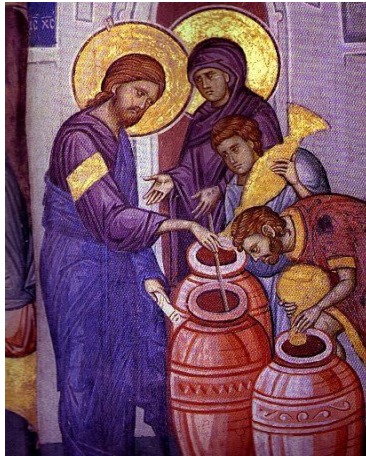


WEDDING POLICIES AND GUIDELINES



ST. PETER THE APOSTLE
UNIVERSITY & COMMUNITY
PARISH
NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ

Preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage

May the riches of God's grace be upon you as you begin your preparation for the Sacrament of Matrimony! The parish community of Saint Peter the Apostle extends its congratulations to you and the promise of prayerful support as you publicly embrace your vocation as husband and wife. The following pages will acquaint you with the Church's vision of the sacrament of marriage and explain to you what is required of couples seeking to marry in St. Peter the Apostle University & Community Parish Church.

A Celebration of the Church

Through the centuries, the Catholic Church has considered it an important responsibility to safeguard the nature and dignity of the Sacrament of Marriage. Both the teaching and the practices of the Church regarding marriage are best seen and understood in this light. At the same time, the Church acknowledges that every marriage is a unique event in the lives of a man and a woman with their own experiences of how God's love has led them together. In preparing for your marriage, this manual is offered to you as the way in which we at St. Peter the Apostle Church seek to apply the discipline of the Church in celebrating marriages in our parish, while also encouraging each couple to add their own personal touches where appropriate. Your wedding is both a personal celebration and a celebration of the Church, which ultimately has the crucial responsibility of protecting and safeguarding the institution of sacramental marriage.

The Mystery of Marriage

Marriage stands in a unique place among the seven Sacraments of the Church: it is the only Sacrament that existed prior to its institution by Our Lord Jesus Christ. At the moment of the creation of the human race, God ordained that man and woman should come together in a life-long partnership of love.

The Lord God said: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him. . . . That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body. (Gen. 2:18, 24)

This loving partnership was the context in which the Lord God ordained that the human race should be fertile and multiply (Genesis 1:28), and so the covenant of marriage was given for the good of raising children, the chief fruit of the marriage partnership.

All the sacraments present to us an encounter with the presence of Christ. Each individual sacrament, through some outward and visible sign, connects us to the divine reality of the saving ministry of Jesus Christ. Marriage as a sacrament makes present to us the reality of Christ's love for us, his Church. The love of Jesus for the Church is faithful, permanent, and always life giving. The one human experience in which we find these characteristics present to a unique degree is in the marital bond between husband and wife. It is precisely in this that Christ chose to raise the natural bond of marriage to the dignity of a sacrament. In the covenantal bond of matrimony, a man and a woman pledge to live out their love for each other in an exclusive and faithful relationship that is permanent and indissoluble, an expression of love filled with such creative energy that its greatest end is the bringing of new human life into the world. Jesus himself, in response to a question about marriage, stated,

Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate. (Matthew 19:4-6)

St. Paul would later make an even more explicit connection between married love and Christ's love for the Church.

So also, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. . . This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:28-30, 32)

Requirements for Marriage

Any baptized Catholic has a right to the Sacrament of Marriage. The Church has determined that there are certain conditions and prerequisites that must be met in order to exercise this right. Some of these requirements are rooted in the natural law and apply to everyone; some are part of the universal law of the Church and apply to all Catholics everywhere throughout the world; some are requirements of the diocesan bishop; others are the result of decisions made by the local parish: all are designed to make certain that everyone who enters marriage is doing so with the proper intention and disposition.

Freedom to Marry

While every baptized Catholic has a right to the Sacrament of Marriage, there are certain situations, called impediments, which may prevent a person from entering a valid marriage. The most frequent is having a prior marriage. When you contact the parish office, you will be asked if there have been any prior marriages for either party. If so, you will be asked how the marriage ended. If it was through death, then the request for your new marriage will be taken. If the prior marriage ended in divorce and there has not been a church annulment, the staff person will refer you to one of the priests, who will discuss the situation with you. In this case, no date can be set for a wedding until an annulment is granted.

