

Welcome

Congratulations on your engagement! We're very excited that you're here. If you're not Catholic, it's ok. Even growing up Catholic, we find differences in what we know. The marriage preparation process is here to inform you of what you're asking of the Church through the sacrament of marriage.

We are created by God in love to know Him, love Him and serve Him. You are being called to do this through marriage. We learn how to do this through Divine Revelation. "The Truth will set you free...", it says in the gospel of John 8:32. For Catholics, marriage is not merely a civil contract but is a covenant between a man and a woman before God.

Our goals for IHM's marriage preparation programs are:

- *To proclaim and explain the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding the Sacrament of Matrimony and the Family.
- *To encourage the couples to welcome God as part of their marriage covenant.
- *To give some necessary tools for a fulfilling, life-long commitment.

This class is the first step in your journey to marry. Our hope and prayer for you is that you will be open to God's Truth and that you'll find the amazing mystery within this most beautiful covenant created by God for our salvation!

Part I

The Sacrament of Matrimony

Sacraments of Service

Two sacraments are ordered towards the salvation of others: Holy Orders and Matrimony. If they contribute as well to our personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so. (CCC 1534) In the Catholic vision of living together as husband and wife, you both agree the essential purpose of your marriage is to help each other reach your goal of eternal life. You're helping each other get to Heaven.

Sacrament of Matrimony

The Sacrament of Matrimony is defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church as: "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament." (CCC 1601)

We're going to break this up and explain what it means.

The matrimonial covenant... Marriage is a sacred covenant. A covenant is entered into with God. God created marriage to image and participate in His own covenant with His people. Through the marriage covenant spouses are called to share in the free, total, faithful and fruitful love of God.

When you get married in the Catholic Church you enter into a covenant with one another through God. A covenant is different from a contract. In a contract, each party knows exactly what is expected and each party spells out specific obligations. But a covenant is a solemn promise of

continued love, friendship and loyalty no matter what is involved. In a contract, you focus on the specific conditions, whereas in a covenant, you focus on the person unconditionally. Your marriage is a solemn, life-long covenant. You have hopes and dreams for your future life together, but you don't know what that future will hold. In a marriage covenant you say, "I pledge my faithfulness to you regardless of what the future brings." In a covenant, a man and a woman embrace the mystery of their future out of love and not out of obligation or convenience. Love always chooses freely to sacrifice oneself for the good of the spouse.

By which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life... A man and a woman, a husband and a wife, are joined by God in an unbreakable bond of love. This relationship is the closest and most intimate of human relationships. It's a total giving of oneself to your spouse. St. Paul, in the letter to the Ephesians, says "This is a great mystery". It's only through the graces we received in the sacraments that a marriage "works". We are called to give selflessly to our spouse through a life long partnership that demands faithfulness of heart, mind and action to your one and only spouse.

Is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses... In Genesis 2:18 the Lord said "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him." God is the creator of marriage. For marriage to be what God intended it to be, marriage needs to be governed by laws. These laws are given to us through the Church. It's for the spouses benefit, for the spouses' salvation, that God gives us guidelines for marriage.

And the procreation and education of offspring... Married love goes beyond oneself to create a greater good. Marriage, as part of its definition, is a sexual relationship. Children are a gift, a blessing, a sign of fruitful love. Marriage is called to be fruitful. God said "Be fertile and multiply" Gen. 1:28. Getting married without the intention of having children is not a sacramental marriage. The second part of this phrase says that parents are "the principal and first educators of their children". (CCC 1653) It's the honor and responsibility of the parents to be able to raise them in the Catholic faith.

This covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament... Specific holy actions, outward signs that have a profound spiritual meaning, were defined as "sacraments". These are actions that Jesus Himself instituted for the holy purpose of giving us the gift of His grace. There are 7 sacraments in the Catholic Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony. A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to nurture and deepen God's presence in us in a unique way.

As you enter into the sacrament of matrimony, you become a visible sign of God's faithful love for humanity. Christian marriage is the sacrament that reflects Christ's covenant love for His Bride, the Church. As Christ's love for the Church is unconditional, so too is your love for each other, in union with God's life within you.

All sacraments consist of some material object (water, bread, wine, rings) and some external act (like the exchange of wedding vows). They bestow Christ's redemptive power into our souls and actually confer His grace. They are the visible signs of Christ's work in us. In the Roman Catholic Church the priest or deacon does not bestow the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. He witnesses the man and woman exchanging their vows before God. It is you, the couple, who "minister" the sacrament to one another.

