Celebrating your Wedding at



Immaculate Conception

CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Dear Parishioner

Congratulations on your engagement! The staff and parishioners of Immaculate Conception Parish are excited about your recent engagement and rejoice in the mutual love you have discovered. We also are pleased that you desire to declare and seal it, publicly and permanently, in the Sacrament of Marriage. In this way, your love and life together will serve those around you as a sign that Jesus Christ is alive and present in the world. Preparation for marriage is a tremendous opportunity for spiritual growth together, and with God, we are glad to be a part of a major milestone in your lives!

This guide is intended to assist you in your marriage preparation and to answer some of the most commonly-asked questions. Please read it carefully and ask the preparing minister to answer any further questions you may have.

You have expressed a desire to be married within the Roman Catholic Church. Since there are other alternatives, such as a civil marriage, your decision to be married in the church is a significant one. Participating in the Sacrament of Marriage bespeaks an understanding and faith commitment on your part, which sets your wedding plans apart from many others. As Catholic Christians, we believe that the Sacrament of Marriage is a covenant between a woman and a man, based upon unconditional love and fidelity, sealed in the presence of the community of believers. This sacred covenant of marriage is a symbol of the union between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:21-32). In Christ, God has made a covenant with us, sealed by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through our celebration and living of the sacrament, God continues to be present and active in our world, making us holy.

Congratulations on your upcoming wedding!

Rev. Tom Heathershaw, Pastor
Deacon Michael Ward

The Catholic Faith Community

Sacraments belong not just to the individual, but also to the whole Church. Indeed, it is the parish community that celebrates the sacraments. Immaculate Conception Parish celebrates the love of God manifested in your loving relationship with each other. We thank you for being that grace of God in our lives.

An Active Life of Faith

Sacraments are celebrated and lived within the context of a committed faith community. The Sacrament of Marriage is a declaration that these persons are, and intend to be, a part of a parish and pastorate community— faithfully celebrating Mass on Sunday; celebrating God's forgiveness regularly in reconciliation; giving evidence of faith in daily living; contributing time, talent and treasure to the parish; and respecting the teachings of the Church, especially in sharing faith with any children born to this union. Couples presenting themselves for marriage in the Catholic Church are expected to be registered, practicing members of a faith community. If the couple is not currently registered or active at the time they begin their preparation, we ask them to do this as soon as possible. Your life of faith is not limited to the two of you alone, but extends into the future with any possible children. The obligation to accept children and educate them in the faith implies that Catholic parents be confirmed in the same faith in which they intend to raise their children. It is assumed that Catholics preparing for marriage have already received the Sacrament of Confirmation. If you are not confirmed, please check with our Director of Faith Formation regarding our Confirmation program. Again, requesting the Sacrament of Marriage while not actively practicing the Catholic faith is contrary to the very nature of the sacrament.

Preparing to Be One Through Prayer

As individuals and as a couple, you need to be spiritually prepared for two to become ONE. It goes without saying that the best marriage preparation is a couple who prays together! Disciples of Jesus Christ are persons of prayer. We encourage you to grow in your prayer life, not only as individuals, but also together as a couple. Learning to pray together is important in growing in love, forgiveness and fidelity, and in becoming a sacrament and sign of God's love to others. Call upon the Lord and ask Him to guide your heart in the covenant of love.

Sometime before the wedding, we urge the couple to experience reconciliation with God and others in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In preparing for a Catholic wedding, you are encouraged to:

- ❖ Pray together and alone.
- ❖ Be a regular part of a worshipping community.
- ❖ Receive the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation regularly.

First Things First

A number of documents and forms are required for a Catholic marriage to be fully processed. The priest or deacon preparing you for marriage will help you obtain/complete the following requirements:

Current Baptismal certificate (for each party)
Form 1: Pre-Nuptial Questionnaire
Form 2: Affidavit Concerning the Freedom to Marry (may be required)
Form 3/4: Permission for Marriage and/or Request for
Dispensation (for interfaith marriages).
Engaged Encounter or Pre-Cana
FOCCUS
Civil marriage license—to be brought to the wedding rehearsal

Marriage Preparation Programs

Engaged Encounter

It is expected that couples preparing for marriage participate in either Engaged Encounter or Pre-Cana. Engaged Encounter is a weekend experience that emphasizes both couple dialogue and couple spirituality. This balance is presented to the engaged couple through the life experiences of married couples and a priest or deacon. The engaged couple learns through observation, listening and written dialogue, a powerful form of learning. Registration forms are available from the priest/deacon preparing you for marriage.

Pre-Cana

Pre-Cana is a marriage preparation program emphasizing topics important to a healthy marriage, as witnessed to from the experiences of married couples. There are currently seven Pre-Cana weekend locations throughout the Archdiocese. You may register for any of the locations as part of your marriage preparation.

