

*Congratulations, You're Engaged to be Married!*  
*Guidelines for the Preparation for and Celebration of your Wedding*  
*Saint Mary Church, Storm Lake — Sacred Heart Church, Early*  
*— St. Joseph Church, Schaller*



*We, your priests & deacons, want the preparation for marriage and the planning and celebration of your wedding to be as joyous and as stress free as we can make the entire process. We do this with an eye to the real preparation you are doing: **preparation for a life-long marriage within the Catholic Christian Tradition.** We want to make sure that this process respects the teaching of the Church on the richness of the Sacrament of Marriage and the beauty of the Wedding Rite (whether the rite on its own or within a Nuptial Mass).*

*This pamphlet includes some of the information you need for:*

- ♥ Scheduling your wedding;*
- ♥ Marriage preparation;*
- ♥ Basic guidelines for your wedding in one of the churches in this grouping*
- ♥ Planning the liturgy of the Wedding Rite/Nuptial Mass.*

*Marriage is a life-long commitment of love, a union of a man and woman that is most solemn and serious. Because God is the author of marriage, it is by nature a holy institution that requires that both individuals are free to marry and wish to enter into marriage without reservation and in complete freedom, so that your marriage will reflect Christ's love for His Church. — Pray through all of this, on your own, with each other, and at Mass with the community who wants the best for you and your marriage!*

*“May the Lord bless you with many happy years together,  
so that you may enjoy the rewards of a good life.  
And after you have served him loyally in his kingdom on earth,  
may he welcome you to his eternal kingdom in heaven. Amen!”<sup>1</sup>*

## *Scheduling Your Wedding*

- ♥ Before a date will be placed on the master calendar we recommend that you meet with a priest/deacon about a year in advance of your hoped-for date (Diocesan requirement is nine months).
- ♥ Registered parishioners will be given preference over those who are not registered parishioners.
- ♥ At this initial meeting the priest/deacon will discuss what the Roman Catholic Church and the Diocese of Sioux City require for the sacrament of marriage. For the Diocese’s requirements and to register for its programs: [scdiocese.org](http://scdiocese.org), click on “Marriage Prep”.
- ♥ The priest/deacon will begin to fill out the paperwork for the marriage file that will be kept on record.
- ♥ *Are you preparing outside this parish grouping?* We still ask that you meet with a priest/deacon here before a date for your wedding will be put on the master schedule. At this meeting the priest/deacon will discuss any special requirements of the Diocese (or Canon Law) that may apply because your preparation is being done elsewhere.

## *Preparation for Your Marriage*

- ♥ We—the priest/deacon and the couple—are required to follow the policies of the Diocese of Sioux City for marriage preparation and for the wedding itself. In the initial meeting mentioned above, the priest or deacon will make sure the requirements are clear to you. (See the Diocese’s website above.)
- ♥ Now, we also want to keep you on task so that we don’t come to the final weeks before your marriage and we are rushing to finalize your preparation. So, at the first meeting, 9 months before your wedding, basic information will be gathered from you and the priest or deacon will go over the basics of our diocese’s marriage preparation. Here is a time line we ask you to follow—**or we will suggest moving the wedding to a later date:**

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<sup>1</sup>Part of one option of the Blessing of the Couple at the end of the Catholic Marriage Rite approved for the United States.

- 🕒 **Within the first two months of your preparation** (still seven months out):
  - Complete the FOCCUS (=Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding & Study);
  - Assist the priest or deacon, if needed, to get new copies of your baptism certificate and other sacramental history;
  - Have two witnesses—one for the bride, one for the groom—meet with the priest or deacon to answer a few questions attesting to your freedom to marry (this takes about 10 minutes for each of them);
- 🕒 **Within five months before your wedding:**
  - be well underway with your preparation with the deacon or priest;
  - at least have scheduled when you will attend the diocesan programs (see below)—or have started doing them online;
- 🕒 **Within three months before your wedding:**
  - Completion of your meetings with your preparing priest/deacon (going over FOCCUS);
  - If doing online “Pre-Cana” and/or NFP, then this work should already be started and nearing completion;
- 🕒 **Within six weeks before your wedding:**
  - Have the diocesan requirements completed.
  - Have all the paperwork done—especially if the file needs to be sent into the Tribunal for permissions, etc. (your preparing priest/deacon can clarify what is needed);
- 🕒 **Within one month of your wedding:**
  - Have the readings, music, ministers (servers, cantor, keyboardist, lay ministers of Holy Communion, etc.) all worked out and approved by the priest/deacon who will preside at your wedding.
  - The priest or deacon can look over your program, if you decide to do one, before it goes to printing.

You now have time to focus on all the other details for your big day.

