**Marriage Preparation Guidelines**

**St. Mary of the Assumption, 119 4th Street, P.O. Box 68, West Point, IA 52656
St. Boniface, 609 Washington Street, P.O. Box 247, Farmington, IA 52626**

**INTRODUCTION**

Your wedding day is a very important event for you as a couple, your families, and your parish community. In planning this day you have spent countless hours making sure all the arrangements have been made for everything from the color and style of the dress and the tux’s, the location of the reception, the menu for dinner, the photographer, the attendants, and the list goes on. While all these things are important in making this day memorable and special, it must not be forgotten that the most important part of the day is when the two of you present yourselves before the altar of God and ask Him to bless and to consecrate your relationship, and your life together as husband and wife.

The union of man and woman in marriage was ordained by our Creator in loving care for God’s children, and instituted by Our Divine Lord as a Sacrament in the care of His Church. It is a most beautiful gift of God to humankind.

In conferring the Sacrament of Matrimony upon each other in the presence of the church’s witnesses and the family of Faith, a man and woman give themselves totally to each other, all that they have and all that they are, freely and without reservation, for as long as they both shall live. They enter into a solemn and sacred covenant -a vowed life- with each other and with God. And they accept the responsibilities inherent in the founding of a new family, the basic unit of society.

To protect this holy union and to help husband and wife fulfill their responsibilities, certain laws, both civil and church have long existed. And the Sacrament of Matrimony is a channel of the selflessness, the courage, the wisdom, and the total love they must have in order to be truly husband and wife.

Through our celebration and living the sacraments, God continues to be present and active in our world, making us holy.

Sacraments belong not just to the individual, but to the whole Church. It is the parish community, making visible the Church, which celebrates the sacraments. Each sacrament is celebrated and lived within the context of the parish community.

The Sacrament of Matrimony is a declaration that the couple is, and intends to be part of a parish community, faithfully celebrating Mass on Sunday, celebrating God’s forgiveness regularly in Reconciliation, giving evidence of the faith in daily living, contributing time, talent and treasure to the work of the parish, especially in sharing the faith with any children born to this union.

It is assumed that Catholics preparing for marriage have already received the Sacrament of Confirmation. **Requesting the Sacrament of Matrimony while not practicing the Catholic faith is contrary to the very nature of the sacrament.** Many times people, for a variety of reasons, become lax in the practicing of their faith. If you have fallen into the habit of regularly missing Mass on Sunday and not practicing your faith, you are encouraged to remember that you are now an adult in the community and in the church. As such, you have a responsibility and an obligation to both your faith and to your parish community.

If, for whatever reason, you have been away from the sacraments and the Church for a period of time, you are encouraged to take advantage of this period of Marriage Preparation. It is an ideal time to start a new habit and once again become an active and participating member of your Catholic faith community**. Feel free to discuss your situation with the Priest assisting you in your Marriage Preparation. If you have been away, you will be welcomed back without judgment and with open arms.**

**DIOCESAN AND PARISH GUIDELINES**

It is our intention to help you carefully plan your wedding together and to assist you in preparing to live out the Sacrament of your Marriage in Christ. The Church has adopted certain guidelines to help couples move toward a full awareness of the sacredness and responsibilities of the vocation of Christian marriage. We wish to help you prepare not only for a wedding, but for a marriage that will be a lasting joy to each of you personally; and a sign to the community that the relationship between husband and wife is a sacramental union clearly manifesting the union of Christ and His Church.

