

# **St. Alphonsus Parish Marriage Preparation Guide**

St. Alphonsus Parish  
224 Carrier St. NE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49505  
616-451-3043

Dear Engaged Couple,

Congratulations on your recent engagement!

Marriage is one of the most important decisions and realities of your life. Your decision to enter into marriage is a decision to become one in a unity of love. Marriage is not merely a civil contract but a covenant between a man and a woman. If both are baptized, the marriage is a sacrament, a symbol of the unity of Christ and the Church, and as such, a means of grace giving strength to the husband and wife to live out their commitment on the path of holiness.

Marriage preparation is an active process of carefully reflecting on and prayerfully discerning the nature of the sacrament. It is with this in mind that the Marriage Preparation Program at St. Alphonsus has been developed.

This Marriage Preparation Guide is being provided to help you as you begin planning for your wedding day, but more importantly, as you begin preparing for your lifelong commitment of love together. Please carefully read through this booklet and do not hesitate to call if you have a question or concern.

May God's grace guide your preparation and may our Lord bless your marriage for many years to come.

In Christ,



Fr. Christopher Epplett  
Pastor

[cepplett@stalphonsusgr.org](mailto:cepplett@stalphonsusgr.org) | 616-451-3043

## CONTACTS

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## **The Nature of Marriage**

“The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament. The sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved His Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life.”

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## **Preparing for Marriage at St. Alphonsus**

The very first step in the process of preparing for your marriage begins by carefully reading through this Marriage Preparation Guide. After you have read the guidebook, contact our office to arrange for a meeting.

In order to schedule a wedding date at St. Alphonsus at least one of the engaged couple must be a baptized, confirmed, and a practicing Catholic. Each party must be free to marry according to Canon Law of the Catholic Church.

Persons attending St. Alphonsus and registered under their parents' name must register under their own name as an adult. Permission may be granted for someone to marry at St. Alphonsus as long as they have family registered or living in the parish and their home Pastor has given permission for the marriage to be witnessed here. We encourage couples who live within the parish boundaries to register in the parish and be active members of the parish since it is the community of believers who will share in your marriage experience with you.

## Steps for Arranging a Wedding

1. Before an engaged couple schedules their initial meeting, the couple must first review the marriage preparation process outlined on the parish website at [www.stalphonsusgr.org/marriage](http://www.stalphonsusgr.org/marriage). After reviewing the preparation process, the couple can fill out the marriage interest google form found on the parish website.
2. The Pastor meets with the couple for an interview and paperwork. **No date may be set and confirmed for a wedding until a couple is determined to be free to marry according to the laws of the Catholic Church.** If a couple is free to marry, a \$500 deposit is required to secure a date wedding. If the couple will be married elsewhere, the deposit is \$100. The deposit is subtracted from the total fee.
3. Once the preliminary meeting has taken place and a date has been set for the marriage to take place, St. Alphonsus pastoral staff and other staff members will discuss changes to the wedding plans only with the engaged couple themselves.
4. The Engagement Coordinator arranges for the couple to complete the FOCCUS Inventory online. Once completed, the couple must reach out to schedule a time to review the results with the Engagement Coordinator.
5. It is the responsibility of the couple to make contact with the celebrant who will preside at the wedding. The number of necessary meetings is determined by the celebrant. We strongly encourage non-parishioners to find their own celebrant.
6. Couples are highly encouraged to participate in Alpha, which is offered at St. Alphonsus at frequent intervals.
7. Couples are required to attend one or both of the following opportunities:
  - a. Pre-Cana/Engagement Retreat offered at St. Alphonsus (or a local parish)
  - b. Natural Family Planning Course taught by the Wedding Coordinator
8. The couple will need to read the book: *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman.
9. **The couple must obtain their marriage license** two weeks prior to their wedding date. Office personnel will type out the marriage license the week before the wedding once it is delivered to them. St. Alphonsus will process the license after the wedding.

## Wedding Fees

The current fees for a wedding and/or preparation at St. Alphonsus are set below and payable no later than one month before the celebration. The fee is always due in full and will not be prorated for any reasons other than financial inability to pay. The final balance due is minus the deposit made.

