

Wedding Guidelines

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Annunciation of the Lord Catholic Church
Decatur, Alabama

Celebrating Marriage at Annunciation of the Lord Parish

Congratulations to both of you!

Your engagement is a special time for each of you, for your families and friends, and for your entire parish community. This is a time of new beginnings, of love, of promise, and of hope. The Church is blessed and encouraged by your willingness to make this commitment of life and love to each other.

Your wedding celebration will be a special and grace-filled time in your lives. The Church welcomes you to celebrate and solemnize your wedding in the context of Christian prayer. Indeed, so important is marriage in Christian life that it has been instituted by Christ as a sacrament: Christian marriage makes Christ, in his love, sacramentally present. Choosing to have your wedding within the liturgy of the Church indicates that you look upon your wedding as a religious event and understand the faith that is necessary to celebrate this sacrament.

Great care is taken to see that the prayer for this special moment is reverent, graceful, beautiful, and open to the movement of God's Spirit among us. As much care should be taken in planning and preparing for the liturgy as is taken for planning all the other aspects of a wedding. Our celebrations of the sacraments, marriage included, are always rooted in listening to the scriptures so that we can be nourished and strengthened by God's Word. We always celebrate the sacraments in the context of community. We gather with our brothers and sisters in faith and ask for their prayerful support. These celebrations are incomplete unless they are filled with song, with prayerful gestures, and with the silence in which we hear the voice of God in our lives.

In this spirit, the parish church of Annunciation of the Lord provides the following guidelines. These guidelines ensure that care and attention are given to the most important aspects of your marriage preparation.

May God bless you during this special time of reflection and preparation.

Father Charles Merrill, Pastor
And the entire Pastoral Staff of Annunciation of the Lord Catholic Church

Scheduling Your Wedding Ceremony

Basic Requirements:

- Either the bride or groom must be a baptized, preferably confirmed Catholic in good standing and free to marry. “Good standing” implies that the person is registered and active in a Catholic Church community.
- If engaged to a non-Catholic, couples will discuss dispensations during marriage preparation.
- Any couple considering marriage for a second time should be aware that time must be given for a possible annulment procedure. A wedding cannot be scheduled until the annulment process is complete and a final affirmative decision has been given.
- The Diocese requires a minimum sixth-month preparation period. Couples may want to consider contacting the Parish Office one year in advance to make a reservation.

Reservation procedures:

- To reserve a date for a wedding, the **Bride or Groom** will need to contact the parish office to discuss available dates. We understand that parents and other representatives like to assist with the coordination of wedding logistics, but it is important that the couple take the initiative in starting the process with the church since it is their ceremony the **Church Use Fee** deposit will be required at the time of scheduling the event on the church calendar (see Fees and Stipends page 12.)
- If the Bride and/or Groom are not members of the parish, they will need to have their current parish, where they are registered, send a letter confirming their parishioner status and that they have permission to be married at Annunciation of the Lord.
- Couples are required to speak to the Pastor before inviting an outside priest or deacon to preside at their wedding. It is preferred that the visiting priest or deacon who prepares the couple will also preside at the wedding.
 - The presider will be responsible for obtaining all dispensations and documents needed. It is always best for the bride/groom to begin in their home parish when selecting the presider and requesting marriage preparation.
 - The chosen presider will need to send a letter confirming his role as the presider and that he will be responsible for the couple’s marriage preparation. Visiting presiders will need to request permission and/or delegation from the Pastor in order to preside at the wedding. Visiting priests or deacons from outside of the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama will also need to have a Letter of Good Standing sent from their Diocese.

Times for Wedding Ceremonies:

The Bride and Groom need to meet with the Pastor or Deacon before you set a date. Diocesan regulations require that arrangements with the church be made at least six months in advance. It is preferable that the date be on the parish calendar one year in advance.

One Wedding per weekend is scheduled at Annunciation of the Lord. Weddings ceremonies may be scheduled at Annunciation of the Lord Church on Saturdays at 10:00 AM or 1:00 PM except for the first Saturday of the month. Weddings may not be scheduled during the Advent and Lenten Seasons. Saturday evening weddings are not scheduled at Annunciation of the Lord. A non-refundable deposit of \$100 payable to *Annunciation of the Lord* is due at the time the wedding is scheduled and the remainder of the Church Use fee is due a month before the wedding. Other fees are listed on page 12. A ceremony date cannot be finalized until all the required paperwork is received along with the remainder of the Church Use fee. Reservations should be completed within the thirty-day time period. **Note:** There will be a non-refundable fee of \$100 for each time a date for a wedding is rescheduled.

