



**“Henceforth, you will belong entirely to each other,  
you will be one in mind, one in heart,  
and one in affection.”**

## **MARRIAGE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

### Who Can Get Married at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Cathedral?

Marriage in the Catholic Church is more than the celebration of a couple’s love for each other. While the Church rejoices in your love for one another, we also recognize that celebrating your wedding in Church presupposes your connection with God in faith and with the Church. These guidelines have been established so that this time of joy will not only be an experience filled with happiness, but also one that expresses **FAITH** and **REVERENCE** in God in whose love we have been created.

If you wish to be married at Nativity B.V.M. Cathedral, one of you must be a registered member of the Cathedral Parish. If neither of you is a member of our parish, then you must supply to the priest of the Cathedral a letter from your pastor giving permission for you to be married here. We presuppose with this that one or both of you is a **baptized Catholic and attends Mass regularly**.

### MARRIAGE PREPARATION

(Diocesan Guidelines)

The decision to marry is one of the most momentous choices in life. Marriage, a lifelong interpersonal union between a man and a woman, is a most serious and sacred commitment. Through it, husband and wife are called to draw closer to God, to the Church, and to each other in a life-giving community of love. Christ enhances the natural dignity of marriage. For those who are baptized in Christ, marriage is a sacrament—a living and effective expression of Christ’s love for us.

Because the decision to marry is so significant, it demands serious consideration and a fitting preparation. The preparation for marriage begins soon after birth, as we experience the way in which our parents relate to each other and to us. These powerful lessons from family living teach us about ourselves and how to relate to others. Lessons from church and school further shape our plans and views toward marriage. We bring all this preparation with us when we come to the threshold of marriage.

We, the Church, especially married couples, parents, priests/deacons, and teachers have a grave responsibility toward helping its people to enter into a marriage that gives promise of being grace-filled, happy, and successful. Prompted by an acute awareness of the many pressures exerted on marriage today, the Church holds up to all men and women the ideal of Christian marriage—permanent, exclusive, and open to having children.

Thus, it is in a spirit of deep hope and concern for building and enriching marriages which are characterized by love, faith, maturity, and social responsibility, that this policy has been adopted for the Diocese of Biloxi.

## DIOCESAN MARRIAGE REQUIREMENTS

1. A couple desiring to be married is expected to notify the parish priest or deacon at least six (6) months prior to the proposed date of their wedding. This interval allows time to prepare well for such a sacred vocational commitment. Only in rare circumstances will exceptions be permitted, as explained below.
2. The parish has the primary responsibility to assist couples preparing for marriage. Ordinarily, the parish priest who will witness the wedding ceremony for the Church will oversee the couple's preparation. This preparation begins with meetings between the couple and the priest in order to explain the Church's understanding and attitude toward the sacrament of Matrimony, explain the preparation required, discuss and assess with the couple their readiness for marriage, and set a tentative wedding date.
3. The couple will be required to participate in a formal marriage preparation program chosen in agreement with the priest. The engaged couple is strongly urged to begin their marriage preparation program as soon as possible. (It is best to have the formal preparation program completed at least three months prior to the proposed wedding date.) The wedding date will be finalized by the priest after the couple has completed FOCCUS and its interpretation.
4. Upon completion of the formal weekend program, *Engaged Encounter*, or training with a designated couple, a subsequent appointment will be arranged with the priest during which a decision will be made as to the couple's readiness for marriage. If all is satisfactory at this meeting, the wedding date will then be finalized and planning and preparation for the liturgical (sacred) celebration of their wedding will proceed.
5. In certain circumstances, engaged couples may be referred to a counselor approved by the diocese for pre-marriage counseling. Also, in certain circumstances, a delay of marriage may be recommended by the priest.
6. The wedding of two Catholics ordinarily takes place in the parish church of the bride or groom. Written permission must be given by the pastor of the bride or groom to be married in another parish. The permission of the Bishop is needed for a wedding to be celebrated in a place other than a parish church.
7. The Church calls engaged Catholics to the sacramental nourishment of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist, as a fitting preparation for the Sacrament of Matrimony. \*\*If one party is non-Catholic, it is often advisable to have the Marriage Ceremony without a Mass.
8. In an inter-denominational marriage, the Bishop may permit the couple to celebrate their wedding according to the rite of the non-Catholic when a pastoral reason exists. In this circumstance, a written dispensation from the Bishop would be needed.
9. Should personal differences arise between the priest and the couple, the couple may request, and the priest should suggest, that they confer with another priest. The priest should assist them in making contact with another priest.

## REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

If neither the bride nor the groom is a member of Nativity Parish, you will need a letter from your pastor attesting to the fact that you are a practicing Catholic and that your Pastor would be willing to celebrate the Wedding Ceremony at the Cathedral.

If you are having a priest or deacon officiate at your marriage who is not on the Cathedral staff, we require that the officiating minister complete all of the marriage preparation and the necessary paperwork, including receiving the Marriage License from the County. This paperwork (the marriage file) should be submitted to a member of the Cathedral Staff prior to the beginning of the rehearsal.

If you are a Catholic, you will need a recent copy of your baptismal certificate (dated within six [6] months of presenting it to the minister preparing you for marriage). Your Baptismal certificate can be obtained from your parish of baptism. When requesting the Baptismal Certificate, be sure to ask for *all notations* of Sacraments to be on the Certificate. This is one of the proofs of your freedom to marry, which the Church requires of you. If you are not a Catholic, but have been baptized, we ask that you provide some documentation about your baptism. If you are not baptized, no documentation will be required.

If you do not understand the above paragraphs and have questions, be sure to ask the priest or a staff member for clarification.

## MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM USED BY NATIVITY B.V.M. CATHEDRAL PARISH

The couple is asked to contact one of the priests or deacons of the Cathedral for the initial interview. Both the bride and groom should be present for this interview. At this meeting, we will begin to discuss your preparation for the reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony in order that you may come to an understanding of the Theology involved. The officiating minister has the responsibility of making an assessment of your readiness for marriage. Therefore, it will be impossible to finalize a date for the wedding until a major portion of the Marriage Preparation Program has been completed.

Early in your preparation, you will be given FOCCUS which is an instrument for marriage preparation. FOCCUS is designed to assist the minister in examining the depth and quality of your relationship in certain key areas such as Life Style, Friends and Interests, Sexuality Issues, Theological Issues, Financial Issues, Readiness Issues, and Marriage Covenant. At the end of this first session, the minister will no doubt give you one or two further appointments in order to review the results of the FOCCUS instrument.

## FACILITIES AVAILABLE AT NATIVITY B.V.M. CATHEDRAL PARISH

1. **CATHEDRAL:** Our recently renovated Cathedral is a beautiful place for the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony. The Cathedral is used for larger weddings and is equipped with a majestic pipe organ and a synthesizer (we will address music later in this document). The Cathedral also has an adequate Public Address System for both the Sanctuary area and the balcony. It is to be noted that there are NO DRESSING ROOMS AVAILABLE for any wedding taking place in the Cathedral.

2. **MARIAN CHAPEL:** For smaller, more intimate weddings, we also have the use of our beautiful Marian Chapel. Seating capacity of this chapel is 80—100 guests. The Chapel is equipped with a liturgically-voiced electronic organ. It is to be noted that there are **NO DRESSING ROOMS AVAILABLE** for any wedding taking place in the Marian Chapel.

#### STIPENDS: Church, Clergy, Musicians, Singers

Because of the high cost of utilities, insurance, and clean-up, etc., stipends/donations to the church are as follows:

For **Nativity Parishioners** (registered members for at least one year), we suggest that you make a donation to help us cover the cost of maintenance, utilities, and clean-up. The suggested donation is \$550.00 for the Cathedral and \$200.00 for the Marian Chapel.

For **Non-parishioners**, a fee of \$1,100 will be required for all weddings in the Cathedral. For smaller weddings, the Marian Chapel (located adjacent to and behind the Cathedral) is available for a donation of \$500.00.

