

*Preparing for your  
Wedding*



*St Frances Cabrini Church  
Omaha, Nebraska*

## A Note from the Pastor



Dear Friends,

Congratulations on your upcoming wedding! Your wedding will be a joy-filled celebration of your love for each other. While your wedding celebrates the wonder of your love for each other, it is also the Church's celebration of your love bearing witness to God's presence in our world. It is private **and** public, personal **and** communal, unique **and** universal, belonging only to you **and** belonging only to the Church.

I know that what I just wrote may seem contradictory, but it is true. Your celebration belongs to you and to the Church. This is something we will plan and celebrate together. I know you thought it was only your parents who were struggling to plan this with you. But now the whole parish is getting involved? Yes. Such is the nature of this sacrament and all the sacraments.

I encourage you to take a few minutes to read through this booklet. It supplements the planning booklet provided by the Archdiocese of Omaha with our parish policies and recommendations. Please share it with those who are assisting you with your wedding: family members, professional wedding planners, photographers, etc.

St. Frances Cabrini is an active parish. Consequently, the building is the site of many activities. There may be other meetings or events happening in other parts of the building or the parish campus during your rehearsal or wedding. All who use the facility are expected to cooperate with one another so that everyone's needs are respected and the building kept in good condition.

We want your wedding to be a day you remember as filled with love and joy. Even more so we want your marriage to last a lifetime. For this reason, we offer our parishioners a thorough marriage preparation process. No process is foolproof, but we hope that you will find it helpful to your relationship now and in the future of your marriage.

We do this as a gift for you. As we say in the ceremony, "Christ abundantly blesses the love that binds you. Through a special sacrament he enriches and strengthens those he has already consecrated by Holy Baptism so they may be faithful to each other forever..."

Best wishes in all your planning,

Fr. Damian Zuerlein

## Introduction

The bond of Christian marriage is a holy mystery and living symbol of Christ's love for his Church. The marriage vows establish a unique covenant of unbreakable unity and total fidelity raised to the dignity of sacrament by Christ, modeled on his own nuptial bond with the Church. In their married life together, the bride and groom help each other to attain holiness. They nourish their marriage with undivided affection, which wells up from the fountain of divine love. In a merging of the human and divine, the couple remains faithful in body and mind in good times and in bad.

The wedding ceremony is not only a liturgy for the bridal couple, but for the gathered assembly and the greater church as well. The wedding vows are not merely private promises made between the bride and groom. Rather, they are a public proclamation before Christ and the Church.

Having witnessed the marriage vows, the Christian community is strengthened in the Lord's promise of faithfulness to his people. The community commits to support the newly wedded couple in their vows as they strive, with God's help, to make their bond more perfect and holy each day.

The decision to be married in the church is significant and is much more than choosing a picturesque setting and photos. You want to make your wedding a meaningful and memorable experience. You also want to express in a clear and beautiful way the hopes you have for your married life. Thoughtful, prayerful planning and participation in your wedding ceremony is a decision that will bring many blessings to your married life long after you've forgotten all the other decisions you made about flowers, photos and the reception.

## Initial Preparation

The Archdiocese of Omaha requires a preparation period of at least six months for couples who wish to be married in the Church. The first thing to do is contact Fr. Damian to enter the proposed date on the parish calendar. He will also answer any questions you may have.

Fr. Damian will set a date to meet with you as a couple and give you the necessary information you need to start the preparation process and plan your ceremony.

## Scheduling

Weddings are an important sacrament in our parish. It is vital that all scheduling issues are coordinated with Fr. Damian and yourselves far in advance so that misunderstandings do not occur on either the rehearsal or wedding days. All activities in our church facilities need to be reserved on the parish calendar. We want to ensure that all parties know the time and space expectations of one another. Normally, in addition to the rehearsal itself, the wedding party has use of the church facilities for two hours before the start of the wedding and one half-hour after the liturgy has finished. Rehearsals are scheduled based upon the availability of the church.

## Church Documents Needed

Each party is to acquire an official baptismal certificate from the Church in which they were baptized. For Catholics, the certificate should be dated within six months of the wedding; it can easily be obtained from the parish of your baptism. Photocopies are not acceptable. Baptized non-Catholics are asked to provide a photocopy of the original document.

## Civil Requirements

All weddings planned for St. Frances Cabrini require a valid Nebraska Marriage License issued from any Nebraska County Clerk's Office. The license must be presented to the priest or deacon at the rehearsals. The priest/deacon, by law, cannot witness the wedding in the absence of a valid Nebraska Marriage License.

