

THE SPIRES OF FAITH CLUSTER

Preparation for Holy Matrimony & Wedding Guidelines

Congratulations on your upcoming wedding!

Welcome! We know this is a special time and are delighted you chose our pastorate to celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage. We will do our best to assist you to have a beautiful wedding and to start your marriage off on the right foot.

How do you prepare for the most serious commitment of your lives? You cannot and should not do it alone. Your desire to be married within the church expresses your faith in God and the hope of growing together as a married couple. This booklet has been created to guide you to get the most out of your preparation.

Beyond the basic requirements of Church preparation, we ask you to take some time to spiritually prepare for your marriage. This aspect will include prayerful preparation, working with a couple who will mentor you, and participating in a retreat.

This booklet contains information, checklists and timelines to aid you in your wedding planning and, more importantly, preparation for your marriage. Throughout this booklet, “wedding” refers to that one-time event taking place at the church to give you a sacramental marriage. “Marriage” refers to your lifetime together, sharing life with each other, with God, and within your parish family.

Again, congratulations! We assure you of our prayers and best wishes during this special time.

Fr. David Schatz and Members of the Marriage Vocation Ministry Team

1. The Overview

“Father, I have never been married before, what am I supposed to do?” This comment came from a young man at a previous parish. While this couple went to Mass weekly and his parents were active members, he didn’t know what needed to be done. Even his parents were unsure. They just told him, “Talk to the priest.” God wants so much more for us.

While speaking to the priest or deacon will be an important part of this process, we also want to acknowledge you are part of a greater community called the Church. A sacramental marriage involves the couple, God, and the body of Christ—the Church. As you will see below, the Church will support your marriage and living out your sacramental marriage will strengthen the Church.

- **Become a recognized member of a Catholic parish locally.**
 - If both parties are living elsewhere, your involvement in the parish where you are living will assist you in your marriage preparation and the local pastor will grant his support for your wedding in our church.
 - If your primary residence is your local family home, then you are still considered a member of our parish under the extension of your parents. For example, if you are in college or in military service, you do not have to register separately.
 - If you have become independent of your parents, now is the time to become a recognized member of your parish.

- **Participate in the Marriage Formation Process**
 - The decision to marry has the biggest impact upon one’s life and how it is lived; it can be so good and it can be difficult. We want it to be good for you, for your children, for our community and for our Church.
 - In our culture today, nearly 25% of all marriages end in divorce within 5 years. Our culture tells us that marriage is supposed to just naturally work out but that is not our experience.
 - The Church has recognized four components that assist a couple in reducing the possibility of a difficult marriage. *The programs used to support our work have been recognized as helping reduce the 5 year divorce rate to 5%.* The areas are as follows:
 - The central importance of prayer and communal support
 - Preparedness and Personality Assessment (Prepare/Enrich)
 - Communal Reflection on Marriage
 - Participation in *Pre-Cana or Two become One*
 - Participation in *Witness to Love*
 - The Sacredness of the Sexual Act
 - A love that is Free, Total, Faithful, and Fruitful
 - Formation on *Natural Family Planning*

- **Grace building upon Nature**

- God wants a joyful, fruitful marriage for you. We believe that God gave us the Church to be a place that supports and nourishes your marriage.
- We are often asked the question about getting married in a different location. Getting married in a church is symbolic of all the work you have done in preparing for this day and for the rest of your lives together.
- The Sacrament of Marriage builds upon your love and good work. When we say, “Grace builds upon Nature”, we acknowledge the good of your natural love for one another and expect to be surprised by the gifts (grace) from God that will enliven your love. Every aspect of the wedding ceremony in the Church is designed to assist you in deepening your love and opening yourself to God’s grace.

TIMELINE & CHECKLIST

See additional pages for further details regarding items/terms within the checklist.

