

Saint Thomas Aquinas Church
Serving the University of Virginia



401 Alderman Road
Charlottesville, Virginia 22903
phone: 434-293-8081
fax: 434-296-1941
<http://www.stauva.org/>

Marriage Preparation at St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish

“The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.”
—Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1601

Congratulations on your decision to get married in the Church! Of all the life-changing decisions you could make in life, this will very likely be the most important. The Catholic Church holds marriage in high regard, and we want to make sure each person who approaches the sacrament knows the kind of commitment they will profess by their marriage vows.

Both bride and groom should enter into marriage well-prepared for the challenges they may face in married life, and have a knowledge and appreciation of the depth of this sacrament, so as to live and enjoy it fully. This is the goal of our marriage preparation at St. Thomas Aquinas. Do you have what it takes to form “a partnership for the whole of life”? If not, you can probably acquire it if you have an open mind and heart and a little dedication.

These guidelines provide an overview of the preparation process for marriage here at St. Thomas Aquinas.

N.B.! Marriage preparation requires a *minimum* of six months before your wedding date; ideally a year. Please do not make financial commitments before we ascertain with you that you are free to marry and your date is available.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

PRAY. Your fiancé/e is very likely the person you are going to spend the rest of your life with. It will be a decision you freely make, and one you must continue to affirm “for better or for worse.” Marriage is a *vocation*, a calling from God. We need God’s help to successfully meet the challenges of married life. If you are not used to praying this is an excellent time to develop a habit of prayer in your life and to pray for each other.

WHERE DO YOU LIVE?

St. Thomas Aquinas is a non-territorial parish given charge of the ministry to the UVA community. To be married at St. Thomas Aquinas either you or your fiancé/e need to have one of two things:

1. a connection to UVA as a current student, faculty, staff, or alumnus/a, or...
2. you are a formally registered parishioner at St. Thomas Aquinas.

N.B.: If you are a student or alumnus/a living in another city or state well outside the Charlottesville area (*i.e.* at such a distance that it is difficult to commute often), you may want to consider finding a Catholic parish closer to where you reside and doing your marriage preparation there. Marriage preparation will be similar in most parishes. Remember, the key to a marriage preparation that is worthwhile will be how much **you** put into it!

If you are going to start marriage preparation in Charlottesville, but expect to have an assignment/deployment/internship elsewhere before the wedding day (and thus become unavailable to meet for long periods of time), please let the priest know, so you can discuss options for your preparation.

SETTING A DATE

Weddings are usually held on Saturdays. Available dates and times are subject to the schedule of parish events and the availability of our clergy. You should contact Ms. Marianne Jablonski, OP (434-293-8081 ext. 323 or via email to friars@stauva.org) to discuss these details. However, dates are tentative until it is determined that you are free to marry. Ms. Jablonski can help arrange a meeting with a priest to ascertain that and secure a date. It is not wise to make reception arrangements until this is determined!

St. Thomas Aquinas parish does not handle reservations for the UVA Chapel. The UVA Chapel is reserved according to the regulations found at the following URL: www.virginia.edu/deanofstudents/eventplanning/chapel-2/ .

MEETINGS

You will meet **several times** with the priest or deacon who is preparing you. The number of times varies, and these meetings cannot be avoided. The number is deliberately kept secret to keep you on your toes. No, just kidding. You will meet about four (4) times to talk about what marriage involves, assess your readiness for the sacrament, and discuss how you are benefitting from the various parts of the preparation process.

PRENUPTIAL INVESTIGATION

This is a short questionnaire the priest or deacon will take you through, usually on your first meeting. It gathers your basic biographical information and assesses your freedom to marry.

FOCCUS INVENTORY

FOCCUS stands for *Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study*. The FOCCUS inventory is a series of multiple-choice questions about your relationship in relation to different aspects of married life. Despite its humble beginnings in a previous life as a Scantron™ examination form, it is not a test, and you can't fail it. Rather, it is a way to tailor your marriage preparation to your unique relationship as a couple. You will probably spend 2–3 meetings discussing the results of this survey. The FOCCUS website is www.foccusinc.com (but there is no need to register directly as you will receive a link via email when you need to take the inventory). The results of the FOCCUS are time-limited and are never retained in your marriage file.