Preparation Time

The Catholic bishops of the Province of New Jersey have stipulated a one year preparation process for those entering into marriage. You are strongly encouraged not to confirm arrangements with reception halls until you have confirmed the availability of the church for the wedding. Given the number of parish weddings each year and the amount of time each priest or deacon must set aside for wedding preparation, less than one year's notice makes it difficult to offer the appropriate preparation time with the couple. Any request for a wedding in less than six months cannot be accommodated

Preparation Sessions

There are two main parts to the wedding preparation process. Couples are required to participate in both parts of the process.

- **Marriage Preparation Sessions or Engaged Encounter**

You are free to choose between either Marriage Preparation Sessions (Pre- Cana) or Engaged Encounter. Please note that Marriage Preparation Sessions are not held at St. Peter the Apostle Church, but are held at several sites around our diocese. You may obtain this information from the diocesan website at www.diometuchen.org/familylife. Please note that couples who choose Marriage Preparation Sessions are also required to attend the program entitled “God’s Plan for a Joy-filled Marriage”. Those who choose to participate in Engaged Encounter need not attend “God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage”.

- **Sessions with Priest/Deacon**

The priest or deacon assigned to witness your marriage will meet with you several times during the months preceding the wedding. He will review the plan for these sessions at the first meeting.

Required Church Documents

All couples are required to provide the following documents to the priest or deacon during the period of marriage preparation:

- A recently dated baptismal certificate needs to be obtained from the church where you were baptized. Catholics should request that the church provide all sacramental notations on the certificate. Those baptized in other Christian churches or denominations may simply provide a copy of the baptismal certificate.
- Catholics must also provide a record of Confirmation, if this is not noted on your baptismal certificate.
- The Church must have documentary evidence that a couple is free to marry. For Catholics this is normally proven through the notations provided on the baptismal certificate. If one of you is not Catholic, or if you are unable to obtain your baptismal certificate, witness testimony of your freedom to marry will be required. The priest/deacon will explain the process further.

- If neither of you is a parishioner of St. Peter the Apostle Church, a letter of permission from the pastor of your home parish may be required.
- Certificate of completion of Engaged Encounter or Marriage Preparation Session (Pre-Cana) and “God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage”.

If there has been a prior marriage on the part of one or both parties, the following additional documents are required:

- If the prior marriage ended because of death, a record of the marriage and a copy of the death certificate.
- If the prior marriage ended with a church annulment, a record of the marriage, a copy of the civil divorce decree, and the original church annulment decree.

RECEPTION OF SACRAMENTS OF INITIAION

The Church strongly encourages Catholics to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation prior to entering marriage. St. Peter the Apostle Church offers Confirmation preparation sessions for adults during the course of the year. However, our experience suggests that preparing for Confirmation and marriage at the same time may do an injustice to both sacraments. It may be best to choose to prepare for one sacrament first, then make arrangements for the other one. If you celebrate your wedding before being confirmed, we encourage you to complete your Christian initiation by seeking the Sacrament of Confirmation at a later date.

Cohabitation

Cohabitation is the term used to describe the situation where a man and woman make the decision to live together as though husband and wife before they are married. While contemporary society views cohabitation as acceptable, and perhaps even desirable, the Church’s beautiful teaching on the nature of human sexuality makes clear a different reality. Not only is cohabitation not in keeping with the life of a faithful disciple; it is also not prudent. Recent socio- logical research

lends credence to the Church's position. The sad reality is that 50% of marriages will end in divorce; the rate is even higher for couples who have lived together prior to marriage. The priest/deacon preparing you for the sacrament will discuss this issue with you as part of the preparation process. We encourage you to be honest and candid in this discussion and to be open to what your pastoral minister will present to you.

Place and Times For Weddings

REQUIREMENTS FOR PLACE

Traditionally, the church of the bride is the proper place for the wedding to take place, but the groom's church may be chosen as well. Since marriage itself is a sacred act, it follows that the church would require that this be celebrated in the sacred "home" of the community. Therefore, Church law requires that Catholics be married in a sacred space, i.e. a Catholic church or chapel. The parish priests do not have the authority to dispense from this requirement. Only the Bishop of Metuchen may do so, and in the case of two baptized Catholics the permission is rarely, if ever, granted.

In the case of a Catholic marrying a non-Catholic Christian, either Orthodox or Protestant, it is still preferred that the wedding take place in a sacred space. However, if the party who is not Catholic has a particular relationship with their own church (e.g. the bride's father is a minister or the groom is a member of the church staff) the bishop can grant permission for the wedding to take place in a non-Catholic church.

