

Invited

THE ULTIMATE
CATHOLIC WEDDING
PLANNER

STEPHANIE
CALIS

PRAISE FOR

Invited: The Ultimate Catholic Wedding Planner

“I wish this book had existed when I was in the midst of planning my own wedding! It thoughtfully covers every aspect of wedding planning through an authentically Catholic perspective. It is a must-have for all Catholic brides-to-be.”

—Kateri Bean, Senior Content Manager at CatholicMatch

“Stephanie brings to light this holy sacrament’s true essence, which can often be forgotten amid frivolities. Intimate insights and comprehensive guidance fill this book. A true treasure for the bride-to-be.”

—Carolyn Shields, Creative Director of
theYoungCatholicWoman

“*Invited* is a rich, honest, and down-to-earth guide—and it’s exactly what Catholic brides (and grooms!) need. Stephanie Calis uses wisdom, compassion, and personal experience to accompany Catholics through the practical and spiritual parts of planning a wedding. And Calis does it masterfully. This book can equip all readers to have weddings and marriages that do what they’re truly meant to do: point others toward God and illustrate his love.”

—Arleen Spenceley, author of *Chastity Is for Lovers:
Single, Happy, and (Still) a Virgin*

“Theological, practical, and honest—this book is a gift to any couple getting married in the Catholic Church. Whether they attend Mass every Sunday or haven’t been to church for years, *Invited* has something for every couple to thoughtfully plan a beautiful wedding *and* enrich their marriage.”

—Edward Herrera, Archdiocese of Baltimore
Director of Office of Marriage and Family Life

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THE ULTIMATE CATHOLIC WEDDING PLANNER

SECOND EDITION

STEPHANIE CALIS


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“The yearning of the human heart after this primordial beauty with which the Creator has endowed man is also a desire for the communion in which the sincere gift of self is manifested. This beauty and this communion are not goods that have been lost irretrievably—they are goods to be redeemed, retrieved; and in this sense every human person is given to every other—every woman is given to every man, and every man is given to every woman.”

—Pope St. John Paul II,
Meditation on Givenness



“The encounter with the beautiful can become the wound of the arrow that strikes the heart and in this way opens our eyes . . .”

—Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger,
“The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty”

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Preface to the Second Edition

YOUR WEDDING IS an invitation—one accompanied by beautiful stationery, artwork, and lettering, yes. But it also signifies something deeper.

For you, your beloved, and everyone present, your wedding day and marriage are living, visible reminders that the love between spouses is powerful. A force that embodies the love of God for his children, stirs the human heart to consider its purpose, and offers a foretaste of the heavenly wedding feast, which is the ultimate invitation.

If you're reading this, congratulations! *Invited: The Ultimate Catholic Wedding Planner* was written to combine both practical and spiritual elements of wedding planning into a single volume for couples marrying in the Catholic Church. No matter where you've been or your current perspective on Catholic marriage, I want the information in these pages to meet you where you are. I want it to *invite* you to consider the great gift of marriage and the fulfillment to be found in the Catholic faith. And I hope it invites

your friends and family to see God's goodness through your living witness to his love.

In the years since the first edition of this book was published, I've co-founded a ministry for Catholic brides that began with a desire to communicate truth, goodness, and beauty through real couples' stories and through honest, authentic dialogue about engagement, wedding planning, and newlywed life. My time spent addressing brides in this medium, as well as working with Catholic vendors in the wedding industry, has increased my knowledge and expertise in planning and preparation. And it's also reshaped my outlook on weddings and divine love.

How? Through blog posts, social media, and speaking engagements, I've talked to many women who excitedly describe their wedding plans to me, often followed by some qualifier like, "but of course, the sacrament is the most important part."

It's true! Entering into marriage, speaking your wedding vows with soul and body, is transformative—an outpouring of grace.

Yet why do couples sometimes experience guilt as they dream of a visually beautiful wedding day? Do they think that beauty will be a distraction from the greater, divine reality taking place, or that downplaying the material elements is somehow more virtuous?

If you've ever felt this way, I commend your spirit of humility and moderation. I also invite you to reconsider the purpose of beauty. Any desire you have for a beautiful wedding—the church, the music, the gown, the flowers, the meal, and more—isn't at odds with the sacrament. In fact, I'd argue that sensory beauty *enriches* the beauty of the sacrament. God himself is all truth, goodness, and beauty. Therefore, held in proper perspective, any wedding elements that evoke the true, good, and beautiful are an opportunity—yet another invitation—to know the heart of God

more deeply. These desires are a good thing! I call them an “appeal to the heart.” Beauty stirs something within us—an ache for meaning and for the infinite. We are made for eternal life, and so these longings draw us into our identity and purpose.

Truth, goodness, and beauty are relational. They are a bridge. That’s what I hope you’ll find in this book. Wherever you are in your spiritual life, whether or not all your wedding guests are Catholic, beauty speaks a language we can all understand. Far more than words and argument, I truly believe that sharing in something true, good, and beautiful (your wedding, in this instance) speaks for itself and makes a powerful statement about the realities of our faith.

So I invite you to consider new or challenging information with an open heart, letting yourself examine the ways in which the Catholic faith aligns with feeling most fulfilled and fully alive. Here my goals for these pages:

- ✦ To answer all the initial questions that arise after you’ve said *yes*: how to set a date, how to book your wedding vendors, how to determine a budget, how to begin shopping for your dress, and more.
- ✦ To walk with you throughout your engagement and first days of marriage in the practical and the spiritual, including ceremony and reception planning, growing in prayer and authentic love for your spouse-to-be, healthy preparation for married intimacy (no matter your past experience), and maintaining a sense of peace during these busy months.
- ✦ To invite your beloved into the planning process in a practical, supportive way. Each chapter concludes with a reflection on the topic at hand from a bridegroom’s perspective,

written by my husband Andrew, and offers questions for conversation.

