

# A CATHOLIC WEDDING GUIDE



*“They are no longer two but one flesh.*

*Therefore what God has joined together no human being must separate.”*

## Our Lady of Hope Parish

*Parish Offices  
673 Stevens Ave.  
Portland, ME 04103  
207-797-7026*

*[www.ladyofhopemaine.org](http://www.ladyofhopemaine.org)*

*Linda McCormack [mccormack@maine.rr.com](mailto:mccormack@maine.rr.com)*

Dear Newly Engaged Couple,

Our clergy and staff express to you our joy and excitement as we begin accompanying you in the months leading up to your wedding. While there are many practical preparations that must be made for your wedding day, our goal is to help prepare you to be faithful to the Sacrament of Marriage which you will receive on that day and you will be asked to live for the rest of your lives.

By being faithful in your love for one another, not only will you help each other on your journey to heaven, but you will also be a sign for the Church of the very love that Christ has for each one of us. We hope that your wedding will be a joyful and grace-filled expression of your love and marriage vows of life-long fidelity in the Lord.

Please review this Catholic Wedding Guide carefully and be sure to discuss any questions you might have concerning these policies with the priest or deacon working with you to help you prepare for marriage. The guidelines presented here reflect the laws and policies of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, Our Lady of Hope Parish, and the State of Maine.

Please know of our prayers for you as you continue your faith journey, yet begin this new phase in your life. If there is anything that you need, or any questions that you have, please do not hesitate to contact us.

May God continue to bless you and enrich your faith in Him and one another as you prepare for marriage.

With our prayers,

*The Clergy and Staff of Our Lady of Hope Parish*

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## Who Can be Married in Our Lady of Hope Parish?

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Marriage is a sacred ritual, a Sacramental Rite of the Catholic Church. The Church's marriage ceremony is intended for those who have made a commitment of faith in Christ through the Roman Catholic Church and **who are active members of Our Lady of Hope Parish**. A parish member is one who is registered and practicing at one of our parish churches, or in the case of a student, who is away at school and whose parents are registered members of our parish. Parish registration can be done during business hours at our Parish Offices. Members of other Catholic parishes may ask to be married at one of our churches if they have a connection to this parish, or a serious reason as to why the marriage should take place here rather than where they reside. In the last two cases, at least one party must be a practicing Catholic, and obtain permission to be married here from their local pastor. This is a requirement according to Church (Canon) Law. In the case of a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized Christian, this policy applies to the Catholic party.

One of the most important elements of Marriage is freedom to marry. If one or both parties have been married before either civilly or within the Church, the Catholic Church recognizes that prior bond and an annulment for each marriage is required before the date for the wedding can be set. For more information on seeking an annulment, please talk with one of the priests.

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## Take Time to Prepare and Plan

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**Our parish has a policy that requires a preparation period of six months to one year for couples who want to be married in the Church.** It's also important to talk with the parish priest or deacon or pastoral minister about what the parish allows and expects in a celebration. It's a good idea to get your date on the parish calendar as soon as possible.

Beginning early to work with the parish makes practical good sense and it also helps you to develop a relationship with a community that shares your faith and wants to support you in the sacrament you are about receive and live.

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## What the Catholic Church Believes about Marriage

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The Catholic Church believes marriage, as seen in God's plan for creation, is both a natural institution and a sacred union between a man and a woman. It is the basic pattern for male-female relationships where the natural make-up of male and female bodies complement each other for expressing married love and transmitting human life. The Church affirms that marriage is much more than a civil contract between two people in love. It is an outward sign to everyone of the love God has for all people. Marriage joins your individual gifts and talents into a new partnership blessed by God's special graces for your relationship.

The Catholic Church trusts that when you stand before the community to marry each other, you will make a **free** commitment to join your lives **fully** and completely in a life-long **faithful** covenant that is **fruitful** in deepening your relationship and in accepting children. Through these holy vows, God will promise to be with you, to sustain you on your journey together, and to help you love each other with God's very own love.