- Initial meeting with Priest/Deacon (Presider)
 - Confirm date and documentation
 - **Time of Wedding:**
 - **Wedding within Mass can start no later than 1:30 PM on Saturdays**
 - **Wedding outside of Mass starts no later than 2:00 PM on Saturdays**
 - Choose a Wedding Ceremony with or without Mass (See Ecumenical Guidelines below.)
 - Review Marriage Preparation program and select journey:
 - Witness to Love Journey
 - Individualized Journey created by Presider
 - Fill out initial documents



If you are not already, please begin and continue to pray for each other and your marriage every day from this moment and for the rest of your life together. Nothing is more important to your married love than sharing your life as spouses in good and bad times, sickness and health with God, and calling on His help to deepen and strengthen you in self-giving love. In Christ Jesus’ death and resurrection, self-sacrificial love that is Christ-like reveals a power to overcome death and everything that would seem to have the power to separate us from life together. Prayer individually, as a couple, and with a community is indispensable and irreplaceable for a marital love that deepens, and expands to include new life.

WITHIN 1 MONTH AFTER CLERGY MEETING:

- Complete Prepare/Enrich Inventory (You will each be emailed a link from Prepare/Enrich to take the inventory online. Please complete it as soon as you can. This will start the Marriage Preparation program.)

- Within a week of completing the Prepare/Enrich Inventory, you will be contacted to set up two meetings:
 - Your preparing priest or deacon will want to review your Prepare/Enrich
 - Deacon Jim and Joan Steger--the Witness To Love Coordinators--will set the other meeting.
- If participating in the Witness to Love Journey, please choose a Mentor Couple (details below) and give their contact information to the preparing priest or deacon.
- Sign-up for Marriage Preparation Retreat -Go to the Archdiocese of Dubuque website <https://dbqarch.org/marriage-preparation> or your local diocesan website if you are living elsewhere. Select **one** retreat: Pre-Cana (if this is a 1st marriage) or Two Become One (if this is not a 1st marriage).

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING COURSE

We encourage engaged couples to take a class(es) with instructors online or in-person to learn more about NFP, including why it is beneficial and how to practice the moral methods approved by the church. This type of reflection assists a couple in seeing the sexual act and your relation as sacred. See handout in packet for who to contact.

NEXT 6 MONTHS:

- Meet monthly with Mentor Couple (6 times)
 1. The Courage to Love
 2. The School of Love
 3. The Support of Love
 4. The Gift of Love
 5. The Summit of Love – with Presider. (After retreat: Pre-Cana or Two Become One)
 6. The Labor of Love
- Attend your Marriage Preparation Retreat and provide certificate of completion
- Acquire **Iowa** Marriage Certificate from the county courthouse of Dubuque or the courthouse of your Iowa residence.
- Acquire your updated baptism certificate/s, Affidavits, and any Church documentation needed.
 Baptism Certificate - is from the parish in which you each were Baptized. (For Catholics) this is *not your historical Baptismal certificate*. **You need to contact your church of baptism and have them send you a new certificate with updated Sacramental information.**

- Reflect upon Readings for the Ceremony and write individual reflections upon the readings. Be prepared to share these reflections when meeting with the presider.
- Watch for an email from Becky Williams with the Wedding Liturgy Planning Spreadsheet and contact her at b.williams@dbqarch.org , if you have not received the email. BEFORE you begin to select musicians and music, please familiarize yourself with the Wedding Liturgy Planning Sheet.

- Completed Wedding Liturgy Planning Spreadsheet with wedding music selection, musician choices, readings, and other wedding ceremony options.

APPROXIMATELY ONE MONTH BEFORE WEDDING:

- Rehearsal & Wedding preview meeting with presider - practice Promises & Vows, share reading reflections and prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to vows.

***Following are Further Details Regarding Items from the Checklist
Regarding Marriage Preparation***

SETTING THE DATE

At the first meeting with Presider (Priest or Deacon celebrating your wedding), a date and time may be set. Any “holding” of a date or final celebration of a wedding on an agreed upon date, depends on the freedom of the couple to marry and completion of the preparation program.

RELATIONSHIP INVENTORY

We utilize the Prepare/Enrich Inventory. Please note this is an inventory—**not a test**. This inventory highlights both strengths and areas for growth, which all couples have. The Presider will give instructions on how to take the inventory at the initial meeting. Your presider will review the results and discuss them with you in preparation for your mentor couple meetings.

WITNESS TO LOVE JOURNEY

The *Witness to Love* Coordinator will contact you after you have completed your initial meeting with your preparing priest or deacon, reviewed your Prepare/Enrich inventory, and chosen a Mentor Couple. (See below.) The Coordinator will arrange a time to meet with you and your Mentor Couple to orient you to the *Witness to Love* program and provide the materials for your six (6) meetings. It is recommended you meet on a monthly basis.