In the case of a Catholic marrying someone of another faith (e.g. a Hindu, Jew, Buddhist, Muslim, etc.) a neutral site may be sought by both parties. In this case, the bishop may grant permission for the wedding to take place in a non-religious site, perhaps the municipal hall or a hotel ballroom. Please note, however, that permission to be married outdoors is never granted.

REGARDLESS OF WHERE THE WEDDING TAKES PLACE, YOU MUST GO THROUGH THE REQUIRED CATHOLIC PREPARATION PROCESS.

WEDDING TIMES

Weddings at St. Peter the Apostle Church are normally celebrated on Saturdays, no later than 2:30 p.m. Those couples choosing a 2:30 p.m. wedding time need to be aware that they must be out of the church building by 4:00 p.m. in order that preparations may be made for the 5:00 p.m. parish Mass. Weddings may also be scheduled for Friday evenings, with the exception of Fridays during Lent. Due to the Rutgers University campus ministry Mass schedule, as well as various other Sunday activities in the church, Sunday weddings ordinarily are not permitted.

Types of Services

There are two forms of celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage in the Catholic Church: the wedding ceremony or the Nuptial Mass.

WEDDING CEREMONY

The ceremony begins with the Liturgy of the Word, which includes three readings from the Sacred Scriptures followed by a homily. The Rite of Marriage follows the homily. The service then concludes with the prayers of intercession, the Nuptial Blessing, the Lord's Prayer and a final blessing. The ceremony lasts approximately thirty to forty minutes.

NUPTIAL MASS

The Nuptial Mass is the second form of celebrating the marriage rite. It includes all the elements of the ceremony plus the Liturgy of the Eucharist, which follows the Rite of Marriage. The Nuptial Mass lasts about one hour.

CHOOSING THE TYPE OF SERVICE

There are some guidelines that will be helpful to keep in mind when deciding which of the two forms of the service to request. Please note that at St. Peter the Apostle Church both the wedding ceremony and the Nuptial Mass are celebrated with the same sense of care and reverence.

The Nuptial Mass is the ideal celebration for those couples where both are active, practicing Catholics who participate in the life of their parish

community. Otherwise, the priest or deacon will assist you to determine which form of celebration is most appropriate for you.

If a Catholic marries a member of one of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, either a Nuptial Mass or the wedding ceremony may be used. This choice is to be made in consultation with the pastoral minister overseeing the preparation process. Since the Orthodox Churches have their own particular requirements for the valid celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage, it is essential that the couple speak with a priest from the particular Orthodox Church to determine these requirements.

When a Catholic marries a baptized Christian from a Protestant denomination, the wedding ceremony is used. It is a sad consequence of the division within the Christian family that we do not share the same beliefs about the Church and, in particular, the Eucharist, with our Protestant brothers and sisters. Marriage is about two individuals coming together in unity. It seems terribly inappropriate to acknowledge this unity and then celebrate the Eucharist, at which half the congregation, including one of the spouses, is not able to participate fully. This is a strong conviction held by the clergy of St. Peter the Apostle Church, and as such we do not celebrate the Nuptial Mass for a Catholic marrying a Protestant or non-denominational Christian.

In the situation where a Catholic marries a person who is not baptized, the Nuptial Mass is prohibited by the universal law of the Church. The ceremony is the appropriate form of celebration in this case.

WEDDINGS DURING LENT

The Rite of Marriage instructs that when a marriage is celebrated during Advent or Lent. . . .the parish priest should advise the couple to take into consideration the special nature of these times. Due to the intensely penitential nature of Lent, no Nuptial Masses are celebrated during this forty day period. Weddings scheduled during this time are celebrated as ceremonies. The liturgical restrictions in regards to music and flowers are also to be observed. Because of the particularly penitential nature of Lenten Fridays, as well as the parish schedule for Stations of the Cross, weddings are not celebrated on Fridays during Lent

PARTICIPANTS

CLERGY

The Catholic Church requires that for a marriage to be a valid sacrament it must take place in the presence of an ordained member of the clergy and two additional witnesses. These witnesses are normally the best man and the maid/ matron of honor. The ordained minister may be either a priest or a deacon. By virtue of their ordination, deacons as well as priests are entrusted with preparing couples for marriage and officiating at the marriage rite. Since deacons do not have the ability to preside at the Eucharist, they only preside at wedding ceremonies that take place outside the celebration of Mass. Please note that deacons may not preside at any wedding in which one of the spouses is a member of an Eastern Rite Catholic Church or Orthodox Church.