A **free** commitment means there is nothing in the way, personally or legally, of you marrying each other. It also means you choose this marriage without pressure from anyone, including yourselves, your families, or any personal situations.

A **full** commitment means you both intend your vows "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do you part". It means you intend, with God's grace, to love your spouse and to forgive your spouse when needed, so that each of you becomes the best person God created you to be. In that way, you will be your best helpers to gain the rewards of heaven some day.

A **faithful** commitment means you "forsake all others" when you marry, so your spouse will be your "one true love" and your most intimate companion for the rest of your life. Your promise to be faithful both sexually and emotionally includes striving to be loving, encouraging, thoughtful, and generous with each other.

A **fruitful** marriage means you are open to new life, that is, to having children if God sends them to you. Sometimes, couples discover they cannot give birth to biological children, but choose to give life through adoption, foster parenting, or generous works of charity. Whatever the situation, your married love is meant to give life to your relationship and to help you love others, including the children who may come into your lives.

In your marriage preparation, you will hear about **Natural Family Planning (NFP)**, a healthy, all-natural, safe, responsible and effective way to plan or space children without artificial contraception. NFP helps couples communicate better about their sexuality and focuses on their total relationship. The Catholic Church approves this method because it is the only one that does not affect or change the natural cycles of fertility and infertility God placed in our bodies. It is our hope that you will seriously consider learning and using this method of family planning.

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### **Interfaith Marriages**

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Marriage between a Catholic and someone of a different faith tradition is called an “interfaith” marriage. In this case, the Catholic party is expected to continue practicing the Catholic faith, have the children baptized, and to the best of his or her ability share that faith with future children by raising them within the Church. Marriages are stronger when interfaith spouses, or when one practices no faith, have an understanding of how that diversity can strengthen and challenge marriage and family life.

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### **If You Were Married in a Civil Ceremony**

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If you were married before in a civil wedding and desire to be married within the Catholic Church, you are invited to seek convalidation of your marriage. A convalidation is a valid marriage, distinct from a civil marriage. It is not a “blessing” of the civil marriage but a new act of consent. For preparation on convalidation, please speak with one of the priests.

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### **If You Are Already Living Together**

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We are pleased you want to be married in the Catholic Church. That means you also want God to be a partner in your marriage.

A special belief the Catholic Church has about marriage is that every act of loving sexual intercourse within marriage renews the wedding vows and the commitment to love each other fully, freely, faithfully and fruitfully as described earlier. So, if there have been no public wedding vows, sexual intercourse loses the special meaning the Catholic Church believes God created it to have.

Though couples may choose to live together for various reasons, the Catholic Church does not believe living together is the best way to prepare for marriage. Also, studies from the social sciences find that couples who live together before marriage divorce at higher rates than those who do not. So, the Catholic Church challenges couples to wait until after marriage to live together.

Couples already living together could find it helpful to discuss the following questions in preparation for their marriage:

1. Why did we choose to live together? (Fear of permanent commitment, testing the relationship, convenience, need for companionship, financial reasons, escape from home, etc.)
2. What have we learned from our experience of living together that will enrich our marriage?
3. Why do we want to commit ourselves in marriage at this time?
4. Before living together, was there a reluctance/hesitation to marry? If so, why? Does either one still have any reluctance/hesitation to marry?
5. Are we now at a new point of personal and couple development that makes us want to get married?
6. What is it that prompts us to marry in the Roman Catholic Church at this time?
7. What does marriage as a sacrament/sacred union/ covenant mean to us?
8. How do we see our love and the continued growth of our love for one another being an important part of our marriage?
9. What changes in our relationship do we think will happen after we marry?
10. Can we consider living apart until we're married?

## Considerations for Marriage in the Catholic Church

### Marriage is a Sacrament!

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The celebration of Marriage is not just a religious ceremony. A marriage between two baptized Christians is a sacrament, which means it is an encounter with Jesus Christ. In a particular way, the bride and the groom, in offering their lives to each other (symbolized in their vows), pledge their selfless love for each other. This selfless love embodies and makes present the love of Jesus, who gave Himself in love for His people. All who are present at a wedding can look at the bride and groom and see Jesus. More importantly, the bride and the groom look at each other and see Jesus' love.