Parishioner of St. Alphonsus: \$500

Weddings conducted non-affiliated with St. Alphonsus (non-parishioner): \$2,000

All fees are made payable to St. Alphonsus Church. A parishioner is anyone who has been registered and active for at least one year before scheduling their wedding date which includes financial and ministerial support. Any remaining balance on your account is due one month prior to your wedding. Please put your wedding date on all checks. The wedding fee covers marriage manuals, the services of the coordinator, office support, maintenance of the church, and utilities. This stipend does not include the fees for musicians or a gratuity for priests. Consult the Wedding Coordinator for the customary gift for the priest/officiant.

## Scheduling a Time of the Celebration

Weddings are scheduled with respect to the couple's wishes and the availability of the church building and parish ministers. It is the responsibility of the couple to secure the date and time with the church before making a commitment with caterers and/or reception halls. The date may only be confirmed after the A-Form has been completed and baptism certificate(s) and deposit are received.

Weddings are usually scheduled on **Friday evenings starting at 2:30 p.m. with a two-hour interval** between. No more than two weddings will be celebrated on a Friday evening. Weddings on **Saturday are scheduled at 1 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.** Weddings celebrated on Saturday at 6:30 p.m. may be subject to the readings for the forthcoming Sunday. For smaller celebrations, there is the possibility of celebrating your marriage during the 4:15 p.m. Saturday parish Mass. Special arrangements with the approval of the Pastor must be made for this Mass. No weddings are celebrated in the parish during the season of Lent.

The Rite of Marriage should be celebrated within the context of Eucharistic Liturgy if both parties are Catholic. If one member of the party is not Catholic, the church encourages the use of the Rite of Marriage for outside of the Eucharistic Liturgy. The liturgy for your wedding will be coordinated and approved by the priest or deacon who witnesses the marriage.

## MUSIC

### **What Are the Guidelines for Music?**

The music staff at St. Alphonsus is prepared to help you choose music that is appropriate and follows guidelines for liturgical celebrations of the Church.

Wedding music is sacred and liturgical. Secular and popular music, however meaningful, is not appropriate for use in the Sacred Liturgy, but may be approved for performance in the prelude before the service begins. A wide selection of sacred and classical music is available to enhance the beauty of the celebration. A brief, 30 minute meeting with the Music Coordinator can take care of finalizing your selections. Wedding music is performed live. Recorded music may be used outside of the church.

All weddings are required to have a staff organist and a staff cantor. Fees for the organist and cantor are **NOT** included in the marriage prep fees.

- Couples should consult with the Music Coordinator for the correct amount, but the standard rate is \$325 (\$200 for organist/piano and \$125 for Cantor). Additional musicians are permissible, but fees are paid by the couple. The Music Coordinator will help to coordinate their participation in the liturgy.

Guest musicians may be allowed to participate with the approval of the Music Coordinator. To make a request, couples should submit a brief recording of the musician.

Fees for staff musicians are in addition to your payment to the parish, payable to St. Alphonsus Church. Please write one check to St. Alphonsus to cover both the church and the music fees.

Additional musicians/instruments are available upon request for an additional fee. Payment (either check or cash) must be brought to the rehearsal and given to the Wedding Coordinator. Checks are written personally to each musician, whose names the Music Coordinator will provide. Couples are responsible for providing compensation to any guest musicians they invite.

For other specific questions, email Carol Fedewa, [cfedewa@stalphonsusgr.org](mailto:cfedewa@stalphonsusgr.org)

## What Are the Guidelines for the Wedding Rehearsal?

The Wedding Coordinator will call the couple **at least six months** before the ceremony to schedule the rehearsal. Approximatley **one month** before the ceremony the couple and the Wedding Coordinator will meet and decisions will be made regarding part of the liturgy. This meeting can be by phone, video, or in person.

We ask that you make sure all the members of the wedding party are present at the rehearsal and arrive on time. Please be gracious to the Wedding Coordinator, as this is her ministry to the Church. She is there to assist you in making your wedding day run smoothly.