MENTOR COUPLE

As part of the *Witness to Love* Journey, **you choose your mentor couple**. The basic requirements for a mentor couple are as follows:

1. The couple has been married in the Church for at least five (5) years.
2. Both are Catholic (discuss potential mixed-faith mentor couples with the priest or deacon).
3. Both are active in their faith and attend Mass regularly.

Beyond these requirements, this process also encourages you to reflect upon the married couples within the parish you know. *Is there a couple whose marriage you both admire? Would you look forward to sharing this journey with them?*

Our hope is that this mentor couple will become supportive, known fellow parishioners for years to come. If you are having trouble identifying a potential couple, the presider will assist you.

MARRIAGE RETREAT

The Spires of Faith utilizes the retreat offerings through the Archdiocese of Dubuque, and the engaged couple signs up through the Archdiocese website (<https://dbqarch.org/marriage-preparation>). The current options are as follows:

Pre-Cana is a day-long marriage preparation program which emphasizes topics important to a healthy marriage.

Two Become One: Embracing the Sacrament in Remarriage is a day-long marriage preparation program designed for engaged couples when one or both have previously been married.

Information will be provided to you at the initial meeting for when both are being offered throughout the year. If the fee is a challenge for you, please inform your presider.

THEOLOGY DISCUSSION NIGHT

The Theology Discussion Night brings the preparing priest or deacon, you and your mentor couple together. We will visit about how your Sacramental marriage relationship fits into parish life and God's plan for your joy. **After you have attended** either *Pre-Cana* or *Two Become One*, please schedule this evening with the Mentor Couple and preparing priest or deacon. The Theology Discussion Night is part of your fifth Witness to Love meeting.

FINAL MEETING WITH PRESIDER

A final meeting with the Presider should take place about one month before the wedding to close out paperwork, review what the Engaged Couple learned throughout this journey, and finalize some wedding-day details.

At your initial meeting with the presider, you will be introduced to a website to help plan your wedding liturgy. You will also receive an email from Becky Williams with a Wedding Liturgy Planning Spreadsheet. This spreadsheet will guide you in selecting your music, choosing musicians, and making other ceremony decisions. Before finalizing your selections, review them with the priest, deacon, or wedding liturgy coordinator.

- Access this link <https://www.foryourmarriage.org/readings/> to choose the Scripture readings for your wedding Mass. You will find approved options for the First Reading, Responsorial Psalm, Second Reading, and Gospel, along with the full text and brief explanations. Take time to read and pray over them together, then select the readings that best reflect your hopes for your marriage. Afterward, complete the following portions of the spreadsheet:
 - First Reading - Old Testament
 - Responsorial Psalm (Could be impacted by music.)

- Second Reading - New Testament
- Gospel - Matthew, Mark, Luke or John
- Universal Prayers - Need samples of prayers
- Complete music selections using the guidelines given in the spreadsheet.
- Share the reflection sheet with the presider “Why we chose these readings”

**Visit our website: spiresoffaith.com/sacraments/holy-matrimony for more information.*

PLANNING A CATHOLIC WEDDING

It is always important to remember that a wedding in the Catholic Church involves the reception of a Sacrament. Excessive ostentation therefore is in poor taste. Instead, modesty and a proper focus on God should be upheld. If both parties are not Catholic, the wedding liturgy is celebrated without a Mass. Please use the enclosed **Wedding Liturgy Planning Sheets** along with the **Wedding Guidelines** on the next page to help guide your considerations.

You will need to discuss with the priest or deacon who will be presiding at your wedding the different details of the liturgy, including the **Readings**. There is a list of Old & New Testament, as well as Gospel readings for couples to read, pray with, and discuss on our website: spiresoffaith.com/sacraments/holy-matrimony and enclosed. At least one reading must reference the nature of Holy Matrimony explicitly; these are indicated with an asterisk (*).

