



CELEBRATING MARRIAGE

in

Immaculate Conception Church

Fort Smith, Arkansas

The Marriage Preparation Process



The following guidelines are part of “the marriage preparation process” of the Church. They are designed to assist you not only to have a beautiful wedding, but also to enjoy a happy, life-long marriage. A check-list of the steps of this process are listed for your convenience on the last page.

(1) Parish registration

We welcome you to make Immaculate Conception Church your future family’s “spiritual home.” Most people are first registered in a church under their parents’ name. As you begin your own family, you should register under your name. You can easily register on-line at www.icchurch.com.

(2) Initial meeting with parish priest

Please contact the church office, (479) 783-7963, to schedule an initial meeting with one of our parish priests. He will help you through the “marriage preparation process,” by reviewing with you the guidelines and parameters for weddings here at Immaculate Conception. This meeting also insures there are no “impediments” (obstacles) to your marriage in the Church. Once you complete this meeting, you are welcome to schedule your wedding.

(3) Scheduling the rehearsal and wedding

Weddings are normally scheduled on Saturdays at 1 p.m. or 7 p.m., and the rehearsals the prior evening. Weddings are not scheduled on Sundays. Please remember that weddings are also not scheduled during Lent or Advent, due to the solemnity of these seasons.

(4) Subsequent meetings with priest

A very useful tool of marriage preparation is a questionnaire called “FOCCUS,” which helps couples get to know each other better. It will be necessary to schedule at least one follow-up

meeting with the priest to discuss your FOCCUS results.

(5) Catholic baptismal certificate

Catholics need to obtain a new baptismal certificate. Note that the “original baptismal certificate” your parents may have will not suffice for the purpose of marriage preparation. Please contact your church of baptism and request a new baptismal certificate to be mailed to Immaculate Conception Church, P. O. Box 1866, Fort Smith, AR, 72902.

(6) Freedom to marry form

Non-Catholics are required to submit a “Freedom to Marry” form, which the priest will give you at the initial meeting. This is an affidavit testifying that you have not been married before and why you are free to enter into a Catholic marriage.

(7) Natural Family Planning course

The Catholic Church discourages the use of contraceptive methods to postpone or space the birth of children. Instead, the Church recommends the use of Natural Family Planning (NFP). Engaged couples are required to take a course in NFP, and you may choose from several options. The best option is to attend a local NFP class, which you can access at www.ccli.org. Or, you can register for an on-line course at www.nwfs.org, then click “Couples and Singles,” then “Natural Family Planning,” then “NFP \Classes” and then “Registration Form.” A certificate of completion will be mailed to Immaculate Conception once you finish the course.

The Marriage Preparation Process

(8) Pre-Cana course

One-day retreats, called Pre-Cana, are offered on Saturdays throughout the year to help engaged couples to appreciate the roles and responsibilities of husband and wife.

Well-trained speakers will share their own experiences with the various challenges and blessings of marriage, including topics such as managing finances, sexual intimacy, in-laws, communication, etc. Please register for the earliest Pre-Cana course at www.dolr.org, and click on Family Life Office under Ministries. Pre-Cana Day Schedule will be listed under Marriage Education Programs. A certificate of completion will be mailed to Immaculate Conception once you finish the course.

(9) Civil marriage license

Couples who marry in the Catholic Church must also be married civilly. Catholic clergy are not permitted to celebrate a church wedding without a civil marriage. If you are already civilly married you should bring a copy of your license. If you are not currently married, you should obtain a civil marriage license at the Sebastian County Courthouse and bring it to the rehearsal. Please remember the license has an “expiration date” of sixty (60) days from the date of purchase. Typically, you should obtain your marriage license about a month prior to the wedding.

(10) Non-parishioner fee

Non-parishioners are required to submit a \$500 facility fee in order to reserve the church for a wedding. Parishioners are welcome to make a donation, but are not required to pay a fee because you already contribute at Sunday Mass.

(11) Wedding liaison

Wedding liaisons will help you make your wedding as beautiful and stress-free as possible. Your liaison will frequently conduct the rehearsal and help with other preparations on the wedding day.

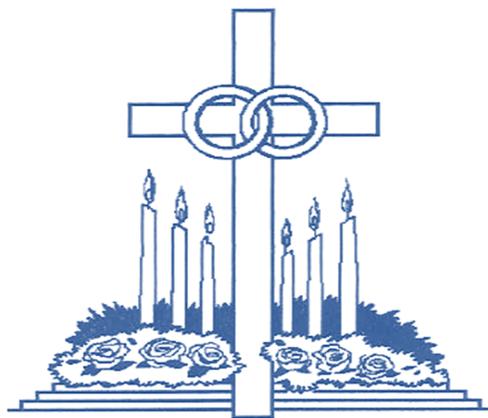
Contact Cindy McNally at cmcnally@icchurch.com who will assign your liaison. You should contact your wedding liaison at least three (3) months prior to the wedding. Please submit \$100 stipend for the liaison directly to the parish office.

(12) Wedding selection record

At the first meeting with the priest, you will receive a booklet called “Together for Life,” which provides you with a program for the wedding ceremony. Please review the readings, prayers and blessings provided in the book, list your selections on the last page, and return that last page one week prior to the wedding to the priest or deacon who will celebrate your wedding.