FOCCUS

FOCCUS is a requirement for marriage. All couples preparing for marriage in the Archdiocese of Dubuque take the FOCCUS inventory. Afterwards, the couple's discussion, which is based on the results of the inventory, is facilitated by the priest or deacon preparing them for marriage. FOCCUS stands for Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study. This is one of the most helpful tools for marriage preparation today.

Special Circumstances

1. **Interfaith Couples:** When one of the persons is of a faith tradition other than Catholic, some additional instruction in the Catholic concepts of marriage is helpful. It is permissible to include the minister/pastor of another faith tradition, when possible, as a participant in the wedding

ceremony of an interfaith couple. For the Catholic party, special permission is required.

The reception of Communion is an action signifying a oneness in faith and worship. Reception of Communion by Christians not fully united is not permitted by the Catholic Church. It seems more appropriate not to celebrate Eucharist when half of the worshippers cannot receive Communion. Because of this, most interfaith marriages are celebrated without the Eucharist.

2. **Non-Christian/Non-Baptized.** When one of the persons is non-Christian or non-baptized, some additional preparation may be required. Again, special permission (dispensation) is required, and it is not permissible to celebrate the marriage within Mass.

3. **Previous Marriage.** If one of the individuals has been married before and has not applied for a Decree of Invalidity, it is not possible to set a date for the wedding until the annulment has been finalized. This should be the couple's first concern before attending to their wedding plans. Once the individual has received a Decree of Invalidity, the date for the marriage may be set. If one individual was previously married and their spouse has died, a death certificate is required.

M.A.T.T. Remarriage Preparation Program

This remarriage preparation program is required for engaged couples entering a marriage where one or both have been married before. Registration forms are available online and at the parish office.

Wedding Ceremony Preparation

Who

Immaculate Conception Parish will accept the wedding requests of the following:

a. Current parishioners

b. Those who have a connection to the parish (e.g., grew up in the parish) and have the permission of their pastor to marry here.

When

Providing all other requirements are met, all requests will be handled according to the availability of the presider and the church facilities. Sometimes, dates and seasons that you should be aware of are:

1. It is the policy of Immaculate Conception Parish to schedule
    a. Weddings with Mass at/before 1:30pm on Saturdays
    b. Weddings Outside of Mass at/before 2:00pm on Saturdays
    c. Weddings can be celebrated in the parish on Friday evenings, on Saturdays and at any regularly scheduled Saturday evening or Sunday Mass. (If a funeral needs to celebrated on a Saturday morning, the funeral will be scheduled as early as possible and the funeral luncheon will be served off-campus.)
2. Normally, weddings are not scheduled during the liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent.
3. Wedding rehearsals for Saturday weddings normally take place the Friday before. A rehearsal for a Friday evening wedding normally takes place on the preceding Thursday evening.

The Ceremony

The marriage celebration is at the same time personal and a celebration of the entire Church, thus models a Sunday Celebration of Mass. Together, the couple and the presiding priest or deacon carefully plan a prayerful and meaningful liturgical celebration for the wedding. Please refrain from making most liturgical decisions until you meet with the priest or deacon, who can serve as a resource to make your day spiritually memorable.

Wedding Music

The Coordinator of Liturgy and Music will help you make decisions about appropriate music for the wedding ceremony. The music you select should be liturgical, that is, music that belongs to Christian worship. All of the wedding music needs to be discussed with the presiding priest or deacon. Secular music is never appropriate during a marriage celebration in a church. Music chosen should correspond with the parts of the wedding ceremony and the Scripture readings, since it is the Christian community celebrating in worship. Sunday worship is the model for the wedding celebration. Catholic weddings are patterned in the way in which our community worships on Sunday. A wedding is not a theatrical event; it is part of the parish's worship life. Every effort should be made to encourage everyone who comes to the wedding to be active participants in the ceremony. Selecting music that will invite their participation is one of the best ways to draw them into the celebration. If there will be many people from other faith traditions at the wedding, choose music that includes them. For example, it is better to recite the Lord's Prayer rather than to sing a tune they will not know. Above all, your musicians must be able to lead the assembly in its sung participation.

Presider

Because of the community dimension of the sacrament, the usual presider for weddings at Immaculate Conception Church will be the pastor if Mass is included with the Rite of Marriage, or the deacon from the parish if is not. However,

exceptions can be made depending upon circumstances, schedules, and relationships with other priests/deacons.

Attendants

Remember that a great wedding does not necessarily mean a big wedding with a large number of attendants. There is great beauty in simplicity and moderation! All of your good friends cannot possibly be included in the wedding party.

In planning your ceremony, remember that only two witnesses are required. Ordinarily, a good guideline for the number of attendants at weddings is no more than four on each side. Members of the wedding party are always seated with the assembly. Liturgical sensibilities discourage the use of miniature brides/grooms and ring/flower bearers, but if you choose to use them, they should be at least five years old. Discuss with the presider other options of involving friends and family in the ceremony.

