- d) additional candles, canopies, balloons or lamps
- e) shouting, whistling or standing on pews
- the Church is the House of God and must be treated as such.

10. Photography / Videography

We know that pictures and videos provide the couple with lasting memories of their wedding day. However, your photographer and/or videographer must follow the rules and policies of Saint Stephen's Church governing their movement around the Church and their use of certain equipment.

- a) No one is allowed in the sacristy or sanctuary during the Mass or ceremony.
- b) The wedding is not a photo opportunity or a press conference. Respect for God's House and professional decorum and behavior are expected.
- c) The choir loft is not available at any time.
- d) Pictures may be taken after the wedding provided the Church's time schedule permits it. The photographer **MUST** check with the priest or deacon after the wedding if this is possible.

The photographer / videographer is to check in with the priest or deacon performing the wedding upon their arrival and before they set up any equipment. Additionally, the bride and groom are to make sure the photographer / videographer are given a copy of the "Professional Agreement" (*located on pages 16 and 17 of this guide*) prior to the wedding.

11. Commercial Filming

In compliance with Archdiocesan policy, no commercial filming of any kind may take place in a Catholic Church. This applies especially to television "reality

shows” such as “Four Weddings” or some other type of commercial venture that will be broadcast through the media.

12. Rehearsals

Rehearsals should be scheduled between the couple and the officiating priest or deacon. The rehearsal time will be entered onto the Church schedule to make sure there are no conflicts with other events or activities.

The rehearsal is normally scheduled for an evening shortly before the wedding day, at the convenience of the couple and the priest or deacon.

We expect that all members of the bridal party are present for the rehearsal, including those who will do readings or take part in the liturgy.

All necessary documents and fees must be submitted prior to the rehearsal.

Any items that will be used in the liturgy (*worship aids, bubbles/bells, etc.*) are to be brought to the rehearsal.

13. The Sacrament of Reconciliation

We ask that the bride and groom, if they are baptized Catholics, celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession) before entering into the Sacrament of Marriage.

Arrangements for confession should be made with the officiating priest. Please note that deacons may not hear confessions.

14. Address and Directions

The address of the Church which you should use for your official notices, invitations is:

The Church of Saint Stephen
676 Kearny Avenue
Kearny, New Jersey 07032

The mailing address is:

The Church of Saint Stephen
141 Washington Avenue
Kearny, New Jersey 07032
201-998-3314 (phone)
201-998-4924 (FAX)
Website: www.thechurchofsaintstephen.com

Directions to the Church, which you may reproduce for your purposes, are:

From Route 21 (traveling South)

- Route 21 South to Exit 7 (Main Street – Belleville).
- At the end of the ramp, make a left onto Main Street.
- Just before the second light, make a right onto Academy Street.
- Make the first left onto Stephens Street.
- Make a left onto Rutgers Street.
- Cross over the bridge and Rutgers Street becomes Belleville Turnpike.
- *Go up the hill to the first light and make a right onto Kearny Avenue.
- Saint Stephen's Church is about a half-mile on the left.

From Route 21 (traveling North)

- Route 21 North to Exit 7 (North Arlington).
- Bear right at the light and cross the bridge.
- Follow the above directions beginning at the *

From Route 3

- Take the exit for Route 21 South.
- Follow the above directions from Route 21 traveling South.

From the Garden State Parkway

- Take the Garden State Parkway to Exit 153.
- Take Route 3 East to the exit for Route 21 South.
- Follow the above directions from Route 21 traveling South.

From the New Jersey Turnpike

- Take the NJ Turnpike to Exit 15W.
- After paying the toll, stay in the far right-hand lane.
- Take the first exit for Kearny.
- Go to the first light and make a right onto Bergen Avenue.
- Go to the second light and make a right onto Schuyler Avenue.
- Follow signs for the Kearny Police Station and make a left onto Laurel Avenue. (about one mile)
- Just before the second light on Laurel Avenue, Saint Stephen's will be on the left-hand side.

PROFESSIONAL AGREEMENT
for Photography / Videography at Saint Stephen's Church

Name of Studio: _____

Name of Photographer / Videographer: _____

Last Name of the Bride: _____

The following policies are meant to respect the dignity and sacredness of God's House while at the same time providing lasting memories for the bride and groom.

1. The photographer / videographer is to check in with the priest or deacon upon their arrival at Church and before any equipment is set up.
2. The photographer / videographer is to respect any guidelines and directions the priest or deacon has already given to the couple and/or bridal party.
3. Please maintain a professional attitude which reflects maturity and decorum.
4. Upon the bride's arrival, photos/videos may be taken but please make sure the bride is in the Church in a timely fashion.
5. The procession is not to be stopped for any reason.
6. During the wedding, the photographer/videographer is to remain on the floor level of the Church. The sacristy and sanctuary are off limits.
7. During the exchange of vows, the photographer/videographer is to remain in the middle aisle at a discreet distance from the sanctuary. The wedding guests must be able to witness what is taking place.
8. Photos may not be taken during the Liturgy of the Eucharist at a Mass. Likewise, photos are not to be taken during the distribution of Holy Communion. This includes photos of guests in the pews. During these times, the photographer is to be seated with the congregation, in a pew behind the break aisle of Church.

9. The choir loft is not available at any time to take photos / videos.
10. Following the wedding, there might be the possibility of taking pictures in the Church. The photographer is to ask permission of the priest or deacon who performed the wedding.
11. If permission is granted for photos after the wedding, they are to take no more than fifteen (15) minutes. Additionally, they are to be taken on the first level of the sanctuary only.

Failure to comply with these parish policies will result in the photography / videography studio and/or professional to be excluded from future weddings at Saint Stephen's Church.