- 🌈 **If you are preparing for marriage *outside the Diocese of Sioux City***, you are required to follow **that** Diocese’s policies, and they will be accepted by our diocese. In the initial meeting noted above, the priest/deacon will discuss any special record keeping that preparing in another diocese entails. It is good to plan to have all your preparation done at least 4–6 weeks before your wedding date, so that all of these matters can be attended to, and to avoid any last minute problems.
- 🕒 **Written permission from the couple’s pastor for the wedding is needed for scheduling the wedding.**

# Planning the Liturgy for Your Wedding

## ♥ Nuptial Mass or Wedding Rite?

- When both the bride and the groom are Catholic, they are married in a Nuptial Mass (includes the Liturgy of the Eucharist).
  - When either the bride or the groom is baptized non-Catholic, normally the Wedding Rite is used, though permission from the Bishop can be requested for the Nuptial Mass.
  - When either the bride or the groom is unbaptized the Wedding Rite is used.
- ♥ For the official records of the parish, you need **at least one Catholic witness** at your wedding. Your Best Man and Maid/Matron of Honor are the witnesses on your civil marriage license. If at least one of them is Catholic, s/he will also be the witness for the purposes of the church record. If not, another member of your wedding party or a person attending your wedding can be the witness for the official parish record.
- ♥ You will receive information about the liturgy in the course of your preparation. In addition, a very helpful website for preparing the liturgy and for putting together a program for your wedding is [catholicweddinghelp.com](http://catholicweddinghelp.com).
- ♥ All music within the liturgy must be **live** (i.e., no recorded music), **religious**, and **appropriate to a Catholic wedding**. The presiding priest/deacon will review all music choices, as well as any program you prepare for your wedding.
- ♥ You are welcome to have musicians of your own choice (cantor, organist, pianist, strings, etc.); you are, of course, responsible to work out with your musicians the fees they ask for a wedding. Our preference would be that any cantor you choose would be able to sing the parts of the Mass.
- ♥ The liturgy begins when the procession begins; the procession is led by a server carrying the processional cross, two servers carrying candles (if the couple chooses to have three servers) and then the priest/deacon. The wedding party then enters. Music for this can be instrumental or a grand hymn in which everyone can join—the latter is especially appropriate for a liturgy of the Church!
- ♥ The recessional music may be instrumental or a grand hymn (see comment above); the couple may lead the way, though it would not be inappropriate for the cross, candles and priest/deacon to do so. The couple is encouraged to have their receiving line at their reception venue. **Ushers are there to usher, so it is much preferred that the couple does not return to usher out their guests.**
- ♥ When choosing Lectors/Readers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and servers (see below on servers), we ask that these persons do those ministries in one of our grouping's churches, or are involved in such ministries at their home Catholic parishes. For the sake of your wedding, you will want people who know how to do these ministries and have the proper reverence when doing these ministries.

- ♥ There are a number of things that have been allowed to sneak into weddings **that are NOT part of the Wedding Rite**. The **new rite** specifically **allows for the use of arras and/or lazo** in a wedding where one or both persons is of Latino descent (these are optional in such weddings, not required).
- ♥ **The new rite does NOT allow the unity candle**, or any other actions, such as mixing of different types of sand or oils, etc. **Therefore, NO extraneous additions to the rite are allowed in weddings for which marriage preparation began after the publication of the new rite in the summer of 2017.**
  - Before overreacting to this restriction coming from the new rite, please note that lighting a unity candle, doing a unity cross or some other action is perfectly **allowable at your reception. That is a more appropriate place for actions that are meaningful to the couple, but are not part of the Church's rite.**

## *Our Parishes' Practical Guidelines for Weddings*

### *Donations/Fees/Costs*

- ♥ All couples preparing in our grouping are to pay **a one-time administrative fee of \$25** for the online inventory (FOCUSS), record keeping, certificates, postage, etc.
- ♥ Our parishes, due to their different sizes, have fees specific to them:
  - St. Mary's (of which St. Joseph's is a part) and Sacred Heart **registered parishioners** will be asked to make a donation of \$100, preferably *at the time of the booking the Church*. This donation helps with the extra use of the facilities (for janitorial services, heat/air conditioning, lights, etc.).
  - Non-registered persons are asked a donation of \$500 for use of St. Mary's or \$250 for use of St. Joseph's or Sacred Heart. This donation is considerably higher because parishioners already support the parish with time, talent and treasure.
    - A **nonrefundable** 50% of this donation is to be offered *at the time of booking the Church*; the remaining 50% may be offered at any time, but **must be offered a month before the wedding date in order to hold the wedding.**
- ♥ The couple will also have fees for Pre-Cana or Engaged Enrichment, and Natural Family Planning, which are Diocesan programs required of couples (see diocesan website); there are online options that can be discussed with the preparing priest/deacon, if the schedule of diocesan sponsored events do not work for the couple.
- ♥ As noted above, all the fees for musicians, cantors, planners, etc., contracted by the couple are to be paid directly to them; the priest/deacon/parish does not mediate these arrangements or payments.
- ♥ It is **highly recommended** that at least one server be present; three are recommended for a Nuptial Mass (see below on procession/recession). The couple is welcome to have siblings/relatives fulfill these roles, if they are server in their own parishes. If the priest/deacon is asked to find servers for the wedding, we ask a \$10 stipend for each server who is asked to come in for the wedding.