Couples must discuss all **Music** arrangements for the wedding with our Director of Liturgy & Music. Please arrange to speak with the Director before making any arrangements. The Director will discuss with you your interests, provide different options, and approve your plan. Only *religious music* will be allowed during the wedding—secular music is not appropriate. Even prelude and postlude music should complement the sacred reality of the Sacrament. Pre-recorded music is simply not allowed. The Director is available to serve as the organist and/or accompanist at weddings. Any arrangements with an outside musician are to be made after discussing the music with the Director, who can be reached at 875-7325 or dbqo67s1@dbqarch.org.

CELEBRATING HOLY MATRIMONY

The Wedding Party - keeping in mind that the wedding is about the reception of a Sacrament ministered between the couple and God, we suggest no more than 4 bridesmaids and 4 groomsmen. Also, based upon our experience, we strongly recommend that children under the age of 4 not be part of the wedding party.

The Procession - in general, the Church envisions that the bride and the groom would process in either together, or with their parents, along with the servers, priest, and the bridal party while the Opening Hymn is sung, like a Sunday Mass. If the couple desires to enter the church with instrumental music, a gathering song must follow.

Readers - couples should make a copy of their selected readings for their reader(s) review. Please select an experienced reader (or readers) who will be comfortable reading and not detract from the liturgy.

Visiting Clergy - priests, deacons, ministers, and/or rabbis are welcome to participate, but with the permission of the pastor. Please discuss this with him.

In the case of a Mass ():*

Presentation of the Gifts - at least 2 people will be needed to bring the gifts of bread and wine forward at the preparation of the gifts.

Communion Ministers - couples should ask between 3-5 people who are extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to be present. This number depends if you plan to have the precious blood.

**Please remember that due to the sad divisions still present among Christians, those who are not Catholic may not receive Holy Communion.*

Common Questions:

The Unity Candle? - the revised Order of Holy Matrimony does not provide for inclusion of this ritual. Instead, after the consent an acclamation is sung, and after the giving of rings, a hymn may be sung by the assembly. A unity candle perhaps could be lit as part of a prayer at the reception. *Sand is not allowed in the church either.*

Presentation to Mary? - the revised Order also does not provide for inclusion of this ritual. The couple might witness their devotion to our Lady by the singing of a Marian song during the liturgy or including a prayer to our Lady at the rehearsal or after the liturgy.

TIMES FOR A WEDDING:

Fridays before 7 pm - **Saturdays** between 1:00 pm and 1:30 pm with Mass or 2 pm without Mass

- Please, no rehearsals for a Saturday wedding on a Thursday.

-- As a courtesy, both the rehearsal and wedding will begin on time.

SUGGESTED STIPENDS:

Musicians	Arranged between couple & musicians
Altar Servers	\$10 per server (if arranged by parish)
SFX Church	\$400 parishioner, \$800 non-parishioner
NV, P, E, W Church	\$200 parishioner, \$400 non-parishioner
Celebrant	priceless

A NOTE ON PREPARATION AND COHABITATION

We understand that when couples who have already begun to live together approach the Church to be married they do so out of a desire for something more profound and deeper in their relationship. And while we are happy for that desire for marriage, couples should know that there are particular risks and considerations that need to be addressed because of their living situation.

Even though couples living together can sincerely and authentically love one another, their mutual witness to one another (as well as to others) is instead to a kind of love that is tentative, self-directed, and independent of the eternal and sacrificial love of Christ. As Christians, we are always called to reveal through our lives the greatness of Christ's love; but cohabitation compromises our ability to do that.

Similarly, all of us are called to the virtue of chastity, whether we are married or single. Chastity is that virtue that helps ensure that our relationships always respect and honor the dignity of the other person, as well as our own. Without chastity, we allow love to become selfish; and rather than giving of ourselves freely in love, we wind up taking from another out of lust, which can quickly dry up a relationship. Living together before marriage simply makes living chastely more difficult—not only now, but also even after a couple is married.

In addition, a man and a woman living together unwittingly limit their ability to freely develop all aspects of their relationship and can even hamper their capability to make a free, responsible, and enduring commitment at the time of their wedding. In fact, statistics show that couples who cohabit before marriage have a significantly higher divorce rate than non-cohabiting couples.

It is out of these concerns that we strongly urge any couple who has made the choice to live together to prayerfully reconsider that decision. Instead, we urge you to give this time of preparation before marriage over to developing that kind of free, chaste, and unconditional love to which the Lord is calling you in marriage. Know that little sacrifices now will surely bear fruit in your marriage.