

US Naval Academy Catholic Weddings

Greetings from the USNA Senior Catholic Chaplain

Congratulations on your engagement! Our Lord raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament and the stunning US Naval Academy Chapel is a particularly beautiful venue in which to celebrate it.

A Catholic wedding is primarily a religious service and so must be conducted in full integrity just as it would in any Catholic church. We are not a parish and our midshipmen-focused mission and high demand for the chapel may require some flexibility on your part.

I encourage you to see the months of marriage preparation as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build your wedding, your marriage and your life on the firm foundation that is Jesus Christ.

May God bless you!

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Prior Civil Marriage

Per longstanding USNA policy (USNAISNT 1730.3B) and in accordance with the Catholic Church's ancient emphasis on the importance of being married in the eyes of God *prior to* living the marital life, couples who wish to marry in the Brigade of Midshipmen (Main) Chapel must arrive to their wedding ceremony unmarried in any way, including civilly. If they have been civilly married (e.g. by a court, etc.) they cannot be married in the main chapel. Couples will verify their status by bringing their unsigned Anne Arundel County (Maryland) marriage license to the wedding rehearsal.

Couples who would like their legal marriage recognized by the Catholic Church are also encouraged to marry at USNA. *Convalidation* ceremonies are in St. Andrew's Chapel (daily Mass chapel). Wedding preparation requirements (see below) are the same.

Prior Marriages

Per Catholic teaching, all couples to be married in the Catholic Church must be free of all marital bonds. If there are previous marriages, paperwork (finalized decrees of nullity, death certificates, divorce decrees, etc.) must reflect that there is no leftover bond, legal or otherwise. Needed decrees of nullity ("annulments") must be *finalized and in hand* before a Catholic wedding is scheduled at USNA.

Preparation

Unless the couple is comprised of at least one Midshipman or Sailor/Marine assigned to USNA/NSA Annapolis, every couple desiring marriage at USNA must fill two clergy requirements:

- 1) A preparing priest, deacon or parish; this will usually be the parish priest or Catholic chaplain where they regularly attend Sunday Mass.

This priest or deacon is solely responsible to prepare the couple for marriage according to the prenuptial standards of the Archdiocese for the Military Services (AMS), while collecting all relevant paperwork such as baptismal certificates, freedom-to-marry forms, etc. An overview of these requirements can be found at www.milarch.org/marriage-preparation.

All documents should be sent to the preparer. Do *not* send any Catholic marriage prep documents directly to USNA! Per AMS policy, there must be at least six months of preparation before the wedding. Under exceptional circumstances, this minimum may be waived by the USNA Senior Catholic Chaplain.

- 2) An officiant. This may be but is *not necessarily* the same person as the preparing priest or a deacon (in the case of a non-Mass Liturgy of the Word wedding ceremony.)

It is the couple's responsibility to provide their officiating clergy. Due to operational commitments, should your chosen officiant later decline or not be able to perform the ceremony, USNA Clergy cannot not be presumed to fill in.

While USNA Clergy are at times able provide wedding support, they will not commit to this more than 90 days prior to the wedding. A couple cannot presume on the availability of USNA clergy to support their wedding and should do their best to find and bring their own officiant.

Celebrating at USNA Chapel

All Catholic weddings at USNA are *services* (rather than Mass), even for two Catholics, and celebrated according to the updated *Novus Ordo*. Exceptions must be approved by the USNA Senior Catholic Chaplain, who will facilitate permissions from the Archbishop for the Military Services if needed.

The USNA Senior Catholic Chaplain serves in the place of canonical pastor and must delegate visiting clergy to conduct weddings, which he will do in writing upon receipt of the visiting clergy's letter of good standing issued by his diocese or Ordinary. This letter should be dated not more than six months prior to the wedding.

Letters of Good Standing are sent from the officiant's ordinary (or his delegate) to:

Most Reverend Timothy Broglio
Archbishop for the Military Services
1025 Michigan Ave NE
Washington, DC 20017

CC: Fr. Curt Dwyer, LCDR, CHC, USN
Senior Catholic Chaplain, US Naval Academy
(same address)

The couple will work with the USNA Wedding Coordinators to select hymns & readings, assign lectors, etc. Officiants are expected to attend the rehearsal, typically the Friday afternoon preceding Saturday weddings, which is conducted by USNA Wedding Coordinators.