DIOCESAN PRE-CANA PROGRAM

In the Diocese of Richmond there are two options to fulfill this requirement: ***Engaged Encounter*** and ***Unveiled***. You can find an up-to-date schedule and register online for either one at: www.cdrcmfl.org/marriage-preparation/

- a. ***Engaged Encounter*** is a weekend retreat (Friday evening–Sunday afternoon) for couples preparing for marriage. It is offered in many other dioceses if you are not living within the Richmond Diocese nor close enough to attend one scheduled here. It is offered about 5–6 times per year.
- b. ***Unveiled*** is the Diocese of Richmond's pre-Cana program, in a one-day Saturday format (8:00 am–8:30 pm). Many couples find this easier to work into their schedules. Don't let its one-day character fool you—it will give you a lot to think about! Be sure to get a good night's rest the night before. This retreat is offered 2–3 times most every month of the year.

When should you register? First, don't wait to register (and thus attend) until the last month before your wedding. There are many dates offered, but these events fill up ***fast***. Richmond is a huge diocese geographically and the prime date may not be at a convenient distance, and vice versa. Further, you will be far too busy in the last month with wedding preparations to focus on anything else.

In general, as soon as you get the ok from the priest or deacon that you are free to marry, you should ***register*** for an event right away. A good date to ***attend*** is between when you have finished the FOCCUS and 3–4 months before your wedding date. The idea here is that the pre-Cana event helps you to discern what you need to do to prepare for marriage as your vocation with the person you are engaged to.

If you live in the Arlington, VA area, the Arlington Diocese offers three options, any of which will satisfy the pre-Cana requirement: ***Diocesan Conference for the Engaged, Catholic Engaged Encounter Retreat, and Three to Get Married***. You can find them listed on this webpage: arlingtondiocese.org/familylife/marriage.aspx . (continued »)

If you live in the Washington, DC or suburban Maryland area, you can find pre-Cana Conferences at this webpage: www.adw.org/marriage-prep-schedule .

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

We require couples to complete a course in Natural Family Planning. NFP is a morally acceptable and medically safe way for Catholic Christians to plan their family in agreement with God's will. It also helps married couples grow in the virtue of chastity (which virtue is still necessary in married life!) and strengthen their relationship. While you may choose not to use NFP for determining when you have children, an understanding of it helps to appreciate the Catholic approach to marriage and the family, which is really needed in the world today.

You can find more information about NFP classes offered at St. Thomas Aquinas, and elsewhere in the Richmond Diocese, on our parish website at www.stauva.org/worship/marriages/nfp/ . To schedule a course, please contact Dr. Karen Poehailos, MD (one of our instructors) at chvillenfp@yahoo.com .

You may register at any time, but since there are a few meetings necessary to complete the course, you will want to do this early on. This is also something that is better experienced when you and your fiancé/e are there in person.

If you live in the Arlington, Virginia area, you can find local NFP classes on this page: arlingtondiocese.org/familylife/natural_fam_plan.php . Or, to find NFP classes in Washington, DC or suburban Maryland, see this page: www.adw.org/nfp/ .

WEDDING PLANNING — LITURGY

You will meet with the priest or deacon to discuss the wedding ceremony itself. We use (and will give you a copy of) the book *Together for Life* to help pick the readings and plan the liturgical aspects of the wedding. This book also has a website with other resources located at: togetherforlifeonline.com/ . Further details about the wedding ceremony will also be provided. This meeting is usually held a month or two before the wedding.

Remember that the wedding Mass is not a Sunday Mass. You and your Catholic guests should still plan to attend a Sunday liturgy even if you have your wedding on a Saturday evening.

MASS OR CEREMONY?

For the wedding of two Catholics the Rite of Marriage is within a wedding Mass. If it is a Catholic and a non-Catholic Christian in most cases you will use the Rite of Marriage

outside of Mass. If a Catholic and an unbaptized person the wedding is a likewise a ceremony and not a Mass. If you are aware of any special circumstances or have any questions, please discuss it with the priest who is preparing you.

MAY WE WRITE OUR OWN VOWS?

There are many ways to customize your wedding ceremony but writing your own vows is not one of them. We use a time-tested formula for marriage vows that is guaranteed to last a lifetime.

EXTERNAL CLERGY

If you know a Catholic priest or deacon you would like to witness your wedding, they may do so with the proper permissions:

1. They need to send a ***letter of good standing*** to the Chancellor of the Diocese of Richmond and copy the letter to the pastor, Rev. Joseph Barranger, OP, (if the wedding is at St. Thomas Aquinas or the UVA Chapel) or to the pastor of the church where the wedding is held (if elsewhere).
2. They must ***request delegation*** from the pastor, Rev. Joseph Barranger, OP, (if the wedding is at St. Thomas Aquinas or the UVA Chapel) or from the pastor of the church where the wedding is held (if elsewhere).