A priest or deacon will be assigned to a couple by the parish staff. You are free to request a particular priest or deacon; however due to transfers, personal commitments and other factors we cannot guarantee your request. You are guaranteed that if you were promised a priest or deacon from the parish one will be available.

VISTING CLERGY

For a good reason permission may be given for a priest or deacon from outside the parish to be the Church's official witness of your wedding. When this permission is given, it is ordinarily the responsibility of the visiting priest to prepare the couple and complete all necessary paperwork. Someone from the parish office will be in contact with him to grant delegation to witness the wedding and to provide him with the parish wedding policy. The visiting priest or deacon must be willing to honor and observe the customs and practices of our worshipping community as they apply to the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage. They are also responsible to be present at the wedding rehearsal.

FAMILY & FRIENDS

There is a tendency to view the wedding celebration as an event properly belonging to the bride and groom, and on many levels it is certainly “your day”. At the same time, your wedding is an act of the church community, both the universal Church and our particular parish community: thus it is also the Church’s “day”. You are encouraged to invite your family members and friends to participate in the wedding celebration and to assume special roles in it. Please keep the following in mind when selecting participants:

For Nuptial Masses, those serving as readers or gift-bearers must be practicing Catholics in good standing, because the Mass is intimately connected to our Catholic identity.

Since the wedding ceremony occurs outside the context of the Mass, anyone who practices his or her particular faith is welcome to read the Scriptures. Please be sensitive to the faith traditions of those you invite to do this. For example, to invite a Jewish friend to read from the Old Testament would be appropriate; to invite the same friend to read from the New Testament might prove quite awkward.

It is important that those chosen to proclaim the Scriptures have the necessary confidence to read in public and have a strong enough voice to proclaim God’s word with beauty and reverence.

You are free to pick any of your relatives and friends to serve as bridesmaids, groomsmen, the maid/matron of honor and the best man. Please note that, as was previously mentioned, because the act of receiving Holy Communion is an act of faith, both in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and in the Church and its teachings, we are not able to extend a general invitation to everyone to receive Holy Communion. It would be advisable for you to share this information with those members of the wedding party who are not Catholic well before the wedding. (See page 19 for the official policy on the reception of Holy Communion.)

Often, couples choose young relatives to serve as flower girls and ring bearers. We strongly encourage you to exercise good judgment when making these choices. To expect a two year old child to walk down the aisle with the same maturity as an eight year old is unrealistic. Experience suggests it is more prudent to have younger children sit with

their parents during the celebration rather than with the wedding party itself. Each child is different, and couples are encouraged to make an informed decision in determining how best to involve any children in the wedding.

The Celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage

PLANNING THE WEDDING LITURGY

The priest/deacon assigned to prepare you for your reception of the sacrament of matrimony will also guide you through planning the wedding liturgy. The Church, as the custodian of the sacraments, has produced an officially approved rite for the celebration of marriage which we are bound to use. For example, couples are not permitted to compose their own vows; one of the two forms in the rite must be used. Each couple will be provided with a set of readings from which to select the particular readings for the celebration. Please note that only readings from the Scriptures may be used. The Director of Music will assist the couple in making proper musical selections.

MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

Since it is an integral part of Catholic worship, music will play an important role in your wedding. St. Peter the Apostle Church observes all the directives of the Diocese of Metuchen concerning the kind of music used at a Catholic wedding. Several times during the year, a general planning meeting of those to be married is offered. During this meeting, the Director of Music will present appropriate musical examples from which each couple may make their selections. You will be notified of the date of the next wedding music planning meeting several months before your wedding. If you have a legitimate conflict and cannot attend, you may schedule a meeting with the Director of Music. In this case, the meeting should take place at least a month before the wedding.

The celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage is first and foremost a celebration of the worshipping community of the Church. Only music which enhances the spirit of the liturgy and only texts consonant with the Christian faith are appropriate for the celebration of the sacrament. Since contemporary popular music does not fit this criterion, such music is not permitted.

The parish organist is contracted to play at all parish weddings. In the rare event permission is given for a guest organist to play at the wedding, you are responsible for paying the parish organist a bench fee of \$100.00. If guest musicians are used, all music must still be submitted and approved by the Director of Music.