Please note: These fees go directly to the Church and not to the priest/deacon witnessing the marriage. If you wish to give a separate offering to him, please feel free to do so.

We ask that payment of the various stipends for the priest/deacon, organist, soloist, etc. be taken care of prior to or at the rehearsal so that there will be no confusion on the wedding day.

#### DATE AND TIME OF WEDDING CEREMONIES

Marriages at Nativity B.V.M. Cathedral are normally celebrated between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. on Saturday.

In reserving the Cathedral or Marian Chapel, it is to be understood that we are reserving the facility for you for two hours. This is time for the pre-nuptial musical program (one-half hour), the ceremony (one hour), and the photographs after the ceremony (one-half hour). It is the responsibility of the bride and groom to instruct the photographer that the Church has been **reserved for two hours only** and all pictures must be completed within this time frame.

#### THE REHEARSAL AND CEREMONY

##### The Music

The wedding is, first of all, a worship service—worship and praise of the God who calls a man and a woman together in the Holy Sacrament of Marriage. As in any worship service, the music must be chosen with great care. The Universal Church provides a series of guidelines by which we determine the suitability of music for worship. These guidelines are expressed through:

**The Music Concern** asks whether or not this music is technically, aesthetically, and expressively good. This concern will eliminate music which might be considered ill-suited for a liturgical worship service. The recommendations and assistance of competent liturgical musicians usually takes precedence here.

**The Liturgical Concern** asks whether the music and especially the lyrics are appropriate for a worship service. Specifically, the lyrics, images, and music should enable the people to join with the bride and groom in praising their God as the author of love and asking his blessings on this union of man and woman. This concern also reminds us that music is very much a part of the liturgy and must always enhance rather than interrupt or distract from these sacred rites.

**The Pastoral Concern** is the “here and now” decision. It evaluates the music in terms of its ability to enable the people gathered for this specific occasion to express their faith through this celebration. It considers such matters as whether or not the majority of the congregation is likely to be Catholic or from another Christian tradition, or non-Christian. Another concern would be if there is the possibility that many of the guests of the ceremony are from outside the Cathedral Parish. In short, the pastoral concern takes into account all the factors that might make this particular congregation unique.

Careful application of these three concerns leads us to the conclusion that some songs—even some which have previously been widely and regularly performed at weddings—are unsuitable for ceremonies at Nativity B.V.M. Cathedral.

**Recorded Music** The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in their document, *Sing to the Lord* (November 14, 2007), restricts the use of recorded music in Catholic Liturgies. In paragraphs 92 and 94 the Bishops tell us:

*Recorded music lacks the authenticity provided by a living liturgical assembly gathered for the Sacred Liturgy. While recorded music might be used advantageously outside the Liturgy as an aid in the teaching of new music, it should not, as a general norm, be used within the Liturgy. [...] recorded music should never become a substitute for the community's singing.*

There is often great difficulty in choosing suitable pieces of music for the wedding liturgy when these pieces of music are drawn from what is called the “secular” repertoire. The distinction between “sacred” and “secular” can be sometimes obscure. There are many “religious” songs which have neither religious nor artistic merit even though their texts mention God and love. There are also very deeply religious songs which have their origins in the secular repertoire. What should be expressed in the wedding liturgy is the mystery of love—the covenant love of the bride and groom—the love of the members of this congregation, and finally, the all-encompassing love of God. Songs from the “secular” repertoire are best used during the reception. The texts of such songs violate the form or liturgical language since they neither represent God speaking to humankind or humankind addressing God. In short, texts of this type just don’t say enough during worship.

Mr. Terry Maddox is the Minister of Music and Director of Fine Arts at Nativity B.V.M. Cathedral. Mr. Maddox has first right of refusal, thus it is contractually agreed that he be utilized for all weddings as he is very familiar with our instruments and is liturgically adept at assisting in choosing proper music for the Wedding Ceremony/Nuptial Mass. It is paramount that you contract the Minister of Music, vocalists, and/or other musicians as soon as possible—most are very busy in their ministries and it would assist your planning greatly to secure their services early on. A list of professional vocalists who frequently sing at the Cathedral can be obtained from Mr. Maddox.

