

*St. John the Evangelist  
Marriage Policy*



*One in Christ*

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# *St. John the Evangelist Marriage Policy*

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## ***Congratulations on your decision to enter into Christian marriage!***

Weddings are special and joyful times for brides and grooms, for their families and friends, and for the parish community. We are happy that St. John the Evangelist Catholic Community will play a part in this sacred and blessed event in your lives. Be assured that we will do everything we can to make your celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage beautiful and prayerful. We are here to answer your questions and provide whatever help you may need.

While this is an exciting time, it is also a time of conflicting demands and emotions. Many people will try to influence your wedding arrangements so that the event will be “meaningful.” What really makes a wedding memorable is the people involved, their faith and the joy of celebrating the sacrament, especially the bride and groom who clearly love each other and want to share their joy with others. Try not to get too overwhelmed with all the details of the wedding day!

For Christians, marriage is celebrated not only as a human institution, but as a sacrament intended by Christ to reflect his love for the Church. This love of Christ which should characterize Christian marriage is faithful, fruitful and life-long. Persons who wish to enter into this sacramental union need to be prepared before they can make such a life-long commitment. The wedding day is not the culmination of the preparation, it is only the beginning!

The sacrament of marriage is a vocation within the Church which is profoundly “religious.” Candidates for marriage must be willing to participate in this sacrament, this “ministry” in the community, which reflects Christ’s love for the Church. Couples do not re-create Christian marriage to fit their own vision; they must try to live up to an ideal which finds its origin in Christ.

It is in this spirit that St. John the Evangelist Catholic Community provides the following policy guidelines for celebrating weddings in the parish church.

Before expressing the parish policies for celebrating the Rite of Marriage, it is both necessary and important to state clearly what we, as a Roman Catholic faith community, believe about this sacrament. Therefore, we affirm the following statements:

1. Every aspect of life from its very beginning until its end is of importance to our faith community.
2. When a couple decides to marry, they have agreed to establish between themselves a partnership of the whole life. (*Canon Law §1055*)
3. When this occurs between two baptized person this partnership has been elevated to the order of a sacrament by Jesus Christ.
4. All sacraments are an expression of our common faith. Marriage of course is a highly personal and intimate expression unique to the couple, but it also involves public and communal dimensions. Sacraments belong to the Church as a whole, not to individuals.
5. "Liturgical services are not private functions but are celebrations of the Church. They pertain to the whole Body of the Church." (*Constitution, The Catechism of the Catholic Church*)
6. The celebration of marriage should take place within the context of the liturgy and be witnessed by the community. (*General Introduction to the Revised Rite of Christian Marriage, 1991*)
  - a) Since marriage is ordered to the increase and sanctification of God's people, its celebration rightly exhibits a community character, a fact that urges the participation of the parish community, at least through some of its members. With attention paid to local customs and as it seems fitting... the sacramental celebration may take place during the Sunday assembly. (*Unofficial English translation of the Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium, editio typica altera (1991), §28*)
  - b) Whenever possible, couples are encouraged to arrange the Sacrament of Marriage during Sunday liturgy. When exceptions necessitate the celebration outside Sunday liturgy the faith community is encouraged to avail itself of the opportunity to celebrate this sacrament with the couple and their families.
7. The community has a responsibility to support and assist the couple preparing for marriage.
  - a) The community should be called upon a few times during the year to pray for those preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage.
  - b) Engaged couples should be presented to the community for a blessing at Sunday Eucharist.
  - c) The community is encouraged to participate fully in the wedding liturgy.
  - d) The time of the wedding should be included in the usual Mass schedule in the bulletin.

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## *Parish Policies*

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Based on the above Magisterial teachings, the SJE faith community has established various marriage policies as explained in the following question and answer format.

### ***Who can have their wedding at St. John the Evangelist?***

Only active parishioners who have been registered for no less than six months can have their wedding at St. John the Evangelist. Either the prospective bride or groom must be an active parishioner (i.e. attends Mass regularly). Anyone seeking to register needs to understand that no possible wedding dates will be considered until membership has been established for at least six months.