- ♥ No fee is charged by the presiding priest/deacon, though it is customary to gift him with a stipend between \$50 and \$100.
  - The amount may reflect whether the priest/deacon simply presided, or also conducted the rehearsal, and also prepared the couple.
  - If you are prepared outside of our parish grouping, we encourage you to show your gratitude to the preparing priest/deacon with a gift.

## *Scheduling Times*

- ♥ The policy of the Diocese of Sioux City is that **2:00 PM is the latest starting time** for a Saturday afternoon wedding. This insures that the presider and the church are available for other parish needs on Saturday afternoon and evening.
  - Having your wedding ***during one of the normally scheduled weekend Masses*** is possible (in that case, the donation for parishioners would be **waved**).
    - In this case, **your wedding would fulfill your and your attendees' Sunday obligation** and the full idea of the sacrament as a sacrament of the whole Church and not just a couple of families would be celebrated.
    - There are special diocesan guidelines for this; please discuss them with the priest/deacon preparing you for marriage and planning your wedding.
- ♥ Usually there is a wedding **rehearsal** the evening before the wedding. The time for the rehearsal is to be arranged with the priest/deacon.
  - The rehearsal will begin on time and will entail going through the entire liturgy **once**.
  - Attentiveness of all involved is most encouraged.
  - The rehearsal goes most smoothly when **only those directly involved in the wedding** are present.

## *Comportment in the Church*

- ♥ With respect to **picture-taking**: this is to be concluded forty-five minutes before the beginning of the wedding liturgy. Please remember—and remind your guests—that you are taking pictures in sacred space, so proper respect for the space should be shown.
  - Please note, due to many requirements for the Church space (esp. at St. Mary's), **we cannot guarantee that you will be able to start more than two hours before the wedding.** This allows up to 75 minutes for picture taking. There is some time after the wedding for picture-taking, but that should be clarified for the site of your wedding in advance by speaking with the priest/deacon.
- ♥ **No gum-chewing, food, and drink are allowed in the church at any time.** See the particular parish guidelines for where food and drink may be consumed by those involved in pictures. (If celebrating a Nuptial Mass, please be mindful of the **one hour fast** before receiving the Eucharist.)
- ♥ Both before the rehearsal and before the wedding, **no alcohol** is to be drunk by anyone involved the rehearsal or wedding. Anyone who is inebriated will be excluded from the rehearsal and/or the wedding. Most importantly, the couple and their witnesses must be sober for the marriage to meet both Civil and Canon Law requirements for validity.

- ♥ After the wedding the ushers and the bride's personal attendant (or other designated persons) are to make sure the church and all areas used by the wedding party are clear of any trash (e.g., tissues, programs, flower boxes, food or drink items, etc.). Any personal items that people may have left behind can be gathered up and taken directly to the reception so that they may be returned to their owners.

## *Guidelines for Decorating*

Our churches are quite beautiful on their own,  
so decoration is certainly **not required!**

- ♥ Schedule a time for decorating the church in advance so that it does not conflict with any other events in the church. (Note well: This has to be flexible, in case, e.g., a funeral takes place during the morning before the wedding.)
- ♥ Liturgical/Seasonal decorations in the church **may not be moved or removed** for the wedding—these decorations situate your wedding within the Church's liturgical season during which your wedding takes place.
- ♥ Decorations on the end of pews, if used, are to be fastened with special clips or string (your florist can help with these); tape is not to be used.
- ♥ Aisle runners **are not allowed** because of the increased likelihood of someone tripping and the liability issues that may result.
- ♥ **Nothing may be thrown inside or outside the Church** (i.e., no flower petals [real or fake], rice, birdseed, confetti, etc.). We highly encourage that balloons not be released, due to the litter and hazard to wildlife that they will ultimately become.
- ♥ No decorations are to be placed on, attached to or obscure the view of the altar and the ambo.
- ♥ You are encouraged to use live plant and/or flower arrangements in the sanctuary or other areas of the church, if you choose to do decorations.
- ♥ The couple is not required to leave any plant/flower arrangement in the Church, though they may choose to leave an arrangement that can be used in the Church. All other decorations are to be removed and taken out of the Church at the conclusion of the wedding.

*Blessings on you both!*

*Father Timothy Friedrichsen*

*Father Michael Cronin*

*Deacon Mark Prosser*

*Deacon Ken Lindquist*

*Deacon Paul Kestel*

*Deacon Rick Rohr*

*Deacon Michael Higgins*