Part II

Marriage Preparation Program

The Preparation

All couples wishing to enter into marriage are required to complete the Immaculate Heart of Mary preparation program.

1. Registration

One of you needs to be a registered member at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish. Once you are married you need to register, or re-register, as a married couple in the parish you will be attending. As a courtesy, please remove your "single" names from the parish that you are/were registered at.

2. Six Months Notice

As this will be one of the most important decisions of your life, a responsible decision for marriage can only be made within a clear understanding of the responsibilities of married life, as well as an in-depth understanding of yourself, an appreciation of the blessing and insights that your Christian heritage may shed on love, married friendship, and the blessing of children. Our marriage preparation is designed to help couples prepare for their married life with a good deal of learning, sharing, prayer and growth.

The marriage guidelines of the Dioceses of the Province of Michigan require that a couple initiate the process of arranging their marriage at least six months before the date of the wedding. Often, it is necessary to do so even earlier, and that is advisable.

3. Meet with the Priest

Engaged couple living in town will meet with the Pastor, about 2 times, depending on each individual situation. Out of town couples will meet with the Pastor once.

4. Premarital Inventory (PMI)

All couples are required to take the Premarital Inventory. Couples living in town will do this with the Pastor. Out of town couples need to take the PMI at your home parish and have the results sent to the Pastor at Immaculate Heart of Mary.

This tool is offered as an aid to self-discovery and measures the degree of compatibility of the couple in their relationship as it now exists. If it is a mixed religion marriage, the subject of the Catholic practicing his/her faith and the Catholic baptism and upbringing of children should be discussed.

5. Pre-Cana Sessions

All couples are required to attend the Pre-Cana Retreat. Immaculate Heart of Mary offers one in late February/early March. Please contact Michelle David (974-9924 or michelledavid96@gmail.com) to register. Registration deadline is Feb. 1st.

6. Natural Family Planning

All engaged couples are required to complete a Natural Family Planning (NFP) class. IHM has three certified teaching couples. Please contact one of these couples for information regarding classes. When you have completed your class, turn in your certificate to your marriage prep. coordinator.

*Paul and Christy Brown (828-3681) are certified in the Billings method.

*John and Rose MacKenzie (989640-5134) are certified in the Couple to Couple League method.

*Bob and Alex Wasinski (452-2659) are certified in the Couple to Couple League method.

7. Sacrament of Reconciliation

The celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is an integral part of life within the Church. Immaculate Heart of Mary offers this sacrament weekly on Saturdays at 4pm. Confessions can be heard by the Priest at a prearranged time, also.

8. Documents All couples must also complete/provide the necessary documents:

1. A Certificate of Baptism must be obtained and given to the priest. Baptismal certificates should be dated no later than six months prior to the wedding. Baptismal certificates can be obtained from the Church where you were baptized by calling and requesting a newly issued copy of the certificate, giving the month, day, and year of your birth.

2. The Prenuptial Questionnaire (Form A) is to be taken separately by the bride and groom. This provides basic information along with personal testimony of freedom to marry and the desire to do so without reservations.

3. An Affidavit of Witness (Form B) must be completed by parents or close relatives of the couple when it is a marriage of mixed religion or the couple is from out of town or state.

4. In the case of a mixed religion marriage, the Catholic partner is asked to sign a statement promising to live his/her faith, to respect the faith of the partner, and the desire to baptize and educate the children as Catholic to the best of his/her ability.

5. When a Catholic wishes to be married in a Protestant Church, the Bishop must grant a dispensation from Canonical Form. This request is obtained by the priest.

6. If one or both parties were previously married, a marriage date in the Catholic Church will be set after the completion of the annulment process.

7. A marriage license from the State of Michigan must be obtained. This license needs to be in the Parish Office by Tuesday of the week of the wedding.

9. Setting the time and day

The wedding date will need to be approved by the parish priest prior to anything else. We recommend that you wait in scheduling reception halls, caterers, florists, etc. until the date has been set with the Pastor. Weddings are scheduled on Fridays, anytime, or Saturdays no later than 1:30pm.

10. Special Circumstances

Living together before marriage, teen marriages, pregnancies, and second marriages are all sensitive issues. Please speak with the parish priest regarding these situations.

Part III

The Wedding Liturgy

The celebration of the wedding is a day...marriage is a life time! People remember their wedding day for a variety of reasons. We hope that one of the special and meaningful memories you will have is of the readings you choose and the vows that you pledge to one another. The liturgy will be a time like no other in the celebration of your wedding. Therefore, the Church encourages you to carefully assist the priest and music director in the preparation of the liturgy. Keep in mind that while your wedding day will consist of many important moments, the liturgy is a moment of prayer...a time of praising God, asking His blessing, and making a public covenant with your partner!

There are a variety of ministerial roles involved in the liturgy. These roles may be carried out by

different people...people who through their lives speak a message about their faith. Please carefully consider the people you will ask to assist at the liturgy.

1. Presider

The Priest/Deacon presides at the liturgy; that is, he calls the assembly to prayer, coordinates the various ministers, and addresses God in prayer. He is also the official witness of the Church to the marriage. The Pastor is the usual Presider, but if families have a friend who is a Priest or Deacon and would like him to celebrate, this can be planned.

2. Music Director

The Music Director is involved in all weddings. She is the official representative of the parish in regards to all musical matters and is responsible to see that the music is appropriate and liturgically appropriate. Couples meet with the Music Director, select music and discuss how to create a worship aid (also known as the program), which assists the assembly in celebrating the wedding liturgy. The couple has a final meeting with the priest to go over the liturgy. Please call the parish to speak with Jane, our Music Director, (241-4477) or e-mail her (music@ihmparish.com).

3. Bride and Groom

The bride and groom are the ministers of the marriage sacrament. In a very real sense they “marry” each other while the Pastor and the congregation witness the event. The couple is the primary sign of the sacrament.

4. Wedding Coordinator

A wedding coordinator is a parishioner that will assist at your rehearsal and wedding. A wedding coordinator will call you a week or so before your wedding to go over the plans.

5. Lectors

It is encouraged that your friends, relatives or members of the wedding party will be readers of the scriptures and the general intercessions at the liturgy. Invite people who have the talent to proclaim these readings effectively, and are willing to take the time to practice the readings or become familiar with our sound system.

6. The Assembly

Of great importance are those who will gather together to pray with you and for you. They show their support and affirmation by participating in the celebration through word, song and gesture in celebration.

7. Servers

Servers will be provided for the service through the parish office. A gift to the altar servers is suggested (\$10/each) and given directly to the servers in an envelope with a thank you note.

8. Witnesses

The best man and the maid/mistress of honor must be at least 18 yrs. of age. They need not be Catholic, but must take their role seriously as witnesses.

9. Attendants

The choice and number of attendants should reflect the involvement of both families as well as those people who will be the support of the couple's faith and marriage.

10. Ushers

Ushers greet people, welcoming them to the celebration. They help the guests be seated, hand out worship aids, and assist people whenever they can. They also assist in making sure the Church is in order before they leave.

11. Children

If a child has reached the age of reason, usually by 6 or 7, and is able to fully participate and witness the marriage, it is then an option for him/her to be part of the wedding party.

Signs and Symbols

The Wedding Dress

The Wedding dress has not always been white. In the Middle Ages, the bride was wearing her most beautiful dress, vibrant red was mostly used. In the different regions of each country, the bride was wearing the traditional dress until very recently. It is only in the 19th century that we find white dresses again. White is considered as the natural color of virginity. White also recalls the Baptism garment, symbolizing that the person has “put on Christ, has risen with Christ”.

While formal dress for bride, groom, and wedding party remains popular, it is not required. Whatever form of dress is chosen, it should reflect the norms of good taste and be appropriate for a wedding. (Low cut dresses, dresses with no backs, etc. are not appropriate.) Men may wear “Sunday attire” or tuxedo, if preferred.

The Wedding bands

The Wedding band reminds everyone that the person wearing it is married. Wedding ring in French is called a "covenant". Generally worn on the well named ring finger on the left hand, the ancients called it "the finger closest to the heart". They said there was a nerve linking directly this finger to the heart. The circular shape symbolizes the continuity, the indissolubility of the Marriage.

Bride and Groom

The practice of the bride and groom not seeing each other before the wedding is superstitious in nature. This practice developed in a time when parents arranged the marriage and occasionally “switched” the bride in favor of an older, unmarried daughter...hence the need for a veil and taking the precaution that the groom should not see the bride until the vows were exchanged. Today, we recommend the bride and groom plan a private moment together before the wedding to see one another, to speak to one another, and to be together in prayer and silence.

The Assembly

The new guidelines from the Diocese suggest ushers begin seating guests on both sides of the aisle regardless of family ties. As we celebrate the union of two people, we try to express this message in various ways...one being the merging of these two families even in the seating arrangement. It is a way to form one community at prayer and worship.

The Entrance/Procession

The familiar entrance with men and women arriving at the altar from different starting points seems to have derived from the custom of keeping the bride “hidden” as long as possible. We believe the procession should highlight all the important people who are going to be involved in the celebration. The order of procession begins with the altar servers and priest/deacon. It is suggested that the groom and his parents walk together with the groom seating his parents. The bride is accompanied by both parents and joins the groom, taking their own place at the altar. The practice where the father alone “gives the bride away” seems to suggest that she is his property. An entrance with all the parents participating announces to the people that it is two families that are emerging with the wedding celebration.

Miscellaneous Information

Worship Aids

These are also known as programs. The Worship Aids need to be approved by the Music Director and Presider **before you have them printed!**

Rehearsal

The engaged couple, along with their wedding party and any assisting ministers (readers and ushers) meet with the priest and wedding coordinator to rehearse the wedding liturgy. This is scheduled the evening before the wedding, or at some time arranged by the party and priest. This rehearsal time is not for the practice of music.

Bridal Room

The basement All-Purpose Room serves as the bridal room and is connected with the women's restroom. All personal items should be taken with you after the wedding. The All-Purpose Room and restroom must be left in the same clean and orderly condition in which you found them.

Groomsmen generally dress at home; however, there is a handicap accessible bathroom with a large mirror that can accommodate the party's needs in the narthex of the church.

Use of the Church Building

Decorating and other preparations for the wedding may begin no earlier than 2 hours before the ceremony is scheduled to begin. Couples are asked to designate a person from their group to clean up their materials after the wedding. It should go without saying that smoking, drinking or eating are not allowed in the church area. **No alcoholic beverages are permitted to be brought on the church property.**

Cars

Cars may be left overnight in the parking lot. However, they have to be left in the back of the parking lot!

Runner

The Church has a runner that is available for use. Please inform the Parish Office if you want to use it.

Photography/Video

Photographers/videographers must understand and respect the reverent nature of this occasion. It is requested that, after the service has begun, pictures may be taken which require modern equipment without bright flashes. Videos may be taken in areas designated by the celebrant. Pictures may be posed and taken before or after the ceremony. As a time frame, 1 1/2 hours are suggested for dressing and pictures before the wedding, and 1/2 hours after the ceremony; (i.e. for a 1:30pm wedding, the church should be vacated by 3:00pm) It might be helpful for your photographer to meet briefly with the priest before the service.

Church Environment

Live plants and cut flowers add life and beauty to the festive occasion. Plants or bouquets of flowers are permitted if placed so as to enhance the environment. Since Immaculate Heart of Mary church is contemporary in design, the principle of "less is more" is a working philosophy. The flowers should be delivered to the church by noon of the wedding day so that there is sufficient time to arrange them. Pipe cleaners, rubber bands, or special "clamps" are to be used to attach ribbons to pews and exterior posts. NO TAPE.

Cleanup

If booklets and programs are used, the ushers are asked to pick them up after the service. The

church should be left in the same order as it was found before the wedding.

No rice, confetti, birdseed or similar substances may be thrown on the church property, sidewalks, entry, or in the church building before, during or after the wedding - this includes the sprinkling of rose petals during the wedding service.

Stipends

The following are stipends that are paid for various services rendered at your wedding:

Parish Member Church Stipend	\$250.00
Music Director	\$250.00
Cantor	varies; typically between \$100 - \$150
Other Musicians	will be contracted by Music Director

The Church stipend goes to the Church for upkeep and Wedding Coordinator. A gift to the Priest/Deacon performing the ceremony is at the discretion of the couple. Stipends must be brought to the church office by Tuesday, the week of the wedding, and they will be distributed to appropriate parties.

Interfaith Marriages

When one of the parties to the marriage is not Catholic, the ceremony does not take place within the Mass. This is done in consideration of the non-Catholic family members as well as our understanding of the Eucharist.

In some cases, a couple of differing Christian traditions may, for various reasons, choose to celebrate their wedding in the non-Catholic partner's church with his/her minister as witness. This is also possible within the Church's law, with the previous approval of the Catholic party's Bishop