Marriage Preparation

During your six months preparation period you will:

1. Meet with the pastor and/or deacon 3-4 times
2. Complete the prenuptial inventory.
3. Discuss any dispensations or permissions necessary.
4. Turn in a recent copy of Baptism certificate of Catholic parties.
5. Attend Pre-Marriage Preparation sessions with the deacon.
 - Part of this preparation includes completing the FOCUS Inventory (Facilitating Open Communication, Understanding and Study).
 - If possible, attend an Engaged Encounter Weekend.
6. Meet with the Wedding Coordinator to coordinate all the details of your wedding liturgy.
 - If you choose to provide the guests with a program, a complete “camera ready” copy of it must be submitted to the pastor for approval before it is printed.

Required Marriage File Paperwork

- Prenuptial Investigation form (completed during preparation).
- Baptismal Certificates: Catholic brides and grooms will need to present a NEW copy of their baptismal certificate from the Church of their baptism, noting all Sacraments received. The new certificate needs to be dated and sealed within six months of the wedding ceremony date. If the Bride or Groom was baptized in another faith, and later was received into the Catholic Church, a copy of his/her Profession of Faith is needed. Non-Catholics must provide some evidence of baptism, i.e. a certificate or letter from the Church's secretary, or a signed affidavit by a witness to the baptism.
- Freedom to Marry Affidavits: It is suggested that the Bride and Groom supply two affidavits completed on their behalf stating that they are free to marry.
- Dispensation (if applicable)
- Certificate from Pre-Marriage Preparation
- Certificate of Completion for FOCCUS Inventory
- Certificate of Completion for Engaged Encounter (optional)
- Civil Marriage License: A copy of the notarized Alabama Marriage Certificate needs to be turned in within 2 weeks before the wedding.

The Wedding Coordinator

Make an appointment with the Wedding Coordinator and confirm all dates and times with her schedule, and the parish calendar. The duties of the Wedding Coordinator only involve tasks done at the Church. The Wedding Coordinator

- will meet with the couple to present and clarify policies and procedures.
- is present and coordinates the scheduled rehearsal.
- is present to assist the celebrant and help the wedding party on the day of the wedding
- is responsible for seeing that the church is ready, turning on lights, locking and unlocking doors, moving chairs, etc.
- will also coordinate with the florists, photographers, etc.
- will help prepare the wedding program (proofread or revise it).

Note: Outside wedding consultants have no role in the liturgy or in the ceremony activities. They can work closely with the Wedding Coordinator to ensure that the wedding liturgy and the activities which surround it comply with the guidelines of Annunciation of the Lord.

Additions to the liturgy, such as the "unity candle", are not permitted. At Annunciation of the Lord, however, there are allowances for some cultural additions that are in accordance with the Catholic Liturgy (examples: Arras and Lasso.)

Music Director

Meet with the Music Director.

1. The music director will be the point of contact for all musical questions and assist you with appropriate musical selections to enhance your wedding ceremony.
2. All music used in church must reflect the sacramental nature of the wedding ceremony. Songs must echo the Catholic understanding of the sacrament of Matrimony which places God in the center of a love shared by husband and wife. The reception is the appropriate place for secular music.
3. The Music Director must approve all musicians (singers and accompanists). They must have an adequate knowledge of Catholic liturgy and the wedding ceremony.

