

## CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY MARRIAGE POLICY

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### Guidelines for Marriage Preparation and Liturgy Planning

*For as God of old made Himself present to His people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the Savior of men and the Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. He abides with them thereafter so that just as He loved the Church and handed Himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal. (Gaudium et Spes, 48)*

**Congratulations!** Weddings are a special time of joy and promise for a bride and groom, their families and friends, and in an indirect way, for the entire parish community. Indeed, our faith tells us that the sacrament of Marriage, where the bride and groom are themselves ministers, is a privileged and grace-filled event. It is a time which foreshadows the great marriage feast of the Lord Jesus Christ to us, His people, in the Resurrection and eternal life.

In view of this religious significance and lifelong importance, it stands to reason that the celebration of marriage must be entered into with prayerful planning. Therefore, it is in a spirit of joyful anticipation and responsible preparation that this policy has been developed to guide and direct couples in solemnizing their marriages at Nativity Parish. Our goal is to work with you to make your celebration worthy of the House of the Lord, in His Presence, while making you feel at home in our parish.

#### Table of Contents:

##### I. Pre-Marriage Arrangements

- A. Who May Marry in our Parish?
- B. Documents
- C. Marriage Preparation
- D. Important Considerations

##### II. Scheduling and Space

- A. Date and Time
- B. Rehearsal
- C. Vendors & Decorations

##### III. Planning the Wedding Liturgy.

- A. Prayers and Scripture Readings
- B. Liturgical Ministers
- C. Music
- D. Dressing Rooms
- E. Visiting Clergy
- F. Regulations for the Church and

##### Other Considerations

##### IV. Wedding Fees

- A. Marriage Prep
- B. Church
- C. Ministers of Music
- D. Altar Servers

I. Pre-Marriage Arrangements

A. Who May Marry in our Parish? - At least one member of the wedding couple should be a registered member of the parish for at least six months prior to the date of marriage. The bride, groom, or parents of either should be members of Nativity for the couple to be married here.

B. Documents

1. A parish priest or deacon will meet with both of you to complete the necessary documents.
2. If the bride/groom has not been baptized at Nativity, you must provide a recent copy of her/his **baptismal certificate** (issued within six months of the time presented).
3. In some cases, two witnesses must be interviewed attesting to your freedom to marry. Preparing clergy will conduct the interview.
4. In the case of previous marriage on the part of either party, a Decree of Annulment must be presented that assures the freedom of said party to marry in the Catholic Church.
5. A **certificate of completion** from the Pre-Cana or Engaged Encounter program is to be provided to the parish office after you have completed your chosen program. (More details below under "Marriage Preparation")
6. A **civil marriage license** must be obtained from any county courthouse in the State of Iowa. Because no marriage may legally take place without a civil marriage license, we request that couples submit all necessary documentation at least 30 days prior to the wedding. There is a waiting period of three days, so do not delay.

C. Marriage Preparation

1. *Witness to Love* is a marriage preparation program that works to connect couples to their parishes through mentors and powerful online resources! You will be invited to choose your own mentor couple from the parish who can assist you in preparing for your married life together. You will meet at least six times to go through the materials and discuss the challenges and joys of married life. More details will be provided at your first meeting.
2. You will be provided with an online log-in to complete an assessment called *Prepare-Enrich*, an assessment tool proven to improve communication, expose idealism, and build confidence in your relationship.
3. Every couple will attend either a weekend marriage prep retreat (*Engaged Encounter*) or a one day conference (*Pre-Cana*). These events provide a space to learn about and discuss topics vital to a healthy marriage such as communication, finances, healthy sexuality, and more.

4. Couples are also encouraged to, but not required to, meet with a Natural Family Planning (NFP) instructor. NFP refers to the practice of achieving or avoiding pregnancy according to an informed awareness of a woman's fertility. Knowledge of the alternating fertile times for the woman allows couples to plan their families without resorting to artificial contraceptives. The parish will do all we can to facilitate this process!

D. Important Considerations

1. If you have not received the Sacraments of Initiation or are interested in becoming Catholic, you are certainly welcome to find out more about the Catholic Church. The preparing clergy will explain some options for further investigation.

2. The couple, in consultation with the preparing clergy, decides whether a simple *ceremony* (35-45 mins.) is to be celebrated or a *nuptial Mass* (50-60 mins.).

*a) Remember, reception of Holy Communion is for practicing Catholics. Intercommunion with those not in full communion with the Catholic Church is not allowed. However, the non-Catholic participants are invited for a special blessing in the place of receiving Holy Communion.*

*b) Marriage between a baptized Catholic and an unbaptized person must take place in the Rite of Matrimony without a Mass.*

*c) The couple is expected to be living the virtue of chastity while in preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage by not cohabiting or having relations before marriage. We truly believe that this is God's plan for marriage and family and allows couples to give their fullest assent to marriage. Please feel free to ask questions to your preparing clergy!*

II. Scheduling and Space

*Please note that the prospective bride and groom must meet with a priest or deacon of Nativity Parish at least six months prior to the contemplated date of marriage. The date of the wedding is usually confirmed at this meeting. Please do not make any definite plans with a reception venue until your wedding date and time is confirmed.*

A. Date and Time

1. Weddings are reserved on a first come, first reserved basis. Marriage may take place on any available weekday or on available Saturdays (until 1:30 pm to accommodate 4:15 mass). Marriages are not performed on Sunday.

2. Weddings may not be celebrated during Lent due to the special penitential character of that time in the life of the Church.

3. Weddings are discouraged from taking place on Holy Days of Obligation but may be considered on a case to case basis.

B. Rehearsal

1. Rehearsals are usually scheduled for the evening preceding the wedding, between the hours of 4:00 and 6:00. It normally takes 30-60 minutes.
  2. The rehearsal is for the presider, the wedding party, readers, altar servers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, ushers, and musicians (see note below). Please be sure to invite all parties to the rehearsal.
  3. Please note that a scheduled Friday evening wedding will take precedence over a rehearsal for a Saturday wedding.
  4. Music Ministers may attend the wedding rehearsal, not as a practice time, but to help the wedding party with the processional and recessional and answer any questions as needed.
  5. Due to our 8 am Saturday mass, decorations may not be placed during the rehearsal. You may access the church at 9:00am to decorate.
- C. Vendors and Decoration - Creating an appropriate mood or environment for your wedding can dramatically enhance your marriage ceremony. There may be seasonal liturgical banners, plants, flowers and objects in the church at the time of your wedding. These parish decorations can be quite substantial in themselves but may be enhanced with wedding flowers.
1. **Flowers** – Please Note: flowers or candles may never be placed on the altar or where they would screen the tabernacle.
  2. **Other decorations** – Tape should not be used to place bows or flowers on the ends of pews; ribbons, plastic hooks, or covered wire are good alternatives. At the directive of our Diocesan Risk Management Department, aisle runners are no longer permitted in our churches. Decorations should be removed by 3:45 so the church is ready for 4:15 mass.
  3. **Photographers/Videographers** – Photographers/videographers are asked to introduce themselves to the officiant of the marriage prior to the wedding ceremony and are asked to be cooperative with the policies of the parish. At no time is the photographer/videographer permitted in the sanctuary area of the church. We welcome couples to take formal wedding pictures in the church before or after the ceremony, if time allows, particularly in inclement weather. Note that confessions begin at 3pm on Saturday, but you are welcome to continue pictures until 3:45.

- III. Planning the Wedding Liturgy - (Should be planned with the presider)
- A. Prayers and Scripture Readings
    1. You will receive a booklet called *Together for Life* which has the selections for readings for the Liturgy of the Word. Your planning is designed to emphasize the dignity and sacred reality of the sacrament of marriage. The presider will review your choices with you.
  - B. Liturgical Ministers
    1. One or more **readers** to proclaim your chosen readings and petitions. A competent reader is important, so select him/her wisely.
    2. (If the Rite of Marriage is celebrated within the Mass) **Two altar servers** and **commissioned Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion** as needed. Nativity can provide these ministers if needed.
  - C. Music
    1. The church is a sacred space, therefore all music used In the actual celebration, as well as preludes/postludes must be of a religious (church-hymn) or classical nature only. It is highly recommended that you use members of the Nativity music ministry to play and sing at your wedding. Should you choose a relative or friend to provide music for your wedding, all music must still be approved by the Director of Music prior to the wedding to ensure its liturgical appropriateness.
    2. A selection of samples of appropriate wedding music is available online on our parish website.
    3. The parish Music Ministry can assist you if you should wish to have a solo instrument (trumpet, flute, violin, etc.) at your wedding. There will be an additional fee for a soloist.
  - D. Dressing Rooms
    1. A Bride's room is available in the back of the church. However, due to its small size, many brides and their attendants opt to get ready in the O'Brien room and walk around the outside of the building at the time of the procession.
    2. The groom and groomsmen are welcome to use the usher's room in the back of church. However, this room is also small and many grooms opt to get read in the music sacristy.
  - E. Visiting Clergy
    1. Many couples have friends and family who are priests or deacons of the Catholic Church. We welcome those clergy members in good standing to celebrate your nuptial mass or preside over your marriage ceremony. Please ask him to provide a *Letter of Good Standing* from his bishop in the case of a mass, preferably one month before the wedding.
  - F. Regulations for the Church and Other Considerations

1. Due to a change in the Rite of Matrimony which took effect on 12/30/2016, the lighting of a unity candles is not to take place within the liturgy. If you would like to use a unity candle, an ideal place for this would be your wedding reception.
2. Similarly, a visit to Mary's altar following communion does not have a place in the new Rite. If you have a devotion to Mary, we recommend making a prayer of consecration at your rehearsal or following mass.
3. Cultural traditions will be considered on a case to case basis but must fit within the rubric of the Rite of Marriage.
4. Use of alcohol by the wedding party immediately prior to the wedding and/or the consumption of alcohol by any member of the wedding party on church premises will result in that person's being prohibited from participating in the wedding.
5. Per bridesmaid dresses, please be mindful of how they will look while sitting in the pews. We advise avoiding strapless dresses because they often appear unclothed from the perspective of the congregation.

#### IV. Wedding Fees

##### A. Marriage Prep

1. *Witness to Love* materials are \$75. *Together for Life* booklet is \$5. These materials are included in the parish fee for couples being married at Nativity.
2. The *Prepare-Enrich* assessment is \$35 upon registration
3. Registration for *Pre-Cana* is \$50 and *Engaged Encounter* is \$250 per couple. Includes meals and lodging (in the case of *Engaged Encounter*). We encourage you to consider the *Engaged Encounter* weekend. If cost is prohibitive, financial assistance may be available.
4. Civil cost for a marriage license is \$35 to the State of Iowa.

##### B. Church

1. Deposit - \$100 at time of reservation and will be returned refunded if the church and O'Brien Room, if used, were cleaned up of food, water bottles, hangers, tissues, dry cleaning bags, etc.
2. Parish Fee - \$250 for parishioners, \$350 for non-parishioners
3. Presider Donation – A good rule of thumb is the cost of a tux rental

##### C. Ministers of Music –

1. Organist - \$150
2. Cantor fees are usually \$100, but may vary

##### D. Altar Servers – We request a \$20 donation per server if provided by the parish.