Mother Seton Parish
Marriage Preparation and Celebration of Marriage

Welcome

Congratulations on your engagement! This is a joyful and meaningful time in your lives. As you prepare for the covenant of Marriage, the Church invites you not only to plan a wedding day, but to grow in a deeper understanding of love itself.

Marriage is more than a personal commitment—it is a **vocation**, a calling from God to love as Christ loves. At Mother Seton Parish, we are honored to walk with you as you grow aware of this calling and prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage. May our loving God richly bless and sustain your love with the Church, with your family, and with your friends.

Growing in the Meaning of Love

Every couple begins marriage preparation at a different place. Some come with a strong faith background, others are still exploring what faith means in their lives. Wherever you are, the Church begins with a simple question:

What is love?

In today's world, love is often understood as a feeling. While feelings are important, the Church teaches that love is something deeper:

- Love is a **free and faithful choice**
- Love is **self-giving and sacrificial**
- Love is **open to life and growth**
- Love is **meant to last a lifetime**

Marriage is the place where this kind of love is lived out every day.

Marriage as a Sacrament

In the Catholic Church, when both parties are baptized, marriage is a **sacrament**—a visible sign of God's grace. Through your vows, you become a sign of Christ's love for His Church.

This means:

- Your love reflects God's love
- Your commitment is lifelong and faithful
- Your marriage is a path to holiness

Your wedding day is important—but even more important is the life you will build together after that day.

Our Role as a Parish

When you come to the Church for marriage preparation, you are not simply requesting a service—you are entering into a relationship with the Church.

Our parish community and staff:

- Welcome you
- Support you
- Pray for you
- Walk with you before and after your wedding

We see marriage preparation as a shared journey of **accompaniment**, not just a set of requirements. When you come to Mother Seton Parish to prepare for your wedding, you are asking the entire parish community to bear witness to the reality of your Christian love. Everyone in the parish community shares the responsibility of proclaiming and celebrating your marriage in the Lord. In a sense, then, you are surrounded by love as you begin your married life together, the love not just of family and friends, but also of the Church.

We will do our best to consider and accommodate your personal wishes, and we ask that your plan begin with a deep and abiding love for the Lord, a personal and profound commitment to His Church, and an enduring respect and devotion to the rites and ceremonies of our parish family.

Thank you for asking us to share this important milestone in your lives. We hope you'll continue to share your lives with us as members of our family of faith, that together we might serve the Lord.

The Journey of Preparation

Marriage preparation is designed to help you grow in understanding, communication, and faith.

You will be invited to:

- Reflect on your relationship and your readiness for lifelong commitment
- Strengthen your communication and conflict resolution skills
- Explore the role of faith in your life together
- Understand the Church's teaching on marriage and family life

This journey includes:

- Four to six with a priest, deacon or mentor couple
- A relationship assessment with clergy or a married mentor couple
- Participation in a marriage preparation program approved by the Pastor
    - Archdiocese of Washington
    - Our Lady of Bethesda Retreat Center's Three to Get Married
- Introduction to Natural Family Planning (NFP)
- Guided use of resources from *ForYourMarriage.org*

Core Areas of Growth during Marriage Prep

During your preparation, you will explore:

- Family of origin and expectations
- Communication and conflict resolution
- Commitment and lifelong fidelity
- Faith and shared spiritual life
- Financial stewardship
- Sexual intimacy and openness to life
- Parenting

These conversations are meant to help you not only prepare for a wedding but also build a strong and lasting marriage.

Couples Preparing at Mother Seton Parish

Couples who wish to celebrate their wedding at Mother Seton Parish should:

- Include at least one practicing Catholic
- Be free to marry in the Church
- Begin preparation at least six (6) months in advance, though longer is recommended.

You will first meet with our pastor to be guided through each step of the process. If either party has a prior marriage, regardless of where it took place, it must be resolved in accordance with the church's teachings. Let the pastor know at your first meeting if you have any prior marriages or are currently civilly married.

Couples Marrying Outside the Parish

We are also happy to assist couples who belong and worship with us but are preparing here and celebrating their wedding elsewhere.

In these cases, Mother Seton Parish will:

- Provide initial and ongoing pastoral guidance
- Assist with preparation and required assessments
- Help complete necessary documentation
- Clergy may or may not be able to travel to assist in other locations

Couples are responsible for coordinating with the parish where the wedding will take place and completing any additional requirements. The clergy can assist with ensuring that the preparation process is completed locally and those items are sent in a timely manner to the other parish. Couples are asked to make a contribution of $300 to support the parish and those who assist the couple and prepare the documents for a wedding outside of the parish.

Planning the Wedding Liturgy

As you prepare for your wedding, you will also plan your liturgy in collaboration with your priest or deacon and the Director of Music.

You will be invited to:

- Select Scripture readings and prayers - You will be provided materials from which you may select the readings, prayers and other elements in designing the ceremony.
- If you would like music at your wedding, please contact our Director of Music, Amy Massey at least six months prior to your wedding, music@mothersetonparish.org. To ensure that all music is appropriate for the liturgy and coordinated smoothly, please consult with the Director of Music before making any arrangements for instrumentalists or singers.
- Invite family and friends to participate in meaningful roles
    - **Lectors** - We invite you to ask some of your family members or acquaintances to proclaim God's Word during your wedding ceremony. Those chosen should plan to attend the wedding rehearsal and have practiced their reading prior to the wedding ceremony.
    - **Gift Bearers** (when the Eucharist is celebrated) **-** We invite you to ask some of your family members or acquaintances to present the gifts of bread and wine as the altar is prepared for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Your wedding is a sacred act of worship, and every element should reflect the dignity and beauty of the sacrament. If the marriage is between a Catholic and a non-Catholic, the clergy will offer a wedding ceremony is outside Mass.