Ceremony Planning

Facilities

- Seating:
 - Annunciation of the Lord provides seating for up to 400 inside the Church. See diagram on page 15)
 - The Chapel has seating for no more than 50 unless extra chairs are set up. Possibly 100 extra chairs may fit. The Chapel is suitable for weddings where the guest list is small. Also, because the Chapel has small spaces, the number in the Bridal Party should be limited to just the two witnesses.
 - Situations such as COVID may reduce the seating available. Check with the Parish Office for any changes.
- Placement of Furnishings: The placement of liturgical furnishings is legislated by the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and is not negotiable. All furnishings in the sanctuary are to remain in their original position.
- Wedding Party
 - Space in the sanctuary is limited. To maintain the Roman Catholic liturgical spirit of “noble simplicity”, the number of individuals in the wedding party should reflect the dignity of the Sacrament. In addition, the Sanctuary space is not set up to accommodate large wedding parties. Please keep wedding parties at no more than 6 attendants per side. If you have a wedding party larger than 6 per side, the attendants will be allowed to process down the aisle straight into a pew, but will not be allowed to assemble in the Sanctuary. Only the Maid/Matron(s) of Honor and Best Man will be allowed go up into the Sanctuary area.
 - Any children involved in the wedding ceremony should be mature enough to reliably fulfill their assigned role. (The acceptable age is at least 6 years old.)
 - Members of the wedding party may ask to have access to separate meeting rooms prior to the wedding for pre-nuptial preparation. The groom

and groomsmen are requested to arrive dressed for the wedding. They will be directed to wait in Room C or possibly the Emmaus Room. The bride and bridesmaids will have access to Room A or possibly the Cafeteria. The bride and bridesmaids should come with hair and makeup ready, but are allowed to arrive in appropriate casual clothes (no robes) and dress in the room.

- The Wedding Dress and the Dress of the Wedding Party
 - The Marriage ceremony will take place in a Sacred Space. Accordingly, apparel for the bride, the groom, the entire wedding party, and all participating in the liturgy should reflect a spirit of modesty, dignity, and decorum.
 - Dresses which are backless, strapless (no spaghetti straps), halter-style, have a plunging neckline or backline, do not cover the shoulders or are otherwise revealing are not acceptable during the ceremony itself or for photographs taken inside the church.
 - If the style of dress for the bride or attendants is revealing, please make arrangements for a shawl or wrap to be worn for any activity taking place within the church. If you have a veil (which is not mandatory), please note that it is NOT sufficient to cover bare shoulders and back. It is very important to follow these guidelines.
 - The bride and groom will be required to sign an agreement that you are aware and understand this policy. If a dress is not within the guidelines and the celebrant deems necessary, a wrap will be provided before the celebration of the liturgy, but please know it may not match the wedding dress.

Wedding Rehearsal

The wedding rehearsal sets the tone for the ceremony. Attendees at the wedding rehearsal should be limited to parents of the bride and groom, attendants, and only those who have specific responsibilities in the wedding. All should arrive at the church fifteen minutes before the rehearsal is scheduled to begin. If you have additional guests invited to a dinner afterwards, please ask them to meet your party at the dinner location. The rehearsal should last no longer than one hour.

Safety Guidelines

1. The consumption of alcohol anywhere on the Church grounds or buildings is strictly forbidden at the time of the rehearsal or wedding. It is the responsibility of the wedding couple and their families to make this fact known to all the members of the wedding party.
2. Rice, rice bags, birdseed, bubbles and confetti at weddings are a safety hazard and maintenance problem. No rice, rice bags, birdseed or confetti may be thrown within the church, on church grounds or anywhere on church property.
3. Aisle Cloths create a tripping hazard and may not be used. Our insurance will not cover a claim for slipping on an aisle cloth or “runner”.
4. Any children involved in the wedding ceremony should be at least 6 years old to fulfill their assigned role.
5. The wedding party is responsible for any personal items left in the church, or stolen from the Church property.

Photographer

To maintain the sanctity and dignity of the occasion, we request that photographers and video operators follow these directives:

1. No flash may be used during the ceremony
2. Only the lighting already available in the church may be used. No additional lighting may be brought into the church
3. Additional microphones for video may be placed in the sanctuary only if they are wireless and do not interfere with the sound system of the church and its wireless frequency.
4. Before and after the wedding, the church will be open for the taking of pictures (flash allowed). A flash photo of the bride may be taken as she comes down the aisle at the beginning of the ceremony, and of both the bride and groom at the end of the ceremony. If group photographs are to be taken before the wedding, arrangements should be made with the priest/deacon to ensure that there are no conflicts with other scheduled liturgies.
5. Neither the photographer nor the video operator is to move around the church during the ceremony
6. No pictures are to be taken in the Sanctuary (Altar area) during the ceremony
7. Pictures may be taken during the ceremony from the perimeter of the seating area only. Video cameras must be stationary during the entire ceremony and set up either in the back of the church or along the sides of the church.
8. Pictures after the wedding should be limited to 30 minutes to avoid conflicts with other services. Respect should always be given to the presence of the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the Tabernacle in the sanctuary or in the chapel.
9. If there are any questions, please check with the priest/deacon prior to the service.