Those who grew up in the parish and whose families remain active members may have their wedding celebrated here if they provide a written statement from the Catholic parish where they currently belong stating that they attend Mass regularly.

As you can see, the faith dimension of the Sacrament of Marriage is taken very seriously. Since the Eucharist is the very heart of our Catholic faith, we understand that to be eligible to celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage, the Catholic must first be faithful to their obligation to regular participation at all Sunday and Holyday Masses.

### ***What is the first step in arranging for our marriage at St. John the Evangelist & when should we begin the process?***

The first step is to make an appointment with the pastor or pastoral associate. To properly plan for your wedding you should meet (not call for an appointment) no less than six (6) months prior to the date you will be requesting (six months can run concurrent with your membership) for your wedding.

In most situations, there will be approximately five (5) different meetings:

1. Meet with the Pastor. It is important that your pastor has the opportunity to know those preparing for marriage, as well as for you to know him better. This first meeting is a very casual visit. If everything is in order, a date will be set and the Pastor will review the process with you.

Please understand that your first choice of a date for your wedding may not be available. Therefore, make sure this process is started and the Pastor has approved the date of your wedding before contracting other services on a given date.

The Lenten and Advent seasons, characterized by repentance and simplicity which are at odds with the festive nature of the wedding celebration, should be avoided in scheduling the wedding date, except for cases of extreme necessity. Under no conditions are weddings permitted to take place during the Paschal Triduum (the three days leading up to Easter).

At this first meeting, the Pastor will also provide you with the basic options you have for the liturgical celebration and answer any questions you might have. Before you leave the parish office after meeting with the Pastor you should have the dates and necessary information for the remaining four appointments.

At anytime during the preparation period, you should always feel comfortable in contacting the Pastor if you have any further questions or concerns.

2. Meet with parish Ministry Coordinator and, if necessary, file any dispensations. At this time a rehearsal date/time will also be scheduled. You will be expected to provide the following for the marriage file:
  - a) Baptismal and Confirmation certificates (for Roman Catholics) issued from the place of baptism and dated within the past six months. Baptized non-Catholics should acquire a similar document from the church in which they were baptized. The Catholic Church of baptism sends the documents directly to the Catholic Church where the wedding is to take place. Please note that the bride and groom must be at least 18 years of age.
  - b) If previously married and divorced – then a decree of nullity will be needed. If previously married and widowed – the death certificate of deceased spouse will be required.
  - c) Two affidavits from witnesses stating that neither the bride nor the groom were married before.
  - d) At the time of rehearsal, the couple must have a current marriage license, issued within sixty (60) days of the wedding date. Lake County residents may apply at the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court at the government complex in Crown Point.
  - e) In unique situations, other documents may be required.
3. Meet with parish Liturgist/Music Director to begin planning your marriage liturgy.

The Church's guidelines for liturgy and music will be carefully explained and specific liturgical and musical options will be presented to you.

It is in your best interest to utilize the parish organist/keyboardist and one of the parish cantors – they are trained ministers who will add to the beauty of your wedding liturgy. You may request other music ministers, with the permission of the parish Liturgist/Music Director, but please remember that the choice of musicians and music is to support liturgical participation and lead the community in sung prayer, not to serve as a solo performance. Leading an assembly in sung prayer involves much more than simply having a beautiful voice or musical talent.

It is very possible that you can fully plan your marriage liturgy, including the music and scripture readings, in one session – however, many keep a running dialogue with the parish Liturgist/Music Director all the way up to the actual date.

We understand that there are a lot of decisions to be made in planning the wedding liturgy and it is not always easy for you to do so. Consequently, we want to do whatever we can to help you while providing you with as much time and patience possible.

However, for your sake, we encourage you to make your liturgical decisions as early as possible and try to adhere to them because the closer you get to your wedding date, the more pressure you will have to attend to other pressing details.

Should you desire to have one, The parish Liturgist/Music Director can assist you with the preparation of the information for your printed program.

4. Attend Marriage Preparation Program. The parish provides a program for your convenience, but if you would prefer to attend another program somewhere else you may do so, provided you first discuss this with the Pastor and provide attendance certification for the parish file. You do not need to wait to do this until you have completed steps 2 and 3. Once you have met with the Pastor and have secured a date, you can attend a Marriage Preparation Program.