Wedding Music

A wedding in the Church is first and foremost an act of worship. As in any sacred liturgy, the music is chosen with care so that it supports prayer and reflects the dignity of the sacrament. Music is not simply a personal expression, but the prayer of the whole gathered community.

For this reason, the Church provides clear guidelines to help determine what is appropriate for worship. These guidelines are not meant to limit you, but to ensure that your celebration is both meaningful and truly rooted in the faith of the Church.

Within these norms, there remains real opportunity for personal choice and expression. Working together with the Director of Music, you will be able to select music that is both beautiful and fitting for the sacred celebration you are preparing.

Our Director of Music, Amy Massey, will assist the couple in planning the wedding liturgy including music selections and will play organ/piano for the wedding. The fee for the Director of Music's services is $250 which is payable **one month prior** to the wedding.

The Director of Music will hire a cantor who will lead the sung parts of the ceremony or Mass. Wedding music is not performance music and therefore an active, trained cantor in the musical liturgical norms of the Catholic church is required. The fee for the cantor is $150 which is payable **one month prior** to the wedding.

The music you choose must always be suitable for a worship service. Secular songs, while they may have meaning for the couple, are not liturgically appropriate and are therefore not allowed.

The music for the wedding will be provided by **Mother Seton Parish musicians**. A cantor from outside the parish may be permitted but must be approved by the music director. Additional instruments such as trumpets, strings, flutes, guitars, etc. may be used to enhance your wedding music. The music director requires a rehearsal with cantors or vocal soloists from outside the parish and for any additional instrumentalists. An additional $100 fee applies, which is payable **one month prior** to the wedding.

Practical Information

After understanding the process of marriage preparation and the guidelines of the parish, you may now ask what you can do about getting the date.

Scheduling your Wedding

- After you meet with the pastor, and your arrangement of the marriage preparation sessions has been confirmed, you may confirm with the parish that the church and the clergy member are available. This would also be the time to reserve the church for a wedding rehearsal the day prior.
- Weddings are held on Saturdays at 2:00 PM due to other parish events, even if a guest clergyman officiates. Speak to the office about weddings on Friday afternoons.
- Once the date and time for your wedding and rehearsal are confirmed and finalized, you may proceed to make your other wedding arrangements (rehearsal dinner, reception, etc.).
- A priest who is not assigned to Mother Seton Parish may preside at your wedding if he has the written delegation (permission) of the Pastor, Fr. Regan.

Guidelines

- **Wedding Coordinators** – Our Parish Office does not have a wedding coordinator; however, our office staff will assist you to answer questions about the church, facilities, etc. You are welcome to have a professional wedding coordinator, but they must adhere to all guidelines outlined in this booklet. The celebrant makes all final decisions regarding how a wedding is celebrated and professional coordinators must follow his guidance.
- **Photography and Videotaping** – Flash photography is not permitted during the Mass. Digital cameras must be set to museum mode to prevent the camera's audible noise during the ceremony. No cameras are allowed in the sanctuary area during the ceremony, but the photographer and wedding party may return after the service to take pictures.
- **Bridal Gown and Dresses of Bridal Party** – Your wedding is a sacred and public act of worship taking place in a consecrated place of divine worship. Bearing in mind the reverence and decorum required by the sacred liturgy, modesty in dress should be observed.
- **Runner –** Runners are not permitted during the ceremony.
- **Rice, Confetti, Birdseed, Flower petals, etc.** – Not permitted at any time, either inside or outside of the church.
- **Church Cleanup** – You are responsible for all cleanup at the conclusion of your wedding. Parish staff is not available to clean up after weddings; it is expected that you remove all decorations from the Church, allowing ample time to prepare for the next liturgy.

Offerings and Fees

Couples are asked to make a contribution of $700 to support the parish and those who assist in the celebration of the wedding. This contribution goes toward the operation of the church and the services associated with their wedding, according to the following norms:

- Church Offering: $150
- Wedding celebrant: $150
- Clergyman who prepares you for marriage (if different from above): Donation directly to the clergy which is not included in the above total amount.
- Musician fees: $250 for the organist/pianist and $150 for the cantor (or a $100 rehearsal fee for cantors outside of the parish)
- An additional $100 will be added to coordinate and rehearse with outside instrumentalists or vocal soloists – the contribution total to the church will be $800 to include this rehearsal fee.

Please make the requested contributions payable to Mother Seton Parish.

Continuing the Journey After the Wedding

Marriage preparation does not end on your wedding day. In many ways, it is just the beginning.

We encourage you to:

- Be a part of the newly married group
- Stay connected to the parish community
- Continue growing in your relationship with one another and with God
- Seek support when needed

The Church remains a companion to you throughout your married life.

Contact Information

For assistance, please contact the parish office at (301) 924-3838.

We are here to support you every step of the way.

Fr. Kevin Regan, Pastor	**ext. 208**	**pastor@mothersetonparish.org**
Fr. Jorge Ubau	ext. 203	parochialvicar@mothersetonparish.org
Amy Massey, Director of Music	ext. 215	music@mothersetonparish.org
Mary Beth DeLuzio, Pastoral Associate	ext. 202	pastoralassociate@mothersetonparish.org
Ruth Chávez, Parish Secretary	ext. 211	mspps@mothersetonparish.org

May God bless you as you grow in love
and prepare for the Holy Matrimony Marriage.