The Maid/Matron of Honor and Best Man normally serve as legal witnesses to the marriage. One or both witnesses to the marriage may be non-Catholic.

## Spiritual Preparation

The spiritual preparation for your wedding is just as important, if not more important, than the physical preparation of planning for the celebration. Here are a few simple suggestions to help you prepare spiritually for your wedding during these months of preparation:

- Pray together as a couple at least once a week.
- Read Scripture together and share your thoughts with each other.
- Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once before the wedding.
- Attend Mass together on Sundays.
- Pray for the success of your marriage, asking for God's help.

## Other Liturgical Ministers

The wedding ceremony requires additional liturgical ministers. Generally, these other liturgical ministers are Catholics who have been formally trained (and mandated by the archbishop, in some ministries). These include the ministries of Lector (readers) and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. If a family member or friend attending the wedding has been mandated in the Archdiocese of Omaha as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion or Lector, they may serve at the wedding as needed. If needed, the parish community is also able to provide competent lectors and ministers of Holy Communion. All liturgical ministers are asked to attend the wedding rehearsal to ensure a smooth and prayerful wedding liturgy.

## Prayers and Readings for the Wedding Liturgy

Couples select scripture readings from among those listed in the book *Supplemental Materials for Catholic Marriage Preparation*. The psalm will be sung and should be coordinated when planning the music. Prayers and blessings are selected from the wedding ritual. Permission for prayers or readings other than those listed must be approved by the priest or deacon. There are options within the wedding rite. For example, you may select scripture readings, blessings and prayers from the approved texts. You can select friends or family members for different roles in the ceremony, such as readers and gift bearers at the Offertory. Making these choices with your future spouse and with the priest or deacon can help you learn more about the Catholic understanding of marriage and to become more deeply involved in your celebration of it.

## Rehearsals

A wedding rehearsal in the sanctuary will be scheduled with the wedding couple and the marriage preparer to practice the physical and ritual action of the ceremony. Those attending this rehearsal would include the bridal couple, their parents, the wedding party, lectors, and ushers. The rehearsal is usually scheduled the day before the wedding, depending upon the availability of the church. Musicians do not normally attend this rehearsal. Music rehearsals are scheduled independently through the parish office.

## Stipends/Fees

How much does it cost to get married at St. Frances Cabrini Church?

Actually, nothing. Sacraments are not for sale. The Catholic Church forbids *simony*, which is the buying or selling of sacred things.

However, it is customary for the bride and groom to share their joy and, in generosity, to contribute to the support of the Church and its ministers. The donations and stipends associated with a wedding fall into three categories:

(1) **Donation to the church.** Traditionally, the wedding couple or their parents make a donation to the church in which they are married. If the bride or groom or both are registered parishioners, the assumption is that you are already supporting the parish with your regular stewardship and no further donation is expected. If the couple has chosen St. Frances Cabrini as the place of their wedding and neither of them are parishioners, then the recommended donation is \$300.

(2) **Music ministers and others.** In addition to an organist, weddings may feature instrumentalists, a cantor and other singers. Musicians' fees are set by the individual musicians. Please check with them early on as to the amount they expect for the wedding.

(3) **Celebrant's stipend.** The services of the priest or deacon are free, but it is customary to offer a stipend. No specific amount is suggested. Couples may want to consider not only the time devoted to the rehearsal and wedding, but also the effort put into the marriage preparation process.

### A final note

Donations and stipends should be placed in clearly marked envelopes and given to the intended recipient.

## Printed Programs

A printed program is appropriate for the wedding liturgy. This primary purpose of this program is to provide an outlined order of the service with the necessary information to foster congregational participation. Music titles and location of songs in the missal/hymnal should be included. The roster of ministers and wedding party may also be included in this program.

Samples of appropriate wedding programs for a Catholic wedding are available.

## Etiquette for the Use of the Church Building

The church is a House of Prayer for the People of God. We welcome all of God's children. We ask everyone to respect the sacred nature of the space. Appropriate conversation should be kept to normal speaking volume levels, avoiding loud outbursts and yelling. Children should be supervised at all times and not allowed to run freely. Appropriate attire should be worn while in the church.

**Sanctuary Furnishings.** The altar, ambo, presidential chair, candles, processional cross, plants/ flowers, and other liturgical and environment items are an integral part of the Roman Catholic liturgy. They are a permanent part of the church environment. Respecting their sacred function, items should not be placed on or near any of these objects. It may be appropriate to tastefully adorn spaces with minimal flowers or plants, but church guidelines do exist pertaining to this.

In general, the overall liturgical environment within the worship space is determined for the particular liturgical season. The wedding liturgy takes place within the context of the liturgical season and calendar of the church. Any additional decoration needs to coordinate with existing elements within the worship space.

**Dressing Rooms.** The bride and her attendants may dress in the parish hall in the school. The groom and his attendants may use the sacristy. Restrooms are available. We ask that someone within the wedding family or party be assigned to ensure these rooms are left in a neat condition when vacating. All boxes, hangers, personal belongings, or trash need to be taken or thrown away. (A large dumpster is located behind the church.)

**Post-wedding Clean-up.** To ensure that the church and all other areas used by the wedding party are left clean and ready for others' use, someone should be appointed to be responsible for removal of all wedding and personal items. This would include all remaining printed programs, pieces of dropped flowers or leaves, pew bows, candelabra, or anything other items the wedding party brought into both the church and other spaces. Reminder: the church will need to be completely vacated by 3:30pm . after Saturday weddings, as the Sacrament of Reconciliation begins at that time

**Food and Drink.** All food and (non-alcoholic) drink are to remain in the parish hall. Respecting the sacred nature of the sanctuary and surrounding areas, please keep all food and drink from the church. Alcoholic beverages are prohibited on church property before, during, and after wedding rehearsals and liturgies. The entire church is gum and smoke free.

## Wedding Environment

**Aisle Runners.** We ask that aisle runners not be used. With the carpeted aisle they are unnecessary and dangerous.

**Aisle Bows or Flowers on Pews.** If used, these items need to be attached to the pews with plastic bow-hooks, available from florists or hobby/craft stores at a minimal cost. Tape, tacky substances or other adhesive may not be used on the church furniture.

**Candelabra.** The sanctuary is furnished with candles necessary for the liturgy. Additional candles and candelabra can create problems within the sanctuary. Please discuss these options with the priest or deacon.

**Rice, Confetti, Birdseed, Bubbles, and Balloons.** Due to their messy character, we ask that rice, confetti, birdseed, soap bubbles, and balloons not be used either inside or outside of the building. These items are difficult to remove, track into the carpet of the church, and create a safety hazard on the stairs and sidewalk approaches. Balloons are also environmentally hazardous.

**Unity Candle.** Lighting a unity (wedding) candle after the Exchange of Vows and Rings is an option within the Catholic wedding rite. Since it is not appropriate to place this candle on the Eucharistic altar, a separate table or location can be provided. The parish does not provide the unity candles or candle holders. It is the responsibility of the couple to provide the candles, tapers and candle holder.

The small taper candles that accompany the Unity Candle – which the bride and groom use to light the wedding candle – may either be lit by the couple's mothers just before the wedding liturgy begins or can be lit with the other liturgical candles before the liturgy begins. The topic of the wedding candle, location, and lighting procedure should be discussed with the priest.

**Presentation of Flowers to the Virgin Mary Shrine.** The presentation of flowers to the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary is an option within the Catholic wedding rite and takes place after Communion. The couple walks to the shrine, places the flowers and pauses for a moment of prayer. Traditionally, a single rose or small bouquet of flowers are placed before the shrine. The flowers are either laid directly on the pedestal provided or placed in a vase.



**Photography.** Since the Rite of Marriage is a sacrament occurring within sacred liturgy, photography and videography must never detract from the sacred character of the ritual. Although one may want to catch the “Kodak moment,” the atmosphere created with camera flashes and people stepping into the ritual action is counter to the primary purpose of the liturgy. We discourage flash photography and ask that people not leave their places to take photographs.

With some forethought, discreet and well-placed cameras without flash can be acceptably located. Couples and wedding parties can also “re-create” the moment for photography purposes during the scheduled photography time. We encourage the couple to hire a professional photographer who would then be the only one taking pictures during the wedding ceremony.

**Flowers and Sanctuary Décor.** Our sanctuary area is relatively small and not able to accommodate extensive additional décor. Additionally, the church environment will already be set according to the current liturgical season of the church. It is important that the florist is aware of the parish policies. If the florist needs additional time for onsite installation, they will need to contact the priest to set a time. All rented and personal items (flowers, stands, etc.) should be removed from the sanctuary within one hour after the ceremony concludes (and by 3:30pm on Saturday afternoons). The parish is unable to safeguard any rented or personal items after this time.