Again, we would encourage you to do this at your earliest convenience. Typically, these programs are limited as to the number of participants and it is not uncommon for a couple not to be able to attend their first or second choice. Therefore, you should complete this requirement as soon as possible.

5. Meet again with the Pastor. Once more, this will be a casual visit to check to see how the couple is doing and to make sure there are no unexpected surprises that might complicate your wedding plans.



It is during this meeting that the Pastor will help the couple initiate conversation in those areas that he feels would be helpful to the success of their sacramental marriage.

Because there are always special circumstances, your Pastor and the parish staff will do its very best to attend to your needs in the most flexible way possible. We want to ease the stress, not be another source of it.

***My fiancé(e) and I are currently living together –  
will that pose a problem?***

Yes! Cohabitation prior to the Sacrament of Marriage is considered by the Church as putting the couple in serious spiritual danger, as well as potentially exposing the People of God to scandal.

Furthermore, approximately 52% of marriages end in failure within ten years. Cohabiting couples should take stock of every study in the past 20 years consistently verifying that cohabitation prior to marriage results in even higher rates of divorce than those who do not cohabit.

You are making a lifetime commitment and this is not the time to put short-term finances/convenience over long-term endurance. The odds are already against you – why, on something as important as marriage/family, would you intentionally increase your chance for failure?

As a person of faith – you also need to seriously ask yourself why you would approach this sacred sacrament absent the state of grace. You know in your heart that cohabitation does not please God – is that the way you want to begin your married life?

Life is not perfect and God alone can judge – therefore, cohabitation will not exclude a sacramental marriage, however; in such circumstances scandal remains a serious public concern that can supersede individual plans. As a result, cohabiting couples should not expect the typical full liturgical expression of the sacrament, but should plan that the ceremony be kept as simple as possible.

***I am a practicing Catholic and I am marrying a non-Catholic  
– are there any issues I should be aware of?***

Not really. In the paperwork phase of the preparation (step 2) this issue will be addressed.



Typically, when a Catholic marries a non-Catholic the ceremony does not include a Mass. The reason for this is because marriage is a symbol of unity (the two shall become one) and the marriage ceremony beautifully expresses this unity.

When both bride and groom are practicing Catholics, this expression of unity is made poignant when celebrated in the context of the Eucharist. However, in a mixed marriage, the Eucharist can actually become a counter-sign since only the Catholic may receive Communion. Therefore, the Church discourages the Eucharist to be celebrated in mixed marriages.

Please note that if your fiancé(e) has not been baptized, the "*Rite of Marriage §8*" instructs us that under these conditions there may be no Mass.

In other words, a marriage celebrated in the context of a Mass is discouraged between a baptized Catholic and a person who is baptized in another Christian tradition, but it is forbidden between a baptized Catholic and a non-baptized person.

Furthermore, a marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person is valid (i.e., - it counts), but it is not considered to be a sacrament. A marriage is only considered to be a sacramental one when both parties are baptized. If this is your situation, please do not worry. The marriage can still take place in the Church and it will be considered by the Church as a "Catholic" wedding.

***I am a Catholic and I have never been married before.  
My fiancé(e), who is a non-Catholic, was married before  
but because he/she isn't Catholic that marriage doesn't count  
– right?***

Wrong! If a person has been married and divorced, then the Catholic Church does not consider that person to be free to enter into a subsequent marriage without successfully completing a process such as an annulment. The fact that your fiancé(e) is not Catholic does not mean that the Catholic Church doesn't "count" their previous marriage, especially if your fiancé(e) is a baptized Christian.

If this is your case, then immediately (at your first meeting with the Pastor) bring it to your Pastor's attention. The specific facts – such as who was baptized Christian and who wasn't - whether the first marriage was to a Catholic and took place in a Church, etc... will help determine what can be done. The Pastor will help determine how best to proceed and will assist you with whatever process is required.

However, typically this will mean that a wedding cannot be scheduled until this matter is resolved. If you find yourself in this situation, do not give up hope. Your Pastor and the parish staff will do whatever they can to help you, so work with them.