The parish cantor is also contracted to sing at all parish weddings and serves as both cantor and soloist. You may bring in a guest soloist who must first be approved by the Director of Music. In the event a guest soloist is approved, the parish will still provide the cantor who will lead all the liturgical songs at the wedding, and the normal cantor fee will be charged.

(The list of fees for musicians may be found under the section “Fees” on page 17.) If you have a friend or relative who is a regular cantor in another Catholic parish, that cantor may be used with the approval of the Director of Music.

Family Rules: Every family has its unique customs and observances that may not be shared by other families. This is true of parish families as well. In conjunction with the norms given by the universal Church and with the guidelines of the Diocese of Metuchen, St. Peter the Apostle Church has established certain practices in regards to music that may not be the custom in other parishes. We encourage couples to be involved in the selection of music for the wedding ceremony; at the same time, we also request that you respect our parish customs.

DECORATIONS AND FLOWERS

You may choose to have flowers or bows at the end of the pews. Please instruct those responsible that these decorations may only be attached to the pews with ribbon, long pipe cleaners or rubber bands. The use of nails, tacks, tape or any other objects that could leave marks or otherwise damage the pews is strictly prohibited.

In selecting decorations, please be aware that they must not restrict access to the pews on either side.

Since aisle runners constitute a safety hazard and places the parish and our people at risk of harm if they should fall, their use is not permitted at St. Peter's.

Lighting a unity candle is not preferred, as it is not in any way a part of the wedding ritual. Should you desire, you may purchase and bring a votive candle and offer it to The Blessed Mother at the Offertory

For reasons of safety, care for the environment and plant maintenance, under no circumstances may any kind of rose petals or any other flowers, rice, birdseed, confetti, glitter, candy or any other objects be scattered in the Church or on Church property. In addition, the launching of balloons is prohibited, as is releasing of doves.

Flowers are the responsibility of the couple. One or two arrangements may be placed on the floor in the sanctuary, in the center or at either end in front of the altar. Floral arrangements in front of the statue of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph are also possible.

There are special restrictions in place for weddings that are celebrated during the season of Lent. Due to the penitential nature of this season, only one floral arrangement is permitted in the sanctuary. Decorations on the pews are not permitted.

PHOTOGRAPHERS & VIDEOGRAPHERS

Only one photographer and/or videographer is to be used during the church service. These persons are present to complement the service and at no time should they distract from the liturgical action. Please note the following policies for photographers and videographers. It is your responsibility to share this information with the appropriate parties.

- The photographer and videographer should meet with the officiant of your wedding before the service begins.
- The setting up of extra lights in the church is not permitted. Flash photography is permitted if kept to a minimum.

- Photographers are to limit themselves to the area behind the pews. At no time may they cross in front of the families, stop the procession or enter the sanctuary area.
- Videographers must be stationery during the service and remain in one of the balconies. They may be downstairs for the procession in and out of church. At no time may they hinder the view of the congregation or hinder the processions.

You may have pictures taken in church after the conclusion of the wedding provided it is done with appropriate reverence and respect for the church. However, since other activities do take place in the church, each couple will be permitted use of the church for pictures for thirty minutes after the celebration. In particular, at Saturday weddings, pictures must be concluded and the church building cleared by 4:00 p.m.

Please note that if your wedding is delayed because of the late arrival of participants, you may lose your time for pictures in the church.

THE CIVIL MARRIAGE LICENSE

It is the responsibility of the couple to procure a valid New Jersey marriage license. A marriage license is valid for thirty days from the date of issue. Both the bride and groom must apply for the license together in person.

THE REHEARSAL

The rehearsal is usually scheduled for the evening before the wedding at the couple's and the officiant's convenience. All the members of your wedding party are expected to be present and on time. There are time restrictions, so this is extremely important. The readers should be present at the rehearsal as well, so that the presider may review the proper procedures for reading the Scriptures during the liturgy. If they are unable to attend the rehearsal, please advise them to arrive early on the day of the wedding in order to speak with the officiant.

In the interest of time, music is not permitted at the wedding rehearsal; it is not necessary for the musicians to be present.

The following items must be brought to the rehearsal:

- The civil marriage license
- All fees, if not previously submitted
- Programs (optional)

The atmosphere of the rehearsal is relaxed. However, we ask you to be mindful that the rehearsal is taking place in a house of worship.