### Bride and Groom are the Ministers of the Sacrament

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In some ways, marriage is less about the ceremony or the sacramental celebration than it is about the daily living of marital life. The priest (or deacon) is not the minister of the sacrament. He merely serves as the official witness of the church and the state (of course if the wedding takes place at Mass, the priest is the celebrant of the Mass). The bride and the groom marry each other, and as such, they are the ministers of the sacrament. The celebration of marriage, then, ought to be a reflection of the couple's faith and love.

### Marriage is a Matter of Faith

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As a sacrament and an action of the Church, marriage both presupposes faith and renews and strengthens faith. The process of preparation for marriage invites couples to reflect on God's presence in their lives. In the Sacrament of Marriage, God "enriches and strengthens" the husband and wife by giving them his special gifts of grace to enable their daily living in marriage "in mutual and lasting fidelity."

### The Sacred Scriptures - God's Word for You

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Couples are invited to choose the readings from the Bible that will be proclaimed at the wedding Liturgy. Normally three readings (one from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament letters, and one from the Gospels) are proclaimed. Sacred Scripture is the very Word of God speaking to the Church. Couples should reflect on what they believe God is speaking to them as they enter into Marriage, and they should also consider what they want to communicate about their own faith to those who will gather to celebrate with them on their wedding day.

### Vows: What you Say, What You Promise, What You Live

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The heart of the Rite of Marriage is the exchange of consent between the bride and the groom. In this moment, as ministers of the sacrament, you will express lifelong commitment to love and honor each other, as the priest (or deacon) acts as a witness. We invite you to reflect and spend time pondering what the vows mean, and hopefully remember the words for years to come, as the words take on more and more meaning in your day-to-day love and care for each other.

*I, (NAME), take you to be my wife/husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you, all the days of my life.*

### Music: To Stir the Soul and Lift the Mind

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Music for the celebration of Marriage not only adds beauty and dignity to the ceremony, but it has a more important liturgical function. In addition to music to accompany the procession of the ministers and the bridal party, music is an integral part of the Liturgy itself: the singing of the acclamations and responses by the assembly, hymns and songs at the entrance (gathering) and Communion procession are prescribed in the Rite of Marriage. Music should reflect and communicate, above all, the mystery of God's love in Jesus, especially as it pertains to the couple joined together in marriage.

Music, including songs, should be of a religious nature according to parish and diocesan policy. The music for a wedding should reflect the religious nature of marriage. As in any liturgy, the music serves to draw people into prayer and help those gathered to offer praise to God. **Secular music and performance music, appropriate for your reception but not your wedding ceremony, is not permitted for your wedding in the Church.**

Music at the wedding must be approved and a list of musicians will be provided upon request by calling our office at 797-7026.

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## **Procession of Bride...and the Groom!**

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What the movies depict isn't necessarily what the Church envisions. The bride and the groom enter freely and equally into marriage, and the entrance procession symbolizes that, as the couple approach the altar to stand before the Lord. The Rite of Marriage suggests that the liturgical ministers (priest, deacon, reader, servers) lead the procession, followed by the bride and bridegroom, each escorted by "at least their parents and the witnesses." This form of entrance is not always common, but speaks profoundly of the nature of marriage and the covenantal bond you are making with one another.

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## **Ministries: More than Just the Bridal Party**

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One of the important tasks couples undertake in planning their wedding is the selection of the bridal party. Couples invite siblings, cousins, and close friends to stand by them as attendants, who show their support by their close presence. They also perform a liturgical function as official witnesses of the marriage rite. There are other liturgical ministries to consider as well: readers to proclaim the readings from Scripture and announce the intentions of the general intercessions, family or friends to present the offertory gifts of bread and wine, or perhaps even (if a Mass) a server to assist at the altar. All of this preparation takes place as couples work with the officiating priest (or deacon), who provides guidance throughout the process.