Altar Servers/Lectors/Gift Bearers

Perhaps you have siblings or other relatives whom you would like to include in your ceremony as altar servers, lectors or gift bearers. Please check with the presider as to age and ability before asking them to be a part of the ceremony. If needed, the parish can provide servers and lectors.

Eucharistic Ministers

You will need two or three Eucharistic Ministers depending on the size of the assembly. Eucharistic ministers must be commissioned ministers in their parish. It is possible to commission a fully initiated, practicing Catholic to distribute Communion on a one-time basis.

Church Environment

When planning the environment (decorations) for your wedding, it is good to keep a few liturgical principles in mind. Consider first the liturgical season in which your wedding will take place. Christmas and Easter are naturally more festive times with more flowers and color. Seasonal decorations in the churches are not removed for weddings, so please check to see what the environment might be at the time of your wedding. Parish guidelines to keep in mind are as follows:

1. Plan to maintain and respect the simplicity and authenticity of the church. A few well-placed plants may be preferable to cut flowers. You may want to check and see how the church will be decorated at the time of the wedding.
2. Floral arrangements are not placed on the altar table itself.
3. Aisle runners are not allowed.
4. No tape or any other type of adhesive may be used on the pews in the church.
5. Other than the candles normally used in the sanctuary area, additional candles are discouraged.
6. Tables for gifts/cards may be placed in the gathering space of the church.
7. Everything brought into the church must be removed immediately following the service. The church needs to be left as it was before the wedding.

Photography

A wedding is a sacred event. Photographing or videotaping the wedding celebration can contribute to remembering and renewing this special event and commitment. Since the participation of the couple and the gathered community in the act of worship is primary, the photographing and videotaping are in no way to interfere or detract from the worship experience. Photographers and videographers are not permitted to move “close to the action” to take a picture or video a scene. Flash pictures should never be used during the ceremony. You may want to make note of

that in your wedding program. All video recorders should be in a stationary position in the rear or side of the church.

An hour in the church is quite sufficient for a professional photographer to do a fine job of photographing your wedding party. Pictures should be completed no later than one-half hour before the start of the wedding. Pictures will not be scheduled after the wedding due to weekend Mass times and Confessions on Saturdays. The superstition of "not seeing the bride before the wedding" is one we do not wish to uphold. The official photographer should contact the presider before the wedding for other details. Please share the above information with your photographer and videographer.

It is the responsibility of the bride and groom to ensure that members of the wedding party conduct themselves properly during pictures. Weddings are, and should be, joyous occasions, but we ask that guests conduct themselves accordingly when they are in the church. The presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the church should be respected.

Church Etiquette

The church is a place for sacred worship. Please respect this sacred space, noting the following points:

- It goes without saying that the church and any rooms used by the wedding party are non-smoking, non-alcoholic areas.
- Maintain reverence for the Blessed Sacrament in the church.
- Conversation and decorum should be respectful and appropriate in this sacred space.
- Rice, bird seed and confetti are not allowed. Flower petals are discouraged, but if used need to be artificial. If petals are used it is the responsibility of the wedding party to clean them up immediately following the service.

- Food and/or drink is not allowed in the church during rehearsals, picture taking, pre-ceremony preparations or during the service itself. Food and/or non-alcoholic beverages are allowed in the social hall. Catholics also need to remember to observe the one-hour communion fast.
- Ushers, or others appointed by the couple, must clean up and return the church, social and dressing room areas to good order immediately after the wedding, disposing of boxes, papers, pins and other discarded food and material in the dumpsters and recycle bins outside the church.
- Cell phone usage is NOT permitted in the church!

Marriage License:

Make sure to allow enough time to apply for and receive your marriage license. The civil license must be submitted to the parish office at least two weeks prior to the wedding date. The marriage license is signed by the couple and witnesses at the rehearsal. The priest or deacon will sign the license following the actual wedding and send it to the County.

Liturgical Expenses

Sharing what we have with others is an important part of Christian life. Being generous to the church and to the poor at the time of the wedding sets a tone for married life. Some couples specify a percentage of the wedding costs to be contributed to the church and to the poor; others make a donation on the day of their wedding to a local charity of their choice.

A donation traditionally is given to the church by the couple at the time of the wedding. Give as you are able and in proportion to the total cost of the wedding. The donation helps defray expenses associated with lighting, heating/cooling and maintenance. Any donation given to the presider is over and above that which is given to the church as an offering.

Suggested donations
Facility Fee (use of facilities, cleaning, administrative and utility costs): $250
Presider: at couple's discretion (normally $100)
Organist/Pianist: determined by musician
Cantor: determined by musician

Worship Aids

Worship Aids (programs) help all attending the wedding to actively participate in the celebration. *Immaculate Conception Parish will provide a worship aid.* If you wish to create a worship aid, they need to be submitted to the presider for approval **at least two weeks prior** to the wedding and before printing. Worship aids need to contain the responses needed to actively participate in the wedding.