Communion services are not permitted in the AMS.

Setting a Wedding Date

All Catholic weddings at USNA Chapel must be approved by the Senior Catholic Chaplain. The process is as follows:

- 1) Ensure that you have first contacted the USNA Wedding Coordinators (weddings@usna.edu) regarding your desired date(s).
- 2) The Catholic Wedding Coordinator receives the name(s) and contact information for the preparing clergy via the signed Acknowledgement Sheet (see below). Please read and clearly understand these guidelines prior to submitting the sheet.
- 3) She will contact the preparing priest/deacon/parish to verify that the preparer both understands and agrees to AMS wedding preparation requirements.
 - a. **Note: Allow a minimum of TWO WEEKS for permission to schedule following our reception of the signed Acknowledgment Sheet.**
 - b. This may be longer depending on the responsiveness of the proposed preparing priest.
- 4) Upon this verification, the Catholic Wedding Coordinator will notify all parties, including USNA's wedding coordinators, via email that the couple is authorized to schedule their wedding. Preparation should begin as soon as possible to ensure timely completion of steps and collection of needed documents.

It is understood the couple will participate in good faith in the wedding preparation process. If they do not, or the file is not complete by the wedding date, the Senior Catholic Chaplain cannot allow the wedding to proceed under Catholic auspices regardless of other arrangements, financial transactions or understandings. *His final written approval is required for the wedding to occur.*

Paperwork Routing

The USNA Senior Catholic Chaplain must have the completed prenuptial file no later than one month prior to the wedding. The preparing priest will route the completed prenuptial file as follows:

1. Preparing priest or deacon forwards it to:
2. His arch/diocesan chancery, which, upon their approval, then forwards it to:
3. The Archdiocese for the Military Services' Tribunal, which, upon its approval, then forwards it to:
4. USNA Senior Catholic Chaplain

Early routing ensures time to remediate should one or both chanceries discover discrepancies. Additional time should be allotted when the paperwork is routed to or from overseas. After the USNA Senior Catholic Chaplain receives the completed prenuptial file, formally approved by the AMS Tribunal (when the preparer is not an AMS-endorsed priest), the paperwork is complete, and the USNA Senior Catholic Chaplain gives his **final approval**, notifying all parties via email that the marriage may proceed.

Renewal of Vows

While “renewing vows” is not a practice of our Catholic faith, we do perform marriage *blessings* on the 25th, 50th and 75th anniversaries. If a couple would like to have their marriage blessed at a Sunday Mass, they may schedule directly through the Senior Catholic Chaplain. This public blessing will be delivered immediately after the homily or before the final dismissal.

Alternatively, a couple may reserve the chapel for a blessing according to the “Rite of Blessing of a Marriage within Mass.” In this case they will schedule their blessing ceremony via the USNA wedding coordinators and must supply their own clergy. The visiting clergyman must supply a letter of good standing dated no more than 6 months prior to the ceremony and receive permission from the Senior Catholic Chaplain prior to the ceremony.

Acknowledgement Sheet

This signed sheet must be returned (via PDF) to Mrs. Brandy Hoot at usnacatholicweddings@gmail.com to obtain approval to schedule.

I have read and agree to comply with the USNA Catholic Wedding Guidelines. I understand that it is *our* responsibility to provide both 1) a preparing priest and 2) an officiant. We acknowledge that there is no guarantee that USNA clergy will officiate our wedding. For main chapel weddings, we will arrive to our USNA wedding day unmarried in any way, including civilly.

Groom's signature: _____ Date: _____

Bride's signature: _____ Date: _____

Groom & Bride Printed Names & Desired Wedding Date:

Groom email _____

Bride email _____

Groom Religion _____

Bride Religion _____

Currently married civilly? Y N

Groom Active Duty US Military? Y N

Bride Active Duty US Military? Y N

Our Preparer: (Name, Parish & Town):

Preparer email and phone #:
