

# Marriage Preparation

## Congratulations on your Engagement!

We are glad that you chose our parish family in which to celebrate the sacrament of marriage and we look forward to working with you. Planning for your wedding involves careful consideration of all the details that will make it a beautiful and memorable day. Important as these details are, even more important is the preparation for your married life, which lasts much more than a day. It is with this in mind that the Church has formulated a marriage preparation policy, one which can assist you in being better prepared for both the wedding day and the marriage, the living of the sacrament.

- ◆ Welcome Letter from the Priest
- ◆ Marriage Preparation Booklet
  - ◆ Marriage Process Checklist
  - ◆ Documentation Checklist
  - ◆ Three Tips for a Great Catholic Wedding
- ◆ Planning Resources
  - ◆ Prayers for an Engaged Couple
  - ◆ Wedding Music Suggestions
  - ◆ List of Helpful Websites
- ◆ Traditional Catholic Prayers
- ◆ Wedding Liturgy Preparation Book
- ◆ Wedding Planning Form
- ◆ Handout on Photography/Videography for your Photographer
- ◆ Handout on Environment for your Florist
- ◆ Suggested Wedding Musicians

We at Sacred Heart Parish hope this information is helpful and we will do all we can to assist you during this important process. We look forward to engaging all the steps of preparation with you and we hope that it will be an enriching and important process for you. Please feel free to ask any questions and to contact us as we engage upon this journey together.

The wedding industry encourages couples to focus on external decorations as they plan their wedding: floral arrangements, dress designs, reception menus, and so on. By contrast, the Church invites couples to focus on planning the liturgical aspects of the wedding: the Scripture readings, the psalm, the music, the prayers of the faithful, the preparation of the gifts, and many other elements. The Church believes that a really beautiful wedding comes from the presence of God shining through the worship of the assembled people. Done right, a good Catholic wedding is a poem, a dance, and a feast, all rolled into one; it is a work of art that reveals the love of the couple “caught up into divine love” (*The Church in the Modern World* #48).

We at Sacred Heart have the training and experience to help you make the liturgy as beautiful and meaningful as possible, so do not hesitate to seek our advice as your wedding is planned.

## MARRIAGE PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- INITIAL MEETING WITH THE PRIEST
- SCHEDULE THE WEDDING
- COMPLETE DIOCESAN QUESTIONNAIRE & MARRIAGE INVENTORY TOOL
- MEET WITH MENTOR COUPLE THREE OR FOUR TIMES
- ATTEND ENGAGED ENRICHMENT RETREAT
- PARTICIPATE IN FAITH ENRICHMENT GATHERING
- INFORMATIONAL SESSION ON NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING
- SUPPLY REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION (SEE BELOW)
- LITURGY PLANNING
- MUSIC PLANNING
- PAY WEDDING STIPEND (\$50 TO RESERVE, \$100 WITH LICENSE THE WEEK BEFORE)
- FINAL MEETING WITH PRIEST

*NOTE: For detailed explanations of each item, see back page.*

## REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

The following documents must be provided to the parish:

- PRENUPTIAL QUESTIONNAIRE (PREPARED WITH THE PRIEST)
- BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATE(S) WITH NOTATIONS
- AFFIDAVITS CONCERNING THE FREEDOM TO MARRY (IF REQUIRED)
- CERTIFICATE FROM APPROVED MARRIAGE PREPARATION EVENT
- VERIFICATION OF PARTICIPATION IN MARRIAGE INVENTORY TOOL
- PERMISSION FOR PRESIDER DELEGATION (IF OTHER THAN A SACRED HEART PRIEST)
- CIVIL MARRIAGE LICENSE

*NOTE: We cannot marry you without a civil marriage license. It is essential that you have one.*

## THREE TIPS FOR A GREAT CATHOLIC WEDDING

Whatever reasons you might have for deciding to get married in the Catholic Church, the best reason is that the sacrament of Matrimony will *super-charge your marriage* with divine grace and the support of the whole community of faith. The guidance that the Church offers to couples preparing for marriage is aimed at helping them receive those special "wedding gifts" as fully as possible. Here are three tips to help you better understand that guidance—and make your Catholic wedding ceremony as beautiful and joyful as possible:

### 1. FOCUS ON PREPARING FOR A LIFELONG MARRIAGE

The Catholic Church spends a great deal of time and energy helping engaged couples prepare for a strong, vibrant, lifelong marriage. Interviews, personality inventories, classes or retreats, and meetings with married couples may all be part of the marriage preparation process. Most dioceses require couples to wait four to twelve months before being married so that they have enough time to prepare for their marriage.