The Environment of the Worship Space

The Church is a sacred space. The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in every Catholic Church, dedicating it to God's presence. Everything done for the wedding must both reflect and respect this reality. Many desire to place floral arrangements in the church. Only fresh cut floral arrangements may be used. Please observe the following when making arrangements with your florist:

6. At Annunciation of the Lord Church floral arrangements may be placed only in the following places:
 - In front of the crucifix
 - In special "rings" around candles (church will make these available).
 - bouquets on pedestals against the back wall of the sanctuary (on the edge near the steps)
 - Flowers may not be placed on the altar.

2. **Flowers** are to be in standing vases or containers and should not trail down onto the floor.
 - The bouquets should not be so large so as to diminish the importance of the altar or the pulpit.
 - Flower girls should not throw any petals on the floor – live or artificial.
 - Flowers may be left in the church after the wedding.

7. **Plants** or flowers currently in the sanctuary may NOT be moved or removed without prior approval. If moved, they must be returned to their places.

8. **Decorations** may be placed near the back wall. Please do not use tacks, nails, tape or anything which may damage the surfaces. Nothing should be taped to the pews. No candles are allowed on the pew markers. If ribbon bows are to be used, they may be tied to the end of the pews. All decorations and candles other than sanctuary flowers should be removed after the wedding.

9. **Candles:** Annunciation of the Lord provides the altar and sanctuary candles for weddings. Please note that no church candles are to be used without prior permission.

10. Finally please arrange with the Parish office for a time to deliver and set up the flowers.

Fees and Stipends

Fees include:

Church Use fee:

Parishioner (registered for at least 2 years) \$300

Non-Parishioner or Parishioner of less than 2 year \$600

Note: \$100 of this fee is required to schedule your wedding on the church calendar and is not refundable.

(Should any parishioner experience a financial hardship, please meet the pastor for other arrangements)

Stipends include:

Wedding Director	\$225 minimum
Music Director	discuss with Music Director
Accompanist	\$225 minimum
Cantor	\$150 minimum
Extra instruments	by arrangement with Music Director
Extra Voices	by arrangement with Music Director
Extra Rehearsals	by arrangement with Music Director
Sacristan	\$50
Altar Servers (each)	\$20 (3 servers if Mass, 2 if not)

Priest/deacon – There is no set stipend, but a gifts for the priest/deacon that is proportionat to the others listed is customary and appreciated since he does not receive any part of the fees paid.

Wedding Checklist

To schedule wedding:

- Meet with priest/deacon (at least 6 months prior to wedding taking place)
- Meet with secretary to get wedding date on church calendar and pay deposit.

At your earliest convenience:

- Obtain recent copies of your baptismal certificates and mail or bring them to the parish office.
- Schedule and attend the Pre-Marriage Preparation Sessions
- Complete the FOCUS inventory.
- Attend an Engaged Encounter Weekend (optional)

Four months prior to wedding:

- Meet with the Wedding Coordinator
- Meet with Music Director to plan wedding music

One month prior to wedding:

- All fees paid
- All music plans finalized
- With the assistance of the Wedding Director select scripture readers and other liturgical ministers for your wedding liturgy.
- Create and print your orders of worship; if you wish to have one, after having it proofed by the Wedding Director and approved by the pastor.
- Musicians and Wedding Director stipends paid. (Please make checks payable to the individual persons.)
- Distribute copies of the information attached to the **florist** and **photographer**.
- If you have a rehearsal, notify and ensure everyone involved will be on time.
- Plan stipends for priest officiating wedding and other ministers (if applicable).
- Be sure all required documents are in the Marriage File. Start arrangements to complete ***Alabama Certificate for Marriage*** form and have it notarized. A copy of the notarized form needs to be turned in to parish office no later than **2 weeks prior to wedding**.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