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## **Family + Friends = Liturgical Assembly**

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Couples invite their closest friends and members of their families to be part of their wedding day. That gathering also represents the community of the Church, as they surround the couple with their encouragement and their prayers. Above all, it is an occasion for worship: in celebrating the sacrament, the couple, together with their family and friends, forms a liturgical assembly, who stand before the Lord with hearts open to His loving power.

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## **Three Forms of the Rite of Marriage**

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The Catholic Church provides three different forms of celebrating the Rite of Marriage. When two Catholics are marrying, the celebration will normally take place within a Mass. The second form, which does not include a Mass, is used when a Catholic marries another baptized Christian. There is a third form, which also does not include a Mass, for a Catholic marrying someone who is a non-Christian. You should choose one of these forms in conversation with the priest or deacon who will witness your marriage vows.

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## **Take Advantage of Options**

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Within each of the three forms of the Rite there are additional choices. For example, you can select biblical readings, blessings, and prayers from the approved texts. You can also choose friends or family members for different roles in the ceremony, such as readers and those who assist with the Offertory procession. Making these choices with your future spouse and with the priest or deacon can help you to learn more about the Catholic understanding of marriage and to become more deeply involved in your celebration of it. We will offer you a Marriage Planning Booklet entitled, "*Together for Life*," which will guide you in making choices concerning your wedding liturgy.

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## **Above All, Pray!**

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The wedding liturgy (whether celebrated at Mass or apart from it) is an act of worship. As such, it is a time to offer praise and thanks to God for His gifts, and to seek His continued blessings and help in your lives. In particular, thank God for the gift of your future spouse, and pray to the Lord to bless you and guide you together as you become witnesses of His love for each of you and for the world.

Being married in a Catholic Church is a significant decision. It means more than just choosing an appropriate and picturesque setting for the ceremony and the photos. You're trying to make your wedding a meaningful and memorable experience and, most of all, to express in a clear and beautiful way the hopes you have for your married life. How can you achieve these goals in the celebration of your wedding?

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## **Thoughtful and Prayerful Planning**

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Thoughtful, prayerful planning and participation in your Catholic wedding ceremony is a decision that will bring many blessings to your married life long after you've forgotten all the other decisions you made about flowers, photos, and favors on the tables.

Getting married in the Catholic Church takes more than one day. The reception, the band, the photographer, the dress are all costly. It may seem natural to give the most time and attention to the items which are the costliest. But it has been our experience that couples who spend the time and effort planning the wedding ceremony – the “in the church” part of the day – find their time and effort well spent.

## **Marriage Preparation Process in Our Lady of Hope Parish The Initial Meeting**

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***BEFORE a Church Reservation or Wedding Date can be arranged, the prospective Bride and Groom together must schedule an initial meeting with a parish priest.***<sup>1</sup> We highly recommend that you meet with a priest **at least one year in advance** of the intended wedding date, **but no less than 6 months before** your wedding. It is important to set up an appointment with one of the priests of the parish to discuss your intention to get married in the Catholic Church as soon as possible. Sometimes there can be obstacles which need to be resolved before planning can proceed. It is better to have advance notice. At this initial meeting, the priest will take time to get to know you, fill in some paperwork, and share with you more about what is offered to you for marriage preparation in our area.

### **Documentation**

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In accordance with Church (Canon) Law, the bride and groom each need to furnish the applicable documents.

**A Baptized Catholic** – a recently issued (not a copy of the original) record of Baptism with notations of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, etc. This is done by contacting the parish office in which the Baptism took place. Let the staff know you are getting married and would request a record of your Baptism – it should be sent to our parish office, where it will be added to your marriage file. If one or both parties were baptized in one of the churches in, this will be done by our staff.

If either of you were baptized and did not receive the Sacrament of Confirmation or Eucharist, you can still be married in the Church. We would recommend that you consider preparing for Confirmation before or after the Wedding.