***My friend told me that getting married in a Catholic Church is like walking through a field of land mines of rules and regulations about everything from the photographer to the throwing of rice – how true is that?***

Well, some of it is true, but we hope the experience is not as bad as your friend implies.

Every organization has guidelines to provide order and to keep individual members faithful to the organization's mission. You wouldn't expect McDonalds to sell you a bottle of vitamins and you wouldn't expect Walgreen's to sell you a Quarter Pounder.

Hopefully, through the preparation period, all the details of the ceremony will be discussed and decided upon. Any wish to change plans must come directly from the couple to the Pastor, Liturgist/Music Director, or Ministry Coordinator. The Pastor and staff members will patiently decline to discuss such matters with anyone (including mothers) except the bride and groom. Please note - if you have hired a wedding planner, you should understand that that person has no role in the liturgy.

So, there are guidelines that we adhere to because to go beyond them is to risk being unfaithful to the Church's mission. All that SJE can do is provide you with a wedding ceremony that faithfully reflects the theology and practice of the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, every effort will be made to explain "why" a particular guideline exists.

In most cases, once a couple understands the reasons for the guideline, they agree with it. We hope you will find that the policy this parish has set forth is reasonable and fair.

***May someone else besides the Pastor preside at the wedding?***

You may invite any priest or deacon, who is in good standing, to preside at your wedding. Raise this at your first meeting with the Pastor because he will need to give permission for a visiting priest or deacon to preside. Your Pastor has canonical jurisdiction over your wedding. Even if you have never met him, he is responsible for the event.

***May we have two ceremonies – one Catholic and the other civil?  
I've heard they do this in other countries.***

You may not have two ceremonies. It is true that this is required in some countries where the church's minister is not recognized by the state. But in the United States your civil union and your spiritual union happen at the same event. There is to be no distinction and no question about whether or not you are married civilly when the ceremony is over.

***May we include some readings that  
are not from the Bible?***

Not during the Liturgy of the Word. This first part of the Mass is when we listen to the inspired Word of God. If you have other texts that are important to you, consider including them in your printed program. Depending on the text, your presider might suggest it be read during some other part of the ceremony. But remember, people will be hearing many words during this wedding. As an assembled church community, it is important that the Word of God stands out.

***Do the Best Man and Maid of Honor  
have to be Catholic?***

No – they do not. You just need two witnesses in addition to the presider. They should be able to comprehend what is going on, so they need to be at least the age of the use of reason. If their comprehension is impaired - for example, by intoxication - they may not serve as witnesses.

But – they need not be Catholic. In fact, they do not even have to be baptized. They are only witnesses to the event.

***Church or Day Chapel – do we have our choice?  
What choice of wedding times do we have?***

Currently, the parish regularly schedule weddings in the Day Chapel at 10:30am or 1:30pm on Saturdays, or during the week as the parish schedule allows. The Day Chapel more appropriately fits the size and needs of most weddings.

Those couples desiring to celebrate their wedding in the Church must do so during one of the regularly scheduled parish weekend Masses. While this may seem to be an extraordinary or new arrangement, it is actually more in keeping with the traditions of our faith— as sacraments belong to the Church as a whole, not to individuals. It is wonderful to celebrate your sacramental wedding with the entire faith community assembled with your family and close friends.

In this circumstance, there are some weekend Mass readings and music that must remain as planned, and cannot be changed for the wedding. The parish Liturgist/Music Director will guide you through all this planning.

Any exceptions to the time or place of weddings must be approved by the Pastor.



The following are some of the more frequently discussed issues and very brief explanations of what the policies are. If any of these issues are concerns for you, then please engage either the Pastor, the parish Liturgist/Music Director, or the Ministry Coordinator in a conversation about them. We are fully aware of how important the details of your wedding are to you and want you to be pleased with your experience.

**PHOTOGRAPHY** - You can either plan to take your wedding photos prior to the wedding or after the wedding. Photos taken prior to the wedding often have greater latitude in terms of how long the church space is available since they are scheduled when the church is free. Those taken afterward need to be concluded within 45 minutes of the end of the wedding or, if applicable, 30 minutes before any next scheduled service in the church begins.