Providing music ministry at your wedding ceremony is a professional service to you. Musicians and vocalists have spent many years in preparation to be able to use their talents on your behalf. At the time that you contract their services, you will agree upon a stipend. The wedding day is very busy, nerve-racking, and confusing sometimes. Please complete your agreed upon financial commitment to the musicians at the rehearsal.

#### Required Use of Church Coordinator

To ensure the rehearsal and wedding ceremony flow smoothly and follow all canonical requirements, all weddings in the Nativity B.V.M. Cathedral require the use of a designated Church Coordinator. Our Church Coordinators, Paul Arguelles or Susie Davis, will assist in ensuring your wedding day is memorable.

#### Decorations and Environment

Nativity Parish celebrates the liturgical seasons with special hangings and decorations. These special decorations will not be removed for any wedding that takes place during these seasons. Any church furnishings, stands, or microphones are not to be moved. If any extra candles are used in the sanctuary, we insist that they be spring-loaded wax or butane gas candles only. Drip cloths underneath all rented candles are required. Unity candles must also have plastic drip cloths to protect the carpet.

If you wish to decorate outside of the sanctuary, no nails, tape, or florist clay may be used on the pews. There are no decorations allowed on the window sills or on the balcony railing. Because of recent incidents with broken glass and spilled hot wax, there are to be no aisle candles permitted (either free-standing or attached to pews).

#### Still Photographers and Videographers

Normally, the clergymen who officiate at weddings at the Cathedral do not mind if professional photographers wish to shoot pictures during the ceremony as long as they are inconspicuous and do not interfere with the Rites. With the flexible lighting in the Cathedral and Marian Chapel, it should not be necessary to use flash. However, we would ask the bride and groom to ensure that this is not objectionable to the celebrant.

In recent years it has become the custom of many couples to have their marriage ceremony videotaped. We have no objection to this as long as the videographer is unobtrusive in the sanctuary during the entire ceremony. The Cathedral balcony is a music space. Video and still cameras and tripods for cameras often get in the way of singers/musicians. We suggest that tripods that are to be left standing be placed on the floor level underneath the balcony. A brief still and/or video segment in the balcony is permitted as long as no equipment is set up there and left in place before or during the ceremony.

Your photographer or videographer should check with the priest/deacon and wedding musicians prior to setting up any equipment.

### Clean-up/The Use of Rice or Birdseed

Many times when the wedding party arrives at the church, they bring make-up, extra clothing, and flower boxes, etc. Many times these items are left in the rear of the Cathedral and present a clean-up problem for our sexton. We would ask that you make every effort to remember to remove these items before departing the Cathedral. The throwing of rice or bird seed poses a danger, especially to the elder members of our parish. Usually there is a parish Mass following a wedding, and therefore, the throwing of rice or birdseed is not permitted. We would ask that you confine this aspect of your celebration to the wedding reception area.

### Time, Decorum, Punctuality

Most weekends there are several rehearsals or wedding celebrations scheduled on the same day. The time of your rehearsal and wedding ceremony is scheduled with the priest/deacon who will officiate at your ceremony. It is the responsibility of the bride and groom to ensure that the members of your wedding party are on time for the rehearsal and the wedding ceremony. We again remind you of the need to complete photographs of your wedding within 30 minutes following the ceremony.

Drinking of alcoholic beverages of any kind before the rehearsal or wedding ceremony shows a lack of respect for our sacred space. We ask that the bride and groom ensure that they remind all the members of their wedding party that this form of celebration must be reserved for the rehearsal dinner or wedding reception. **Alcoholic beverages of any kind as well as food are prohibited from being brought into the Cathedral or Marian Chapel for rehearsals or weddings.**

The Cathedral Staff hopes that by sharing this information with you that your preparation and wedding ceremony will bring great joy to both of you and your families and friends. We offer our prayers and best wishes for your future life together.

*If you are interested in reserving the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Cathedral for your wedding, please call our parish office at (228) 374-1717 to check the availability of dates and to schedule an appointment to complete your contract. Full payment is due at the signing of the contract.*