## What about Decorating?

- Flowers: Decorate with flowers as you wish, but they are not permitted on the altar proper. Real rose petals may not be used, but the imitation rose petals are permitted, provided they are cleaned up after the ceremony.
- Extra candles may not be used, except for altar candles.
- Tie-on decorations may be used on the pews, not tape, wire, or glue.
- Please do not remove any decorations in place in the church. Keep in mind the liturgical season in which you will be married (i.e. Advent, Christmas, Easter).
- Aisle runners are not permitted, nor rice, balloons, or birdseed outside/inside

## What about Photographers?

Pictures may be taken before, during and after the ceremony. Photographers **will not** be free to roam about the sanctuary of the church during the celebration of the wedding ceremony and should avoid encroachment of the altar area. They should check with the Wedding Coordinator prior to the ceremony for guidelines. Please ask the wedding coordinator to adjust the lights in the church, as needed. **Photographers must adhere to the timeline for the wedding.**

The photo session is limited to 1.5 hours prior to the ceremony and one half hour after. Videotape equipment may be set up and used during the ceremony. Video cameras must remain in one place throughout the ceremony. They should check with the Wedding Coordinator prior to the ceremony for guidelines—not the officiant.

**\*\*You must take the final page of this document to your photographer and have it signed and returned to the office no later than two months before the ceremony.**

## What about Videographers?

Many couples now choose to utilize video equipment to capture or complement still photography of their wedding ceremony.

Videographers **will not** be free to roam about the sanctuary of the church during the celebration of the wedding ceremony. They should check with the Wedding Coordinator prior to the ceremony for guidelines.

**\*\*You must take the final page of this document to your videographer and have it signed and returned to the office no later than two months before the ceremony.**

## Livestreaming

We can provide a recording of your special day. The recording can also be livestreamed to YouTube. It is a nice option to have for those that may be unable to make it to the actual wedding. There is an additional fee of \$150.

**Disclaimer:** We are not professional videographers. We will make every effort to provide you the best possible recording of your special day. We are not responsible for any technical difficulties that may arise with the internet connection.

## Other General Guidelines

Weddings at St. Alphonsus are celebrated according to the worship books of the Roman Catholic Church, the Roman Missal, the Lectionary, and the Rite of Marriage.

**If children are to be part of the ceremony, they must be at least 5 years old (or able to walk unaided) in order to be able to participate adequately in the Liturgy.**

You should choose someone to do the Scripture readings and lead the Prayers of the Faithful. They should be able to read in a loud and clear voice. No other readings than scripture are allowed during the Liturgy. Other contemporary pieces should be read at the reception.

People are generally at ease and open to celebrate when they know the people around them. At weddings, this often does not happen until sometime during the reception. Some very simple things can be done as people arrive to make them feel welcome and to gather them together to celebrate the Liturgy. For this reason, the



time before the wedding procession is one of the best times to set the positive tone for your wedding. Consider the following suggestions to take advantage of this time:

- You should plan on arriving at the church 45 minutes before the ceremony. Give yourself time to relax at the church, and in fairness to others, start the wedding on time.
- If possible, get dressed at home. Fussing over gowns and tuxedos just prior to the ceremony only adds to the anxiety. **Bridal Room:** St. Alphonsus offers a room in the back of the church for the bride and bridesmaids. The room is small Restrooms are next to this room. Groomsmen will gather in the sacristy to assemble while the guests are being seated.
- The poor are always part of our celebrations and we are called to always remember them in our services. We ask you to be mindful of Christ's calling and our commitment to charity. Our Wedding Coordinator will discuss various options with you to assist in this parish-wide effort as a meaningful addition to your celebration.
- Make certain people are warmly greeted at the main doors of the church when they arrive, **preferably by the family of the bride and groom.** This is probably the most effective thing you can do to make people feel welcome, thank them for joining in your wedding, and encourage their participation in the ceremony. This also allows you to introduce friends and relatives before the Liturgy, rather than waiting until the reception.
- You should seat people close together and toward the front of the church. There is no reason to have a groom's side and a bride's side in the church. The aim is to encourage people to interact and form a cohesive assembly.

The use of a **Unity Candle is not part of the Liturgical Rite** for Marriage in the Catholic Church. The use of a Unity Candle is not recommended. If there is a reasoned request for its use, it must be discussed, prior to the rehearsal night, with the officiant who will witness your marriage. If no approval has been given by then, the Wedding Coordinator will not rehearse its use. At no time may a Unity Candle be placed on the Altar as part of the Rite. If used, it is preferred that the Unity Candle be incorporated into a small ceremony at the start of the wedding reception.