If you are not a current UVA student, faculty or staff, and are not a registered parishioner here, you should arrange for your own priest or deacon to perform your ceremony, subject to the above regulations.

WEDDING PLANNING — MUSIC

Music is a large part of any wedding ceremony. All couples who plan to be married at St. Thomas Aquinas church must contact Mr. Brian Dean Sousa, the parish Organist and Choirmaster. If your wedding is at the UVA Chapel it is suggested that you also contact him to arrange music for your ceremony. Even if you plan to have other musicians play at your wedding please contact him. He will help you find music that is appropriate and permissible for a church wedding. It is good to contact him early on even if you work out the details later.

- A. ***If your wedding is at St. Thomas Aquinas Church proper***, there is a fee that must be paid for music. This fee secures Mr. Sousa to play the organ for your wedding. He has the right of first refusal: if he is unavailable for your wedding date, then you are free to provide another organist or musician(s) at whatever fees they require. If he is available and you decide to choose someone else his regular fee is then termed as a “bench fee” and is still required to be paid. The “bench fee” is a standard practice among professional organists around the world. Use of a cantor or vocal soloist also requires a separate fee. (Fees are listed at the end of these guidelines.) »

- B. ***If your wedding is at the UVA Chapel***, there is no “bench fee” required to Mr. Sousa if you decide to use an other musician(s). If however, you’d like to use Mr. Sousa to provide music for your ceremony his regular fee is paid. Although Mr. Sousa is not currently on the list of organists handed out by UVA, he is approved to play there. Sound equipment maybe rented according to UVA policies. UVA Chapel regulations and fees for weddings can be found at: www.virginia.edu/deanofstudents/eventplanning/chapel-2/ .

ORGANIST CONTACT INFORMATION:

Mr. Brian Dean Sousa

Director of Music

St. Thomas Aquinas Parish

401 Alderman Road

Charlottesville, VA 22903

Phone: (434) 293-8081 ext. 319 (office)

Fax: (434) 296-1941

Email: music@stauva.org

Web: briandean Sousa.com

DOCUMENTS, DOCUMENTS, DOCUMENTS...

There are some documents you will need to acquire that get put into your marriage file. It is good to request these earlier rather than later.

BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATE

If you are ***Catholic*** you will need to request a baptismal certificate from the church you were baptized in. It must be recently issued, which means dated within six months of your wedding. It is probably easiest to find the phone number of the parish online, give them a call, explain that you are preparing for marriage, and ask that a baptismal certificate “***including all sacramental notations***” be sent to St. Thomas Aquinas, attention the priest or deacon preparing you. (Address information is listed at the end of these guidelines.)

If you are a ***baptized non-Catholic Christian***, you will need a baptismal record from the church where your baptism took place, listing the name and location of the church, your date of birth, date of baptism, and the name of the minister who baptized you. Note that this baptismal record does not need to be recently issued. We will make a copy and return the original to you.

CONFIRMATION CERTIFICATE

If you are Catholic and have received the sacrament of Confirmation, this is usually noted on the baptismal certificate. If it was not recorded there, you should be able to obtain a separate Confirmation certificate from the church where you were confirmed. Find the parish and give a call as above. »

CERTIFICATE OF RECEPTION INTO FULL COMMUNION

If you were a baptized Christian received into the Catholic Church via the RCIA, you should request a certificate of your reception into full communion (which may also note that you were confirmed) from the church that received you.

If you were baptized Catholic through the RCIA, that church should be able to issue you the usual Catholic baptismal certificate.

FREEDOM-TO-MARRY AFFIDAVITS

You each will need to fill out two (2) affidavits from people who have known you long enough and well enough to witness to your freedom to marry. Good examples are parents or grandparents, aunts or uncles, as they have usually known you since birth.

The form may be filled out ahead of time, but it must be signed by the witness in the presence of a Catholic clergy (priest or deacon) or a notary public. It must also be suitably stamped with the parish or notary seal. Parents may fill out just one form so long as both sign it. But if only one person is giving witness via the form, only that one witness needs to sign that form.

The priest preparing you will provide this form, either printed or as in PDF. The completed forms should be mailed directly to St. Thomas Aquinas Church, attention the priest or deacon who is preparing you.