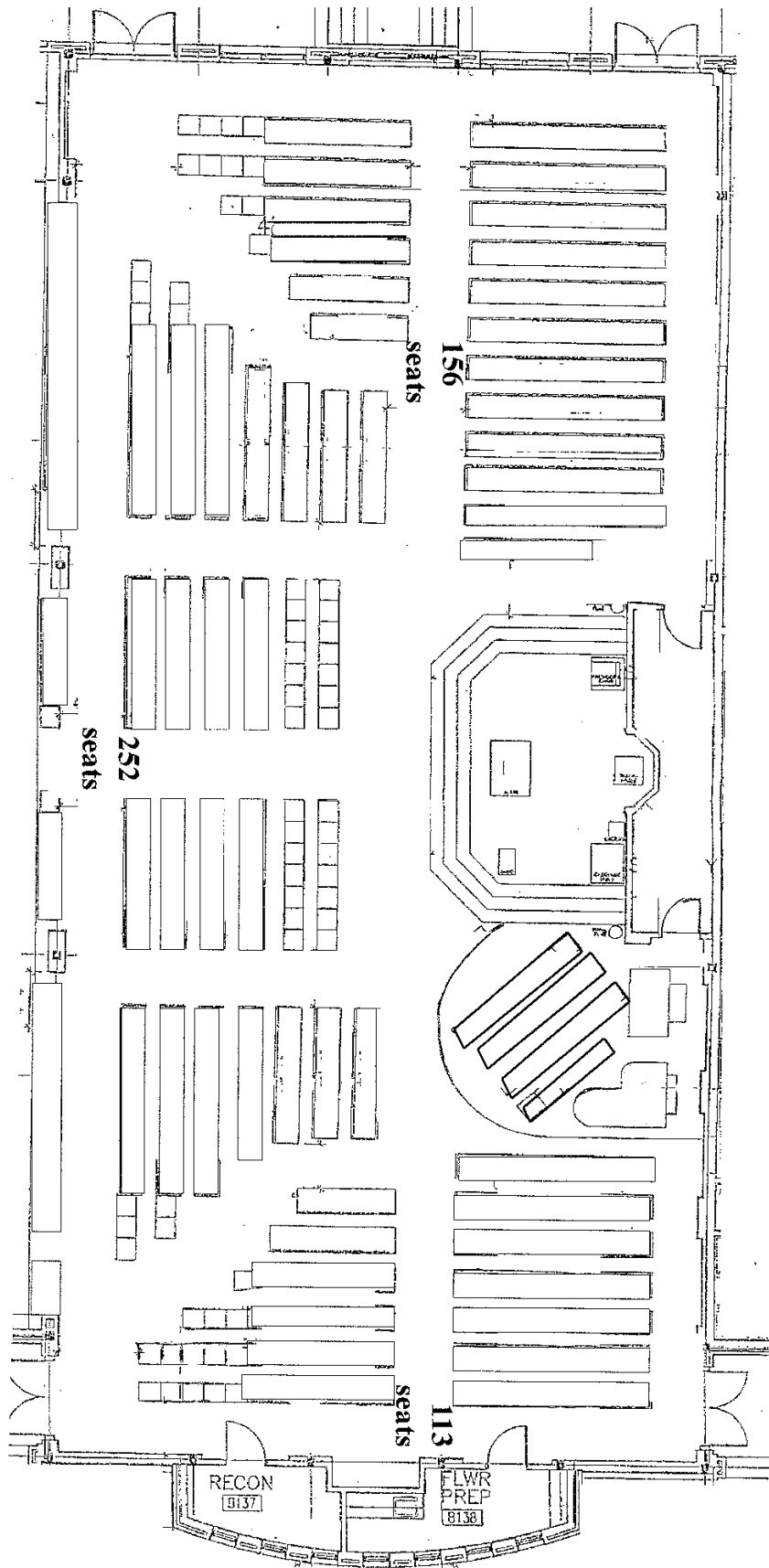
Prepare to receive the fullness of God's blessing by receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation in advance of your wedding. This is a time of very special grace in your life and the life of your families. It would be a fine idea to invite your family and friends to also receive this sacrament as a preparation for your wedding.

After Your Wedding

Continue to grow in your faith as a married couple by being an active member of either Annunciation of the Lord Parish or another Catholic parish near where you will be living. If you are planning to live in the Decatur area after your wedding, we hope you will be part of our parish community. Please feel free to call on us to help you in any way we can.

May your celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage truly be a joyous occasion, reflecting God's love for you, as well as your love for God and the community that celebrates with you.

Annunciation of the Lord Catholic Church.



Worship Space Floor Plan