Regarding pictures or videos during the liturgy, as long as the photographer or videographer is respectful and discreet, there should be no problem. Flash photography is allowed.

**FLOWERS / BOWS** - Flowers or plants can be brought in and arranged, with consideration to the diagram provided by the parish Liturgist at the time of your wedding planning, provided they do not obstruct views or pathways. Artificial or silk arrangements are strongly discouraged because they diminish the authenticity of what they symbolize.

Bows may be placed on pews provided they are attached with cloth ties or rubber bands and that no wire or plastic is exposed that could potentially damage the pew.

The Art & Environment (decoration) of the church is carefully planned to coincide with the liturgical season. Those getting married are welcome to enhance the setting, but they may not replace it. In other words, the colors, the greenery and other decorations cannot be moved or removed from the church for weddings. It is very important that your florist is aware of this.

**AISLE RUNNERS / THINGS TO THROW** - Aisle runners are not used in the church - not only for liturgical and practical considerations - but also for safety, since they will slide on the stone floor.

Due to additional safety, insurance and custodial reasons, real or silk flower petals, rice, confetti, birdseed or balloons cannot be used.

**READERS / SERVERS** - You are encouraged to select readers of scripture from the parish. If this is difficult for you to do, then you may invite others to perform this ministry, provided they are currently a trained lector at their own Catholic parish.

The reader of scripture is called the "lector." It is a specific liturgical ministry. Lectors are trained, commissioned and experienced.

People who do not understand what is involved in this ministry often perform the ministry in ways that diminish the beauty and solemnity of the marriage ceremony.

In a similar fashion, a server from the SJE faith community will be more familiar with the requirements of the liturgy as they are practiced here.

**SIGN OF PEACE** - Decide beforehand who besides each other you will extend the Sign of Peace to and limit that number, so as not to unduly prolong this aspect of the liturgy.

**UNITY CANDLE** - There is no place in the liturgy for the use of a unity candle. This action occurs nowhere in the Catholic marriage rite – although it is being used widely.

Most Catholic parishes do not allow the unity candle. Its history is very recent compared with the other parts of the ceremony. It is a duplication of what the consent and rings are expressing. If the other parts of the ceremony are done well, there is no need for an additional visual symbol.