PRE-CANA CERTIFICATE

You will receive a certificate on completion of the Engaged Encounter or Unveiled weekend. Please bring this to your next marriage meeting, and we will make a copy for your marriage file.

NFP CERTIFICATE

You will likewise receive a certificate for completing your NFP course. Bring that in to be noted as well.

LETTER OF PERMISSION

If you are a Catholic and have moved away from Charlottesville with the intent of settling down at your new home, you will need to request permission from the pastor of your local parish to be married at St. Thomas Aquinas or the UVA Chapel. This permission is given in the form of a letter. It should be sent to St. Thomas Aquinas Church, attention the priest or deacon who is preparing you.

If you are *currently attending* UVA but doing an internship in another city or state, you are still considered to be here at St. Thomas Aquinas and do not need this permission.

WEDDING MUSIC GUIDELINES

This file, found on the parish website, must be filled out by all couples using Mr. Sousa to provide music for their wedding.

CIVIL MARRIAGE LICENSE

You will need to obtain your civil marriage license in person from a Virginia court. The circuit court for Albemarle County where St. Thomas Aquinas Church is located can be found here:

www.courts.state.va.us/courts/circuit/Albemarle/home.html .

The Charlottesville Circuit Court is another location nearby.

The Virginia marriage license is valid for 60 days. About a month before the wedding date is a good time to acquire it just in case you have to adjust your actual wedding by a day or two for an emergency reason.

Marriages in other states may have different requirements. Be sure to check for what is needed in the place where your marriage will actually take place.

You should bring this license (along with the packet of materials) to your wedding rehearsal and give it to the priest or deacon who is doing your ceremony. In Virginia, neither you nor your best man/maid of honor need to sign anything after the ceremony. The officiant is responsible to return notification to the court. There is a non-certified wedding certificate that the officiant should fill out and return to you.

N.B. *We cannot witness your wedding if you do not have a valid civil license!*

WEDDING FEES

<i>Weddings held at St. Thomas Aquinas Church</i>	<i>Currently Enrolled UVA Student(s), Faculty or Staff; Registered Parishioners</i>	<i>UVA Alumni</i>
Use of the church:	\$ 250 made out to: <i>Saint Thomas Aquinas Church</i>	\$ 500 made out to: <i>Saint Thomas Aquinas Church</i>
Regular Music Fee (or) Bench Fee:	\$ 350 made out to: <i>Brian Dean Sousa</i>	
Cantor:	\$ 200 made out to: <i>(talk with the organist)</i>	
Stole Fee:	\$ 150 made out to: <i>Saint Thomas Aquinas Church</i>	

»

Weddings held at The University of Virginia Chapel on Grounds**	For all	
Rental of the UVA Chapel:	The fee to use the University of Virginia Chapel and their sound system is paid separately to the University of Virginia; details may be found on the following webpage: <i>www.virginia.edu/deanofstudents/eventplanning/chapel-2/</i>	
Organist/Musicians:	<i>whatever fee is charged by your organist/musicians</i>	
Cantor:	<i>whatever fee is charged by your cantor</i>	
Stole Fee:	if your celebrant is a priest or deacon from St. Thomas Aquinas Church:	\$ 150 made out to: <i>Saint Thomas Aquinas Church</i>
	if you provide your own celebrant (external clergy):	<i>whatever fee is charged by your celebrant</i>

N.B.: ALL payments must be made by the date of the wedding rehearsal. Payment may be mailed to or dropped off at the parish office.

GENERAL CONTACT INFORMATION FOR THE PARISH

Our address information is:

St. Thomas Aquinas Church
401 Alderman Road
Charlottesville, VA 22903

Phone: (434) 293-8081
Fax: (434) 296-1941
Email: friars@stauva.org
Web: www.stauva.org

For documents to be obtained and mailed in, please note here the priest or deacon you're doing your marriage prep with. Please request any documents to be sent to his attention:

- Rev. Joseph Barranger, OP, *pastor*
- Rev. Mario Calabrese, OP, *parochial vicar*
- Rev. Joseph-Anthony Kress, OP, *parochial vicar*
- Rev. David Mott, OP, *parochial vicar*
- Rev. Antoninus Niemiec, OP, *parochial vicar*
- Rev. Mr. Michael Fitzgerald
- Rev. Br. Pier Giorgio Dengler, OP
- _____