**A Baptized Christian** – a copy of your baptism record from the Church in which you were baptized, and a letter, preferably from a relative, stating you have not been previously married. This is referred to as a Marriage Affidavit.

**One who has not been Baptized** - a letter, preferably from a relative, stating that you have not been previously married.

**State of Maine Marriage License** - In the State of Maine, a marriage license is required in order for the wedding to occur. Together, the couple must go either to the local city hall where they reside, or Portland City Hall to obtain a marriage license. This can be obtained within 90 days of the wedding date. We recommend that you do this well in advance. **NO LICENSE = NO WEDDING.**

**Marriage Form** – This form needs to be filled out and sent to the Parish Office. [Click Here for Form](#)

**Previous Marriages** – If one or either party has been married before, an annulment is needed before the wedding can occur.

A Copy of the Decree of Annulment along with the Divorce Decree must be produced. It is important to share this in the first meeting with the priest.

### **Planning a Date and Time**

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Weddings are scheduled in our parish churches on a first-come, first-served basis. Please bear in mind that your first choice of date and time might not be available. Weddings are scheduled as the parish and clergy calendars permit.

Weddings may occur in either of our parish churches, any day of the week, except Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation. Typically, they are held on Friday or Saturday.

If you intend on having an evening wedding, we recommend Friday evening. Saturday evening weddings are not permitted in the Diocese of Portland. Friday evening weddings are normally scheduled for 5:00pm or no later than 6:00pm. Saturday weddings are scheduled either at 11:00am or no later than 1:00pm due to parish and clergy calendars.

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<sup>1</sup> If it is not possible to meet with a local priest in our parish, especially for couples who are living in other parts of the State or other parts of the country, please let us know. This meeting can happen with a priest/deacon in a Catholic parish where the couple is living.

Should you happen to postpone or cancel your wedding, please call the Parish Office immediately. Others may appreciate the day and time you had reserved.

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### Officiating Priest or Deacon

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Once the paperwork is started, one of our priests (for a Wedding Mass) or a deacon (for a Wedding Ceremony Outside of Mass) will be assigned to work with you to plan your wedding. If you would like to request a particular priest or deacon from the parish or from outside of the parish to celebrate your wedding, please make your request known as soon as possible. For priests/deacons not assigned in our parish, permission is needed from our pastor and a letter from their Bishop or Religious Superior needs to be provided.

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### Fees and Donations

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To cover the cost of administration, maintenance, and utilities, the following fees must be made payable to the Our Lady of Hope Parish. A non-refundable deposit of **\$50.00 is due at the time of reserving the Church** for the wedding and should be dropped off or sent to our Parish Office.

The remainder of the fee is due two weeks prior to the Wedding and should also be sent to our Pastoral Center Office.

\$450. for Registered Parishioners

\$650. for Non-Registered Parishioners

The Couple is also responsible for compensating the musician(s), the photographer, florist, etc. These amounts are negotiated with them directly. If there is an Altar Server for a Wedding Mass, it is customary to offer the server \$10.00.

There is no fee for the priest or deacon who is officiating your wedding. While a gift is welcome, it is not required to offer a gift to the officiating minister.

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### Marriage Preparation Program

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Participation in a Marriage Preparation Program is not an option, but a requirement. Our Lady of Hope Parish offers three options to assist you in preparing for your marriage. **Marriage Mentors** – We will connect you with a married couple to discuss the Sacrament of Marriage. The schedule will be up to the four of you. Generally you will meet for seven sessions. There is a \$50. Cost for this option. **Class setting** – Other area parishes use a classroom-type setting for marriage preparation. We can give you locations and times when this option is available. The cost for this is also \$50. **Online** preparation. The two websites approved by the diocese which offer this type of preparation are: [www.catholicmarriagepre.com](http://www.catholicmarriagepre.com) or [www.catholicmarriageprepclass.com](http://www.catholicmarriageprepclass.com) The cost for this option is approximately \$130.