✧ And above all, to appeal to the heart: yours, your beloved's, and your guests'. There is something so captivating about a holy wedding celebration between a couple deeply in love and focused on the Lord. I sincerely hope the information in this book sparks a new, deeper perspective on your faith and inspires in you a sense of joy and anticipation for your married life.

Throughout the book, along with chapters on first steps, marriage preparation, your ceremony, reception, and wedding week, cultivating peace and self-care, affirming your inner and outer beauty, authentic love and healthy intimacy, and newlywed life, you'll also find distinctively Catholic timelines and worksheets designed for you feel informed and in control of your planning.

I'm excited to walk this path to your vocation with you. Thank you for inviting me into your engagement and future marriage.



“I DO” TO-DOS:
A MASTER CHECKLIST

THIS CHECKLIST WAS designed to minimize overwhelm and to break down your wedding-planning tasks into manageable categories and time frames. Depending on the length of your engagement, the times suggested for various tasks are flexible. If you want or need to adjust the time frames on the list, I recommend still keeping the tasks grouped in the same way they're listed. And depending on your budget and tastes, feel free to cross out or disregard items on the list that don't pertain to your situation.

And what about the day of your wedding? The best resources for creating a day-of timeline will be your photographer and DJ, who likely have tried-and-true practices in place for offering you the best client experience and helping the day run as smoothly and peacefully as possible. Speak with your photographer and DJ about your hopes for the day and ask what their typical wedding-day timeline is like. This allows them to make suggestions that fit ideally with their work processes and give you the most time for portraits, special dances, time with guests, and more. Placing your trust in their talent and abilities nearly always results in the best experience.

Additionally, I recommend frequent communication with *all* your wedding vendors. All vendors in the industry have spent hours developing their skills and education and are experts at handling a range of wedding-day dynamics. Tap into their expertise! If you have a wedding coordinator, he or she will help facilitate these communications.

Practical First Steps

- Choose a celebrant for your wedding ceremony, like your parish priest or a friend who is a priest.
- Choose a location for your ceremony. See the section “Considerations for Choosing a Church and a Priest” in chapter one.
- Schedule a meeting with your celebrant to go over marriage preparation requirements and available wedding dates.
- Sit down with your parents and future in-laws to discuss each family’s general expectations regarding investment and involvement in the wedding.
- Decide if you will have a nuptial Mass or a Celebration of Matrimony outside of Mass.
- Set a date.
- Set a budget. Use the Budget Planning Sheet that follows.
- Decide on an approximate guest count.
- Identify potential reception venues. Schedule phone meetings and in-person visits to learn more.
- Choose your bridesmaids, groomsmen, maid of honor, and best man and invite each of them to be a member of your wedding party.
- Mail or email Save-the-Dates.

Spiritual First Steps

- Sign up for a marriage prep program through your parish or diocese. See chapter two for more on choosing a program format well-suited to you and your beloved.
- Register for a Natural Family Planning (NFP) course. See Appendix C for resources.
- Ask your celebrant for a blessing over your engagement and future marriage.
- Plan a betrothal ceremony if you choose to have one. See the section “The Rite of Betrothal and Betrothal Ceremonies” in chapter one.
- Pray! Ask the Holy Spirit to grant you peace and clarity of mind during this season of busyness and anticipation.

Reception Planning

For an in-depth reception to-do list, see the Reception Planning Sheet in chapter four.

Vendors: Book Your . . .

- Wedding coordinator
- Photographer
- Videographer
- Stationery designer
- Hairstylist and makeup artist

- Ceremony musicians
- Florist
- Cake baker
- Caterer, if necessary
- Bartender
- DJ or band
- Transportation

Be sure to sign contracts and send deposits as necessary!

Note: Some venues include several of these vendors and items, such as food and alcohol, together in a package.

Ceremony Planning

- Plan your nuptial Mass or Celebration of Matrimony ceremony. See the Ceremony Planning Sheet in chapter three.
- Choose and invite liturgical ministers and other attendants for your Mass or ceremony:
 - _____ Musicians and vocalists
 - _____ Readers
 - _____ Extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist (only at Mass)
 - _____ Altar servers
 - _____ Greeters/ushers
- Invite any priests whom you'd like to concelebrate the Mass, along with any deacons to assist.

Attire

- Go dress shopping! Purchase your gown and schedule fittings and alterations.
- Shop for and buy or rent the groom's suit or tux.
- Choose dresses for your bridesmaids, ideally six months or more in advance. Follow up to check that everything's been purchased.
- Choose suits or tuxes for your groomsmen.
- Shop for and purchase bridal accessories:
 - ___ Shoes
 - ___ Jewelry
 - ___ Wrap/bolero/jacket
 - ___ Lingerie/undergarments/shapewear
 - ___ Bag, clutch, or purse

6–8 Months in Advance

- Browse invitation options. If you are working with a custom stationer, discuss deadlines for finalizing and approving designs, lead time for them to create your stationery, and delivery.
- Book rentals for ceremony and reception items, such as attire, seating, lighting, tables, serving ware, etc.

4–6 Months in Advance

- Create a gift registry online and/or in brick-and-mortar stores.
- Order invitations, if you haven't yet (see above).
- Book your honeymoon and arrange for time off from work.
- Shop for and buy wedding bands.
- Make or purchase favors.
- Reserve room blocks at 2–3 locations close to your ceremony or reception location for out-of-town guests and share the information with them.

2–4 Months in Advance

- Plan your rehearsal dinner. See the section “Planning Your Rehearsal Dinner” in chapter five for more details.

_____ Time and place:

_____ Meal:

_____ Guests:

_____ Special items: speeches, gifts, blessings