1. At least one party should be a practicing Catholic and a REGISTERED member of the parish in which they wish to be married.
	1. A registered member is a person and/or family who have a current membership form on file in the parish.
		* + If the couple will be living in our parish after marriage they must complete a St. Mary’s Membership information form.
			+ If the couple will be living outside of our area they should provide information about the parish they have joined.
	2. Sacramental Records: Catholic parties need to obtain recently dated certificates of their Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation records. Non-Catholic parties need a copy of their Baptism certificate.
2. Both parties are to be free to marry in the Catholic Church.
	1. Both parties are to be at least 21 years of age. A dispensation from the Bishop is required if either party is under 21 years of age. Parents of the under 21 party will be asked to fill out the standard form of the Diocese confirming the maturity and serious intent of their daughter or son.
	2. In an interfaith marriage, the Catholic party is required to reaffirm his/her faith in Jesus Christ, that he/she will continue living that faith in the Catholic Church, and promises the he/she will do all that one can to have children baptized and raised as Catholics.
	3. They must never have been married before. If they have been married, they are to provide proof of the death of their former spouse or proof that their former marriage has been annulled.
3. There is at least a six month preparation period beginning when the priest is contacted about the marriage plans. Both are required to attend one of the following:
4. The sponsor couple program: A four session meeting with a sponsor couple; the sponsor couple program is a “like-to like” ministry where a trained married couple is assigned to sponsor an engaged couple in the parish. The sessions last about two hours each and take place in the home of the married couple or sponsor couple.
5. The Engaged Weekend or One Day Engaged Encounter: A weekend day(s) away to a camp or similar facility with an opportunity to share the experiences of how married Christian couples developed their relationships and responded to early marital adjustments.
6. Besides the above the couple will meet with the priest at least three times.
7. First Meeting;
	* Discuss each person’s relationship with the Church
	* Ascertain the freedom of each person to marry in the Church
	* Answer the question, “Why do I want to be married in the Church?”
	* Review the overall pre-marriage preparation program
	* If the couple can accept the program of preparation, then a date for the wedding is finalized.
	* Make plans to participate in the Sponsor Couple Program or Engaged Weekend
* Fill out the necessary pre-marriage papers and if necessary, dispensation forms

\* After 1st Meeting -begin the FOCCUS program (Facilitating Open Couple

 Communication, Understanding & Study) – a pre-marital evaluation of couple

1. Second Meeting
* Present and discuss the FOCCUS Inventory results
* Watch the Natural Family Planning Video
* Begin planning the wedding liturgy
1. Third Meeting;
* Finalize the liturgy plans
* Discuss the rehearsal
* Answer any final questions
1. **Marriage with or without Mass**. Since marriage is a Sacrament of the Church entered into between two persons it is celebrated in Church in the presence of the priest and two witnesses. Marriage can be celebrated either with or without a Mass. When both parties are Catholic a Nuptial Mass is recommended. In an interfaith marriage, there may be no Mass.
2. The date and time of the wedding celebration. Dates are reserved on a first come first served basis, and as a general practice we will schedule only one wedding per Saturday. The wedding should begin no later than **2:00 p.m**. because of other scheduled parish activities services. All pictures in the church must be taken **prior** to the wedding ceremony. It is important that the wedding ceremony begin on time. Marriages are not celebrated on Sundays or during Holy Week, unless there is a justifiable reason, weddings are discouraged during the season of Advent and Lent.
3. The rehearsal is held the evening before the wedding. The rehearsal should begin at 6:00 p.m. **Except the First Friday of every Month when Mass is held at 5:30 pm and ends at 6:00**.
	1. Please bring two wedding programs to the rehearsal. We need this to line up the wedding party. Please be on time and remember to bring the marriage license.
	2. All who take part in the wedding ceremony, servers, singers, organist and lectors must be there.
	3. When planning to decorate the church for the wedding, please be prepared to be flexible. Please call Anita Blindt a couple days before the wedding to confirm details for decorating.
	4. The Ossenbrink Center is available before and after the wedding for dressing, changing and gathering, beginning at 6:00 p.m. on Fridays.
	5. Please remove all personal items, rented items and decorations and clean up the Ossenbrink Center before 4:00 p.m. confession.
4. If the priest is to be present at the rehearsal dinner, please be sure the invitation is made in advance.

1. In an **Interfaith Wedding** it is possible for a minister to participate in the ceremony. Such participation is welcomed, however a permission form must be submitted to the Diocese of Davenport so permission may be granted. Additionally the minister’s name and address is needed so that he/she can be invited and the details of the ceremony planned with Father.
2. It is possible for the wedding to take place in a Protestant Church in the case of an interfaith wedding. If this would be the case, please make known in advance so that the necessary permission can be obtained from the Bishop of the Diocese.