For some couples, the process of preparing for marriage is a burden that gets in the way of planning the wedding day. In retrospect, however, the vast majority of married couples say that the time they spent on marriage preparation activities was valuable. As the old adage goes, "A wedding is for a day; a marriage is for a lifetime." So try to spend more time preparing for your marriage than planning for your wedding day.

### 2. PUT GOD FIRST ON YOUR GUEST LIST

At the beginning of the *Rite of Marriage* (the Catholic wedding ritual), the priest or deacon says to the couple: "You have come together in this church so that the Lord may seal and strengthen your love in the presence of the Church's minister and this community" (#23). That sums up the difference between a Catholic wedding and a civil ceremony: the focus of a civil wedding may be the couple alone, but in a Catholic wedding, the focus is on the couple in relationship to God, one another, and their faith community. A Catholic wedding is more than a legal formality or even a celebration; it is a *liturgy*, the whole community praying to God.

Inviting God into your marriage enriches it in supernatural ways. "Authentic married love is caught up into divine love," the Church says (*The Church in the Modern World* #48). And the marriage of two baptized people is a sacrament in which Christ gives the spouses the strength they need to help one another, to forgive one another, and "to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1642). So as you make up your wedding "to do" list, think about where God fits in your plans.

### 3. LET YOUR WEDDING BE A PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Most parishes invite the couple to take an active role in planning their wedding liturgy. After all, in the Catholic Church, the bride and groom—not the priest or deacon—are the ministers of the sacrament of Matrimony (*Catechism* #1623).

As you plan your wedding, however, keep in mind that getting married "*in the Church*" means much more than holding the wedding in a church building. It means inviting the Church to participate in the wedding in a way that creates a special relationship between the couple and the whole community of faith. That's why the Church requires that weddings follow the form outlined in the *Rite of Marriage* (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1631).

The Church's wedding guidelines may rule out some possibilities, such as getting married in a hot air balloon (although you could always take off from the reception in one). But the Catholic wedding liturgy offers so much more: namely, the prayers of the whole Church and God's blessing of your marriage.

As you plan various elements of the wedding, then, focus on what will help you and your guests pray for God's blessing of your marriage.

## INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

For good reason, a Catholic may be married in a non-Catholic community with a minister of that community witnessing. However, the Catholic party through the priest must obtain permission from the Bishop of the Diocese.

If you are planning an inter-faith (mixed marriage) ceremony in a Catholic church, the minister of the non-Catholic party is welcome to participate if the couple wishes. The invitation is extended by the couple after discussing it with the priest. The role which the minister will play is to be determined by the priest and the couple while respecting, as much as possible, the wishes of the minister.

Serious thought should be given to the question of whether or not the inter-faith wedding will take place within a Mass. Ecumenical sensitivity might warrant the celebration of the rite of marriage outside the context of Mass because the Eucharist cannot be shared with Christians of other faith traditions.

### Terms to Know

**INITIAL MEETING:** During the initial meeting the engaged couple meets with the priest to discuss their intentions and start the process. This initial meeting begins the marriage preparation process and will take approximately one hour. It is the parish policy that at least one of the parties desiring to be married be registered in or affiliated with the parish in some way. The couple planning to marry is expected to contact the priest at least nine months but no later than six months in advance to begin preparation. No wedding date can be scheduled until the couple has met with or spoken to the priest. No date is final until all the preparation has been completed.

**SCHEDULE THE WEDDING:** After a final date has been approved by the pastor the wedding can be scheduled with the secretary. Weddings may be celebrated on any day of the week with the exception of Sunday, Holy Days of Obligation, Christmas, Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday) and Easter. Saturday weddings may be scheduled no later than 2:00 or 2:30 p.m. depending on the rite used. *\*Saturday evening weddings are not permitted.\** If more than one wedding is scheduled on a Saturday, adequate time between the weddings must be allowed for their immediate preparations and the celebrations. Reservation for a particular date is on a first come basis.

**DIOCESAN QUESTIONNAIRE AND MARRIAGE INVENTORY TOOL:** Meet with the priest or a parish staff to complete a premarital questionnaire for the diocese and a marriage inventory tool. This is not a test. Rather, its purpose is to identify topics such as communication, finances, family and faith that you could profitably discuss as part of your marriage preparation. Most engaged couples find this to be extremely helpful. The results of the tool will be tabulated and sent back to the parish.