ADDITIONAL PREPARATIONS

We strongly encourage you celebrate the Sacrament of Penance (Confession) before the wedding (obviously this applies to Catholics only). This may be scheduled for immediately after the rehearsal or at another time during the week prior to the wedding, or you may come anonymously during the regularly scheduled time for Confession at St. Peter's, Saturday mornings from 11 AM - 12 noon. The celebration of the Sacrament of Penance provides an opportunity to put the past behind you and to receive the fullness of sacramental grace.

Couples often provide program booklets for the wedding. You should discuss this with the priest/deacon so that the proper order of the service is printed in the program. St. Peter the Apostle Church does not provide wedding programs. If you do have them on hand, we ask you to please bring any leftover programs back with you.

We request that you and your wedding party respect the assigned starting time for your wedding. There is no such thing as being "fashionably late." The bride and bridal party should plan to arrive at the church ten minutes in advance of the scheduled starting time. To plan intentionally to be late is insensitive to your guests, the musicians and the clergy. Please make appropriate plans with your limousine driver and photographer so that the start of the wedding is not delayed. If the wedding starts significantly late, the presiding priest has the right to change a Nuptial Mass to a ceremony. In addition, we cannot guarantee that the musicians will be able to remain for the entire liturgy.

FEES

All fees are due at least a month prior to your wedding. The church fee is to be made by check payable to St. Peter the Apostle Church. Cantor and organist fees may be paid in cash or by check directly to the musician.

Please note that the church fee is not a payment to the priest or deacon.

Church Fee (parishioners, current Rutgers University students, faculty and staff, and Rutgers alumni within five years of graduation)
\$325.00

Church Fee: (non-parishioners and all other Rutgers alumni)
\$725.00

Organist \$225.00

Cantor \$175.00

NURTURING YOUR MARRIAGE

A wedding is a day; a marriage is a lifetime. Your sacrament begins at the moment you exchange your vows in the wedding liturgy. In the years to come, your love must grow, develop and mature if your sacrament is to be a true and authentic reality. Working to nurture your marriage in the years ahead is a primary responsibility for Christian spouses. Seeking the support of other couples in good marriages, embracing a full participation in the sacramental life of the Church, seeking guidance and advice from your pastoral ministers when necessary all can assist you in sustaining and enriching your marital love. Another helpful tool is the American Bishops' marriage support website For Your Marriage which can be found at www.foryourmarriage.org. This contains information and resources for marriage preparation as well as helpful suggestions for nurturing and supporting your lives as a married couple

CLOSING REFLECTION

God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him (1 John 4:16b). Every celebration of a sacrament is a celebration of this profound truth; an encounter with the mystery of God's love for the human person. In the joining of husband and wife in the unbreakable bond of love which is marriage, this divine love is made real and visible in a unique manner. The power and witness of your faithful love as Christian spouses ought never to be under-estimated. In times of joy and sorrow, in times of peace and struggle, and in all the ordinary moments of daily life, your love stands as a shining beacon inviting others into the experience of God's love which is the source of all human love. God has a plan for your lives as a married couple; may you know his will in all things and have the courage to live out that will in joyful love all the days of your married life.

What then does God want? Simply, He wants what any lover wants. He does not want merely the fruits and effects of love but our love itself, our hearts. He wants us. The lover, in some mysterious way, wants the beloved herself. His object is not to possess her, not to have power over her, not even just to enjoy the pleasures she can give, but he wants her herself. Love longs for union, however dimly it is understood and however impossible it is to explain. Love longs for perfect harmony of wills but not confusion of substances. That means the union in which the two become one without ceasing to be two. This is the crazy, impossible, but true mathematics of love.

(The God Who Loves You by Peter Kreeft, p.164)

DIRECTIVES FOR THE RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

On November 14, 1996, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the following guidelines on the reception of communion. These guidelines replace the guidelines approved by the Administrative Committee of the NCCB in November 1986. The guidelines, which are to be included in missalettes and other participation aids published in the United States, seek to remind all those who may attend Catholic liturgies of the present discipline of the Church with regard to the sharing of Eucharistic communion.

FOR CATHOLICS

As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for a grave reason where there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (canon 916). A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.

FOR OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS

We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21).

Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (canon 844 § 4). Members of the Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National Catholic Church are urged to respect the discipline of their own Churches. According to Roman Catholic discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of communion by Christians of these Churches (can. 844 § 3).

FOR THOSE NOT RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION

All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another.

FOR NON-CHRISTIANS

We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ. While we cannot admit them to Holy Communion, we ask them to offer their prayers for the peace and the unity of the human family.

Secretariat for Divine Worship | 3211 4th Street, N.E., Washington DC
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