**SPECIFIC ITEMS CONCERNING THE WEDDING**

1. **Please call Anita Bindt, at 319-837-6845**, regarding church preparation for the wedding. She will assist with the rehearsal. She will discuss decorations and will give you a form to complete. Please mail the form back to her **at least ten days prior to the wedding.**
2. Altar Servers: The couple may select relatives or friends who are trained servers or the priest can select from the parish list. Please let Father know by the time of your final meeting who will be serving.
3. Alcohol and Smoking: No beer or alcoholic beverages are to be brought in or consumed on church premises. Smoking is not permitted in the church. If someone wants to smoke please ask him/her to do so outside away from the church entrances. Other food, drinks and gum should not be consumed in the church but are permitted in the Ossenbrink Center.
4. Celebrant of Wedding: The normal celebrant of the wedding will be the Pastor, Parochial vicar and/or Deacon of the parish. If a relative of either partner is a priest, and the couple would prefer their priest relative to be the celebrant of the wedding, it will be permitted. Please let the Pastor know in advance. All other priest friends of the couple are more than welcome to concelebrate the wedding.
5. Church Decorations: Seasonal and liturgical decorations in the church may not be altered or removed. The church will furnish the Mass candles. The wedding couple will furnish any other candles. The church’s candelabra may be used. Drip less candles should be used so that the sanctuary carpet can be protected.
6. Clean Up: For the sake of cleanliness, please appoint a family member or friend to put the Church and Ossenbrink Center back in order after the wedding. Please make sure the Church and Ossenbrink Center are restored to the condition in which they were found by 4:00pm. It is important to remember that confession and Mass use the parish facilities almost immediately after the wedding. Garbage bags can be thrown in the dumpster in the alley behind Holy Trinity School.
7. Parking: If people will not be using their personal vehicles immediately following the wedding ceremony please make sure they are not parked on the streets in front of the church or school as this parking is needed for Saturday evening Mass.
8. Fees:
	1. The following Facilities Fees have been established for use of the St. Mary’s of the Assumption or St. Boniface facilities:
* $100.00 for a Registered Parishioner
* $500.00 for non-parishioner
	1. Fee to be paid to the each server (if provided by the church):
* $10.00 each server

ALL applicable fees are to be received in the Parish Office prior to the Wedding or at the **wedding rehearsal**. Servers, if provided by the church, should be paid with individually marked envelopes before the ceremony.

1. The suggested gift for the Priest officiating the wedding is $100.00
2. Marriage License: An Iowa marriage license is required. The license can be applied for at the Lee County Courthouse. You will need to have a witness at the time of application. There is a three day waiting period between the time of application and the time of obtaining the license. **Please bring the license to the rehearsal so that the priest can properly fill it out before the wedding.** The priest cannot marry a couple without a marriage license. He is required to return the official document to the courthouse. This document will be signed by the couple; the two witnesses and officiate after the ceremony.
3. Music: The music at the wedding should reflect the joy and solemnity and sacramental nature of Christian Marriage. A choir, soloists, instrumentalists, etc. are welcome knowing that they will observe the sacredness of the wedding ceremony. It is the responsibility of the couple to contact the organist and soloists. Please contact the parish office 837-6808 if you need a recommendation for an organist.
4. Pictures: Still and video recording are permitted. Photographers are requested to use discretion and avoid interference with the progress of the wedding ceremony. Guests should be discouraged from taking flash pictures during the ceremony, especially during the exchange of vows.
5. Lectors: The couple may choose family members and/or friends who are good readers to read the Scripture readings. One or more readers may read the Old Testament, Responsorial Psalm, New Testament, and Prayer of the Faithful readings. The priest/deacon reads the Gospel.
6. Sand Ceremonies, throwing rice, birdseed and confetti: These and similar practices are not permitted. These are not religious ceremonies and are inappropriate at a Christian wedding. Please inform the wedding party and guests concerning this matter.
7. Witnesses: The State and the Church require two witnesses. The Church requires that the two witnesses have the use of reason and be capable of comprehending what is happening in the exchange of consent.
	1. Attendants do not need to be Catholic, or even baptized, since their sole function is to attest to the fact that a marriage took place. Since the witnesses must be capable of comprehending what is happening, those who are incapable, even temporarily, may not be witnesses.
	2. A big wedding does not necessarily mean a nice wedding. There is beauty in simplicity, and if you are having a number of attendants, a very definite distinction would be made between the official witnesses and the other ceremonial attendants.
	3. Flower girls and ring bearers are naturally permitted; however, they should be of an age conducive to the solemnity of the occasion.

We want to assist you to prepare for a day when you enter into that mutual loving relationship with each other and with God that is a Christian marriage. May God bless you as you prepare together for the most beautiful and fulfilling time of your lives—your vocation of Christian marriage.

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