

Archdiocesan policy now allows for outdoor and other locations for weddings

Archbishop William E. Lori promulgated in February a revised policy regarding the place of weddings in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. The policy now allows weddings at locations other than a parish church.

The priest or deacon celebrating the marriage must apply to the chancery for permission to use another location at least six months in advance.

Diane Barr, chancellor of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, said the new policy comes as a result of conversations, especially with young people, who want to be married in the church but also wish to have the wedding at a special location.

“The archbishop has been emphatic about reaching out to young people,” Barr said. “There is more openness to considering other options.”

The preferred location for a wedding of a Catholic is still either the bride’s or the groom’s home parish church. The engaged couple must complete the proper Catholic preparation for marriage, as required by the church, according to a Frequently Asked Questions about the policy.

Catholic brides or grooms who live in the archdiocese are eligible to receive permission to marry at a location other than his/her parish church. One of the most common requests is for use of a chapel at a school. Alumni, current employees and others with a connection to the location can be married at an approved Catholic high school, college, university or other Catholic site.

A special process will allow such locations to be recognized as a wedding site and is designed to make sure that “the local parish and the Catholic location (high schools, colleges, etc.) work well together in serving the wedding couple in an evangelizing way,” the FAQ said.

Weddings can also be held at an appropriate outdoor location, as long as there is a back-up indoor location in case of inclement weather.

Some venues are not suitable for marriages, the policy states, including on a boat or in any place where alcohol is served as a matter of course such as casinos, bars, night clubs or the like.

Barr said that still leaves a lot of potential locations for a Catholic wedding. "People take getting married very seriously. If they want to get married in their grandmother's field, behind the family home," that's an important reason.

The policy anticipates that some of the selected locations may be outside the boundaries of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, including places on the Eastern Shore or along the Chesapeake Bay.

"There's a range of places," Barr said. "Some of them are lovely."

Such requests will be handled on a case-by-case basis, working with the local diocese to see if it is open to such a wedding and to ensure the proper permissions are in place.

Celebrating a Catholic wedding at a location other than a parish does bring some additional logistical concerns and potentially an additional burden for the priest or deacon who officiates.

"Priests and deacons approached by the faithful should use their best judgement to determine their own personal availability for any particular wedding date or location, keeping in mind the honest desire of those seeking marriage to have a meaningful ceremony at a particular location and the needs of the broader community," the archdiocese's FAQ said.

The priest or deacon who is officiating at the wedding must request the permission, not the couple. Usually the chancery will provide a response within a month. Barr said there had already been more than 20 requests since the policy was promulgated, and all were approved.

The permission to use other locations will be a one-year experiment.

“We will draw together the data we have at the end of the year,” she said. “We will probably poll our priests as well. From there, we’ll see where to go.”

To read the policy, visit <https://policy.archbalt.org/policies/26/45> and scroll to section 404.8 – Place of Wedding.