**MENTOR COUPLE:** After your initial meeting, a parish staff will assign to you a mentor couple. These are married couples who are parishioners at your parish that work in ministry with the engaged. Your sponsor couple will telephone you and arrange a date and time for you to meet where you will discuss with them the results of the marriage inventory tool. The engaged couple will meet with their mentor couple three or four times during the process.

**ENGAGED ENRICHMENT RETREAT:** All couples who plan to be married in the Diocese of Winona need to participate in an enrichment retreat for engaged couples. These programs are designed to deepen your awareness of the challenges of living together in Christian marriage. Through discussions, exercises and presentations, you will have the opportunity to concentrate more intensely on the many facets of married life. Documentation of attendance at a Marriage Preparation program must be obtained. This information must be submitted to the parish at least TWO MONTHS prior to your wedding.

**FAITH ENRICHMENT GATHERING:** Interfaith couples are asked to participate in an additional session on Catholicism.

**REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION:** You must complete and submit the documentation required of a couple preparing for marriage in the Catholic Church. A list of the required documentation is on page 2.

**LITURGY PLANNING:** At least one month prior to the wedding the couple should meet with the priest or staff person to plan the ceremony (the actual rites and processions) and set the time of rehearsal. There are many options regarding readings, prayers, etc., and a careful selection will make it a personal and prayerful

celebration. Bigger is not always better and consideration should be given to limiting the number of attendants. The witnesses of the wedding need not be Catholic. Two witnesses (best man and maid/matron of honor) are required.

**MUSIC PLANNING:** Because marriage is a community event and the priest is the leader of the community worship, the wedding ceremony should be planned in close collaboration with the priest and the music minister of the parish. It is recommended that a principal cantor be used to lead community and family sung prayer and provide solos as needed. Vocalist friends and family members of the wedding parties are welcome and are encouraged to rehearse prior to the wedding. Anything which suggests a secular atmosphere should be saved for the wedding reception.

**STIPEND:** A suitable stipend should be given as an offering to the church. The minimum offering to the church is \$150.00. Checks should be made payable to "Sacred Heart Church" or "Holy Trinity Church." \$50.00 must be paid at the time you reserve the church, and the remaining \$100.00 may be paid when you bring the marriage license. Speak with the priest if you have any questions or concerns with regard to the stipend to the church. Stipends for the music ministers should be arranged directly with the ministers. Offerings to the priest himself, though neither necessary nor expected, would be in addition to the offering to the Church.

**MEETING WITH PRIEST:** It is important to meet with the priest who will preside at your wedding prior to the wedding. Ideally, this meeting should take place one to two months before your wedding. At this meeting the priest will want to discuss your plans for the liturgy as well as to get to know you as a couple, which will help him develop a homily for your service.

**PRENUPTIAL QUESTIONNAIRE:** The prenuptial questionnaire for the bride and groom will be completed by you and a priest.

**BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATE(S) WITH NOTATIONS:** Both parties must submit Certificates of Baptism if they are baptized. If the party is Catholic, the certificate must be newly-issued by the church of baptism within the last six months. The certificate must bear the seal of the church issuing it, and show the date it was issued. Notations concerning the person's celebration of confirmation and/or previous marriage will be indicated on the certificate. If the party is baptized but not Catholic, any copy of a certificate is fine. If no certificate exists, then an affidavit is to be filled out by someone who witnessed the baptism.

**AFFIDAVITS CONCERNING THE FREEDOM TO MARRY:** Each individual must secure testimony of at least one person who knows him/her very well (e.g. parents, relatives, friends who have been close since adolescence or before) and can attest under oath that the individual is free to marry and intends to live a Christian marriage. The testimony may be taken by either a Catholic priest or by a public notary. The marriage preparation coordinator provides the couple with affidavit forms; completed affidavits are returned to wherever the file is being prepared.

When a marriage takes place between a Catholic and a non-Catholic, a dispensation or permission is required.

**CERTIFICATE FROM APPROVED MARRIAGE PREPARATION EVENT:** Upon completion of your Engaged Enrichment retreat, submit the original certificate of attendance to the place preparing your file.

**PERMISSION FOR PRESIDER DELEGATION:** This is a letter from the pastor indicating his willingness to delegate to the presiding priest of the marriage. When the presiding priest is not from the Diocese of Winona, he must attach documented proof from his diocese or religious order indicating that he is a priest in good standing.