Couples are asked to leave the church environment in a clean and orderly fashion just as it was when they arrived for the ceremony. Dress should be **appropriate and modest** for the sacred environment and the sacredness of the occasion.

**If you have concerns about the music guidelines, please contact Carol Fedewa, Music Coordinator. Any concerns in regards to the Liturgy should be raised with the Wedding Coordinator.**

**If there are any unresolved concerns about music or the wedding liturgy, the Priest or Deacon who will be witnessing your marriage celebration will make the final determination as to what will happen as part of the ceremony. These people are the only ones authorized to make changes from these guidelines.**

## IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE WEDDING

- Register as a family at the parish church where you will grow in your faith together.
- Talk to your insurance agent and banker to make appropriate name changes on all insurance policies and securities.
- Advise employers of your change of marital status and check to make sure the two of you have full medical benefits.
- Apply for a corrected Social Security number in the bride's new name if necessary.
- Insure all wedding gifts from the time of receipt. Be sure all household items are insured. Put a complete and detailed list of items in a safe and secure place.
- Notify your voter's registration office of any name changes.
- Write or rewrite necessary wills and designate joint ownership of property.
- Store records such as the marriage license and birth certificates in a safety deposit box.
- Change names on all appropriate financial accounts.
- Make a list of all credit cards with account numbers and contact numbers in case the cards are lost or stolen. Make appropriate name changes on driver's license and vehicle registration forms.

# PREPARATION CHECKLIST

**Marriage Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Pray for guidance and direction.
- Complete Wedding Interest Form (found on website under sacraments)
- Set first meeting with celebrant.
- Reach out to Mary to have FOCCUS Inventory sent to you.
- Take the FOCCUS Inventory.
- Schedule and review the results of the FOCCUS Inventory with Mary.
- Read assigned books.
- Attend a NFP/Theology of the Body seminar and/or complete a Natural Family Planning (NFP) course (ask Mary for recommendations)
- Request & send hard copies of baptismal certificates with notations
- Ensure St. Alphonsus received certificates ([office@stalphonsusgr.org](mailto:office@stalphonsusgr.org))
- Confirm date and time for wedding rehearsal
- Pay any balance due. (Within 30 days prior to wedding date)
- Choose Scriptures & someone to proclaim. (Online Form)
- Bring marriage license to the Parish Office. (You must secure two weeks prior from county clerk.)
- Complete Pre-Marriage Prep Evaluation (30 days after wedding)
- Register in your new parish home. (60 days after your wedding date)

## PHOTOGRAPHY POLICY AND AGREEMENT

In an effort to maintain the integrity of the marriage sacrament and the beauty and solemnity of the occasion, we kindly ask you follow these photography guidelines.

**You must take this page to your photographer and have it signed and then returned to the office no later than your final meeting.**

Name of Bride or Groom: \_\_\_\_\_

Wedding Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Photographers will not be free to roam about the sanctuary of the church during the celebration of the wedding ceremony. They should check with the Wedding Coordinator prior to the ceremony for guidelines.

Photo session prior to the wedding is limited to 1.5 hours and **one half hour** after.

Self-contained Videotape equipment may be set up and used during the ceremony. If used, these cameras must remain in one place throughout the ceremony.

Photographers/videographers should check with the Wedding Coordinator prior to the ceremony for guidelines—not the officiant.

I have read and understand these guidelines and agree to follow them.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Authorized Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Photography Studio

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address City State Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number

## VIDEOGRAPHY POLICY AND AGREEMENT

In an effort to maintain the integrity of the marriage sacrament and the beauty and solemnity of the occasion, we kindly ask you follow these videography guidelines.

**You must take this page to your videographer and have it signed and then returned to the office prior to your wedding day.**

**Name of Bride:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Wedding Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Videographers will not be free to roam about the sanctuary of the church during the celebration of the wedding ceremony. They should check with the Wedding Coordinator prior to the ceremony for guidelines.

Self-contained Videotape equipment may be set up and used during the ceremony. If used, these cameras must remain in one place throughout the ceremony.

Photographers/videographers should check with the Wedding Coordinator prior to the ceremony for guidelines—not the officiant.

I have read and understand these guidelines and agree to follow them.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Authorized Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Videography Studio

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City

\_\_\_\_\_  
State

\_\_\_\_\_  
Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number