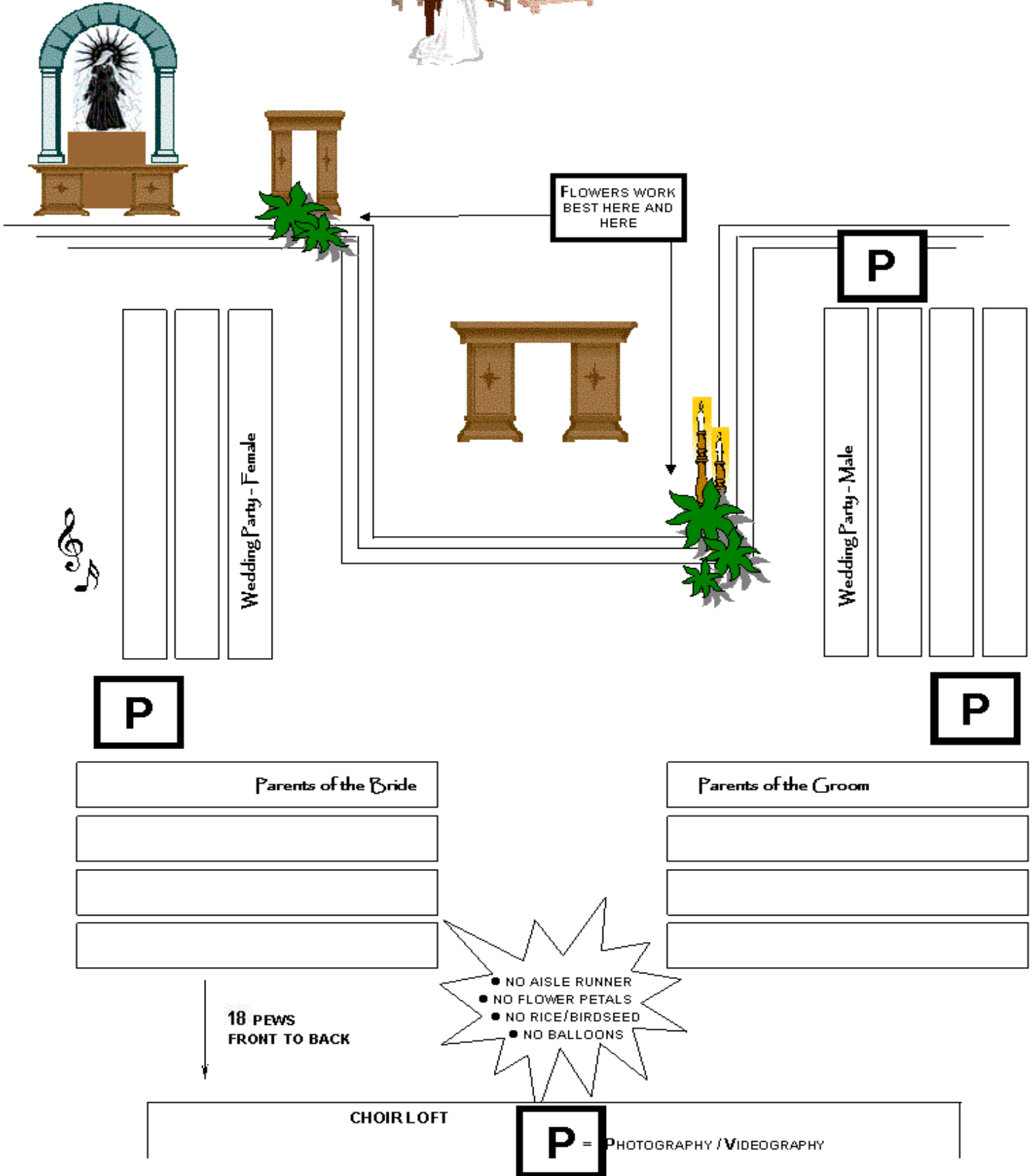
Also, the sharing of candlelight in the liturgy usually connotes the Easter Vigil or the Rite of Baptism. In both instances, light is drawn from the Paschal Easter candle to signify spreading the light of Christ. Usually we light multiple candles from one, not one from two.

If the use of a unity candle holds some special significance for you, and you feel the need to include it in your wedding, an appropriate use would be at the beginning of your reception. A prayer is provided in Appendix "B" that would tie the lighting of the candle into the prayer before the meal. Keeping it separate from the wedding liturgy will eliminate its competing with the signs and symbols of the liturgy.

**FEES** - If the Pastor of St. John the Evangelist is presiding, he will decline any compensation for his time. It is his privilege and pastoral duty to be there for you.

However, there are some fees attached as consideration for others who will be sharing their time and talent for your wedding. When you meet with the Liturgist/Music Director, this issue will be carefully addressed. (As an aide to your planning, budget approximately \$400. If a presider other than the Pastor is present, budget a total of \$500).

APPENDIX "A"





## *Candle / Meal Prayer at Reception*

Jesus Christ is the light of the world, a light no darkness can overpower. Blessed be the name of the Lord – now and forever. This candle symbolizes beauty and light in our lives. In the darkness, it tells us of God’s gift of light and of Christ, whose light we received at baptism, and who (bride) and (groom) have now received in matrimony.

Let us pray:

God of night and day, we praise you for the brightness of our sun, for the softer light of the moon and the splendor of the stars, and for the fires of earth that bring us light and warmth. By these great and small lights we mark our days and seasons, we brighten the night and bring warmth to our winter. In the beauty of this candle, keep (bride) and (groom) in quiet and in peace, keep them safe and turn their hearts to you that they may, themselves, be a light for our world.

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation, Lord of the universe. Blessed are you who have brought this couple together. Keep them together in their good times and bad times – and on the long flat stretches in between. Bless this good food we are about to share in their honor; may it symbolize our sharing of life with one another. Bless those who hunger for bread, and for those of us who have bread, increase in us a hunger for you. We ask this always together in the faith and fellowship of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.