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### Planning the Wedding Liturgy

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All marriages in the Catholic Church are conducted according to the Rite of Christian Marriage. This is because a Catholic wedding is an event that involves the whole Church community. Since engaged couples are the ministers of the sacrament, they can and should be involved in making certain decisions about the wedding liturgy. As mentioned, a booklet called “Together for Life” will be provided so that you can select options for the wedding liturgy. You will be able to discuss options with the priest or deacon assisting you.

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### Final Meeting – Reviewing Wedding Details

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Once the paperwork and period of preparation has been completed, and no less than a month before the wedding, please plan a final meeting with the priest/deacon who will officiate at your wedding. At this meeting, he will review the paperwork and also finalize the details for the ceremony with you.

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### Wedding Rehearsal

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The wedding rehearsal is usually scheduled the day before your wedding. Sometimes, the rehearsal is coordinated by a parish staff member other than the officiating priest or deacon. Most couples do plan to have a rehearsal dinner with their friends and family, so we recommend a 5:00 or 5:30pm time for the rehearsal.

Due to church schedules and those of others, it is essential for your rehearsal to begin promptly and on time. The rehearsal is typically 45 minutes to one hour in length.

Please plan to bring Unity Candle (if you have one), programs, decorations, etc. with you to the rehearsal.

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## Decoration and Use of the Church

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A Catholic Church is a sacred space, and so it must be treated with reverence and respect. Please observe the following policies in our parish churches:

**Flowers** - If you would like special flowers for your wedding, please make sure that they are of good taste and dignified. Sometimes flower arrangements are placed at either side of the altar. It is customary to leave these flowers after the wedding so that our parish community can share in the joy of your wedding. No floral arrangements should be placed on the altar itself, or in such a way that obstructs the view of the top of the altar. They should not obstruct movement in the sanctuary. Simplicity and elegance have long been a custom of our religious tradition. Please notify your florist that on the wedding day, the Church will be open one hour in advance of the wedding. Scattering of flower petals or any other item is not allowed for safety and cleanliness reasons.

**Pew Bows** - Pew bows may be used provided they are attached with rubber bands or ribbon or thickly coated wire. No kind of adhesive material (tape, masking tape, duct tape) or pins are permitted.

**Unity Candle** - Although it is not an official part of a Catholic wedding ceremony, you are responsible for obtaining the candles and bringing them to the church for the rehearsal. Please consult with the priest or deacon before choosing to have one.

**Wedding Carpets** - No wedding carpets (aisle runners) are permitted in our churches because of the safety hazard.

**Confetti or Rice** - Absolutely no confetti, rice or any other kind of material may be thrown or scattered within the church or on the church property for safety reasons and because of the extensive cleaning time involved.

**Clean Up** - Please arrange to have someone stay after the wedding to pick up anything left, including pew bows, tissues, empty floral boxes, programs, etc., and to return chairs and tables in the church to their original places. There is no maintenance staff in our churches on the weekends. Please keep in mind that the Church will need to be ready for Mass shortly after the conclusion of your wedding.

**Photography and Videography** - Photographers and Videographers should always keep in mind that they are working in a sacred space) and should be especially respectful during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is helpful if the photographer can check in with the priest or deacon prior to the liturgy.

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### And Finally --

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We offer you our sincere congratulations on your upcoming marriage. Our Lady of Hope Parish extends to you a warm and heartfelt welcome to the marriage preparation process. We sincerely believe this experience will be rewarding and enlightening for you. You are preparing for the most important relationship journey of your life – a journey that God and the Catholic Church want to support. We invite you to look at this preparation process as a solid investment in your marriage, one that will pay generously in benefits for the future.

If you have not already done so, we invite you to consider registering as a couple/family in our parish. We would recommend that you consider some form of active involvement or ministry in your parish. Please discuss this with your marriage preparation team. You hold the future of the Catholic Church in your hands and hearts. We believe you have much to offer, and we hope you will find a meaningful way to share your gifts and talents with our Catholic Church community.

*This booklet was created by the staff of St. Michael Parish, Augusta, Maine. We are grateful for their permission to share it with you.*