



Saint Catherine of Alexandria

Marriage Preparation Guidelines

Non-Parishioners



Dear engaged couple,

Congratulations on your decision to celebrate the Holy Sacrament of Marriage and thank you for inquiring about the possibility of having your marriage ceremony at our beautiful parish church in Avalon on Santa Catalina Island.

The Sacrament of marriage holds a sacred and profound significance within the Catholic Church representing the union of Christ and the Church and embodying the divine love that God has for humanity. This sacrament is not merely a social contract, but a holy covenant that calls couples to a lifelong commitment of mutual self-giving, faithfulness and openness to life, reflecting the unconditional love of Christ for His Church.

The preparation for the sacrament of marriage within the Catholic Church is a profound journey that encompasses spiritual, doctrinal, and practical dimensions. As you prepare for this beautiful journey, you are invited to recognize the grace bestowed upon you through the Sacrament, which sanctifies your union and empowers you to grow in love and holiness. Through catechesis, prayer, and participation in the sacraments, couples are guided to appreciate the sacramental nature of their union, which is rooted in the teachings of the Church and the example of Christ's love.

The celebration of a Catholic wedding ceremony is a momentous occasion that not only marks the beginning of a couple's shared life, but also serves as a witness to the community of the enduring love and commitment that marriage entails, making it a vital expression of faith and a cornerstone of family life within the Church.

The Church is particularly interested in each member of the Christian community and in safeguarding the sacredness of the Sacraments, which is why the priest or deacon participates in the preparation of the sacrament and provides any necessary assistance to assure the fulfillment of the ceremony as well as the validity of the Sacrament. These guidelines will also help to ensure the validity of the sacrament.

This introduction draws on the understanding that marriage preparation is a continuous journey of faith, as emphasized in various Church documents, which highlight the importance of spiritual growth and the sacramental significance of marriage

Entrusting you to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph as you embark on this sacred journey, please be assured of my prayerful support and blessing.

Rev. Father R. Darío Miranda
Parish Priest – Pastor

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1. Preliminary Preparation:

- a. The marriage preparation begins with an interview with your Pastor at your home parish. Your pastor must be consulted with enough time (at least six months) to complete all the necessary requirements. You will also be prepared at that parish according to their requirements.
- b. Church law states that this sacrament can only be celebrated at the parish of either the bride or groom therefore, written permission will be needed from the pastor of both the bride and groom's parishes to have the marriage take place here.
- c. Fill out the Wedding Couple Information sheet and take it to your first interview with your parish pastor. Also bring the Home Church Permission form, which he will fill out, if he determines you are free to be married in the Catholic Church. When we receive these two forms plus a \$100.00 non-refundable booking fee a date and time can be reserved for you.
- d. If your parish is not in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, a marriage file complete with all the required documents must be mailed to your home diocese for approval. They will in turn forward the complete approved file to us. It is the bride and groom's responsibility to make sure the paperwork and preparation is completed at least two months before the scheduled wedding date.
- e. We schedule only one wedding per day. No weddings are held on Sundays. On Saturdays they must begin no later than 2:00pm, because of the afternoon parish Mass.
- f. The offering for a wedding ceremony is \$1000.00 (includes \$100 non-refundable booking fee) due 60 days before the wedding includes the use of the church for the rehearsal and wedding. The fee does not include flowers or musicians or a wedding coordinator.
- g. Marriage is a Sacred Sacrament. Therefore, it is important to understand that this sacrament grants all who are baptized Christ's presence who strengthens the love of the couple with His love. All catholic participants: bride, groom, parents and bride's party, are to receive the sacrament of reconciliation (confession with a priest) at least a month before the ceremony to actively participate in the wedding ceremony by receiving Holy Communion. We ask the bride and groom to kindly explain to no-Catholics in your wedding party the need to refrain from attempting to receive Holy Communion.

2. Practical Considerations:

- a. **DATE AND TIME:** Two factors to consider are (1) how many members of the wedding party and guests are coming from the mainland on the day of the wedding and (2) how many are arriving the day before or staying the night after the wedding. Boat schedules vary in times and frequency depending on the month. Also, it can be difficult to find hotel rooms on some holidays and during the summer months. Most of the hotels require a 2- or 3-night minimum stay on holiday weekends.
- b. **REHEARSAL:** Usually this is held on the afternoon or evening before the wedding. It takes about a half hour and is conducted by the priest officiating at the wedding. Please refer to the “Wedding Rehearsal Guidelines” for details and please limit the rehearsal to the wedding party. Please communicate these guidelines to your wedding planner or coordinator so that they may plan accordingly.
- c. **DRESS CODE BRIDAL PARTY MODEST:** To summarize those norms of modesty in church, please cover your shoulders, breast, back, and knees.
- d. **FLOWERS:** There is only one florist on the island. You can use them or someone from the mainland. Ask your florist to contact the Parish Office for detailed guidelines on appropriate church decorations. Three large floral arrangements should decorate the sanctuary area and remain in the church after the ceremony, the rest of the flowers can be removed to be used at the reception if desired. We do not allow arches, runners (the main aisle is not carpeted) or bubbles, rice or birdseed to be thrown on the front steps or flower petals, leaves, etc. dropped inside the church.
- e. **CHURCH SPACE:** The church is divided into two rows, each 15 pews long for a total of 30 pews. The church’s capacity is about 250. Attendants are usually seated in the first row.
- f. **PHOTOGRAPHY:** The officiating priest will set the guidelines about where the photographer and/or videographer can be. Following the Mass pictures can be taken in the courtyard.
- g. **PRIEST/DEACON:** Usually the pastor of St. Catherine’s or someone he delegates will officiate at the wedding. With his approval, obtained some months in advance, another Catholic priest or deacon, in good standing with his diocese, may officiate. The couple is responsible for his lodging and transportation.
- h. **WEDDING WITHIN MASS OR CEREMONY ONLY:** The Sacrament of Marriage need not take place within a Mass and under some circumstances this might not be best (e.g. one partner is not Catholic and cannot receive Communion; many guests are unfamiliar with the Mass; the Catholicism of the couple is not very strong, or they have been cohabiting).
- i. **MUSIC:** Please contact our organist and music director Gabriel Saldaña by emailing him at music@stcatherineoncatalinaisland.org as soon as possible to check your availability. If he is not available for your ceremony, it is the couple's responsibility to arrange to bring their own musicians. No secular music is allowed, all musical selections must be liturgical and approved by the pastor of St. Catherine’s Church.

Contact the Parish Office at (310) 510-0192 if you have any additional questions about the church or ceremony.