(13) Minister’s credentials

All priests and deacons in the Diocese of Little Rock (which covers the entire state of Arkansas) can celebrate weddings at Immaculate Conception. Any other priests or deacons (or other clergy) who will preside at a wedding will need to obtain their “Minister’s Credentials” at the Sebastian County Courthouse prior to the wedding. Additionally, any Catholic clergy coming from outside the Diocese must first be approved to celebrate a wedding by the Bishop. The priest who prepares you for the wedding will explain further details.



The Wedding Celebration



The following section deals with the rehearsal and wedding ceremony itself. These items should be discussed with your wedding liaison.

— The Environment

Your liaison will go over with you in detail the proper seating arrangements for the bride, groom and attendants, as well as the appropriate areas for the placement of candles, flowers and greenery. Please note the seating arrangement in this chart.

XXXX		MB FB	FG MG		OOOO
XXXX		GP	GP		OOOO
L L					

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| X = Brides Maids | O = Groomsmen |
| FB = Father of Bride | FG = Father of Groom |
| MB = Mother of Bride | MG = Mother of Groom |
| GP = Grandparents | L = Lectors |

Wedding parties are accorded one hour to decorate the church. This is especially important during the summer and early fall months that are so popular for weddings. Frequently, more than one wedding is scheduled on a given Saturday. Please note that flowers are not permitted on the altar.

To avoid any safety problems and to minimize custodial work, the throwing of birdseed, rice, confetti or any other material is not allowed at the church entrance or on walkways leading to church entrances. Blowing bubbles is allowed outdoors.

Seasonal decoration of the worship space may not be altered. Please inform the liaison if you wish to move something in the sanctuary.

— Rehearsal

Rehearsals are frequently conducted by the wedding liaison. The liaison will help make everyone feel welcome and comfortable in their roles in the wedding, as well as explain the prayerful nature of the celebration.

— Church Cleanup

Ushers or other members of your party must return all furniture to its proper place, i.e. bride and groom’s chairs, candle and flower stands, and guest registry pillar. You are also responsible for cleaning up and returning the church to readiness for Mass. The liaisons are not responsible for cleaning up, but you may ask for their help if you need it.

— Photography and Videotaping

Please take as many pictures as possible before or after the ceremony. Photographers will not be free to roam about the sanctuary areas during the celebration of the wedding.

During the wedding portable lamps, reflective umbrella, etc. may not be used.

After the celebration, the church will be open for the taking of pictures within your allotted time. Please bear in mind other weddings or other parish activities.

Videotape equipment may be set up at either the cry room window or the choir loft. These are excellent locations for capturing your wedding on video. If used, these cameras must remain in one place throughout the service. As with still photography, no additional lighting may be brought into the church.

The Wedding Celebration

— *The Ministers*

The **principal ministers** at a wedding are the bride and the groom. The priest or deacon serve as official witnesses of the ceremony. Two additional witnesses — the best man and the maid or matron of honor — are also required to be present.

Lectors, those who will read the scriptures and intercessory prayers, should be provided by the bride and groom from among their family and friends. Furnishing them with a copy of the readings beforehand allows them to proclaim God's word with confidence and ease.

You are welcome (but not required) to provide **altar servers** for the wedding. You may wish to include family or friends in this role. Otherwise, the wedding liaison will obtain altar servers from the parish.

— *Music Guidelines*

The music chosen for your wedding should reflect your commitment to each other and to God, and express the joy and thanksgiving you feel towards God for bringing you together. Songs may be instrumental or vocal, but should always bear in mind the importance of congregational participation. Popular love songs are not appropriate during the ceremony.

— *Musicians*

Your liaison can help you to choose singers, cantors or other instrumentalists. All organists should contact the church organist, Mat Burkepile (mburkepile@icchurch.com), for approval and to schedule a practice time.

Fees for music are negotiated directly with the musicians. Arrangements for music ministers should be made by the bride and groom at least 3 months before the wedding.

— *Reception*

We have reception facilities available at Immaculate Conception. If you choose to have your reception here, you will need to reserve the facility as soon as possible by filling out a facilities request form and returning it with the proper deposit to the Business Manager in our parish office.

— *Dressing Areas*

We are pleased to offer a bride's room where the bride's party can prepare for the wedding. The groom's party can use the nursery rooms, but are encouraged to dress at home. *No alcoholic beverages may be consumed in the bride's or groom's rooms.* The bride's room has good lighting, a restroom and plenty of mirror space. Ask the wedding liaison for details.

— *Clergy Stipend*

It is customary to compensate the clergy for his time. \$100.00 is an appropriate stipend. All fees for musicians, altar servers and the presider should be given to the liaison prior to the rehearsal for distribution.



Your marriage preparation check list

- _____ (1) Register as member(s) of Immaculate Conception parish
- _____ (2) Schedule initial meeting with parish priest
- _____ (3) Schedule rehearsal and wedding with office
- _____ (4) Schedule subsequent meeting(s) with priest to review FOCCUS
- _____ (5) Submit baptismal certificate (Catholics) to office
- _____ (6) Submit Freedom to Marry form (non-Catholics) to office
- _____ (7) Register for NFP classes (www.ccli.org or www.nwfs.org)
- _____ (8) Register for Pre-Cana classes (www.dolr.org)
- _____ (9) Obtain civil marriage license
- _____ (10) Submit \$500 facility use fee to office (non-parishioners)
- _____ (11) Submit \$100 for wedding liaison to office
- _____ (12) Submit “wedding selection record” to office
- _____ (13) Obtain “minister’s credentials” (for out-of-state clergy)