



Guidelines for Weddings and Marriage Preparation at St. Ambrose Cathedral

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REQUIREMENTS FOR MARRIAGE AT ST. AMBROSE

- **Catholic:** A Catholic marriage is a sacramental union between one man and one woman. At least one party must be a fully initiated Catholic (having received Baptism and Confirmation in the Catholic Church).
- **Parishioner Status:** St. Ambrose Cathedral offers the Sacrament of Marriage to both parish members and non-members. However, the Catholic party(ies) must be fully initiated into the Catholic faith (baptized and confirmed), actively practicing the faith by attending Mass each Sunday, and be a registered member, or the child a registered member, of a Catholic parish in the Diocese of Des Moines.
- **If Not a St. Ambrose Parishioner:** If the Catholic party(ies) or their parents are not parishioners at St. Ambrose, the couple will need approval from their priest to get married at St. Ambrose (see [page 10](#)). Marriage preparation will be completed at the parish of registration.
- **Six Months Notice:** A wedding date is to be set no sooner than six months from initial contact with St. Ambrose staff.
- **Freedom to Marry:** Both parties must be free to marry. If either party has been previously married, a declaration of nullity (annulment) must be obtained prior to scheduling a wedding date. Both individuals must also be of legal age, mentally and physically capable of fulfilling the requirements of marriage.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR USE OF FACILITIES

Our Spaces

- **St. Ambrose Cathedral:** Can comfortably seat 400 guests.
- **St. Anne Chapel:** Located on the east side of the Cathedral. Can comfortably seat 50 guests.
- **Courtyard:** Located between Cathedral and rectory. Available for photos.
- **Parish Hall and Office:** Located in the rectory located west of the Cathedral. The parish hall entrance is on the ground floor. The parish office entrance is on the second floor.
- **Parking:** Lots north and west of Cathedral available on weekends and evenings. Metered street parking is available on 6th Avenue and High Street.
- **Accessibility:** Handicap accessible entrance on east side of Cathedral near 6th Avenue. A handicap accessible restroom is located inside the east entrance.



Safety

- **Alcohol Policy:** The use or presence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or weapons is strictly prohibited within the Cathedral and on all Cathedral grounds. Any violation of this policy will result in a \$500 fee. To preserve the dignity of the sacrament, St. Ambrose staff reserves the right to cancel a wedding ceremony if the couple arrives under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- **Personal Items:** St. Ambrose Cathedral is not responsible for lost, stolen or damaged items.
- **Pets:** Pets are not permitted on the property, with the exception of approved service animals.

Cathedral Use

- **Anticipatory Mass:** Anticipatory Mass takes place on Saturdays from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM. No wedding activities or decorations are permitted inside the Cathedral during this time.
- **Cleaning:** Please remove all trash, decorations, and personal items immediately following the wedding.
- **Decorations:** Permitted decorations are outlined in the “Decoration Guidelines” section.
- **Food/Drinks:** No food or drink is allowed inside the Cathedral, with the exception of water.

Parish Hall Use

- **Cleaning:** Please remove all trash and personal items from the dressing area immediately following the wedding.
- **Doors:** Do not prop open exterior doors.
- **Spaces:** Getting ready space, restrooms, and refrigerators are available for use on the day of wedding.

Wedding Attire

- **Modesty:** The wedding party, including those who have significant roles in the ceremony (lectors, extraordinary ministers, gift bearers, etc.) should dress



appropriately and modestly for this sacramental celebration. Conduct in the church for the rehearsal and ceremony should reflect respect for the Eucharist always present in the church.

Fees

Cathedral Rental	\$2500
Organist	\$250 (If Cathedral staff is used)
Cantor	\$200 (If Cathedral staff is used)
Suggested Donation to Witnessing Clergy	\$200
Marriage Workshop	\$50 (In person), \$250 (Online)
FOCCUS Inventory	Varies (typically less than \$200)
NFP Training	Varies (typically less than \$150)



MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Baptism Certificates

- **For Baptized Catholics:** Please provide a newly issued baptismal certificate (issued no sooner than 6 months before the wedding). Must include notations for First Communion and Confirmation. If notations are missing, obtain certificates directly from the parish where each was received.
- **For Baptized, Non-Catholics:** Please provide a copy of your baptismal certificate only.
- **For Non-Baptized:** Notify the Cathedral as a special dispensation is required for a Catholic to marry a non-baptized person.

Sacramental Preparation

- **Location:** Marriage preparation will be completed at the parish of registration.
- **Marriage Preparation Requirements**
 - Attend a Workshop
 - “Invited to Joy” Sacramental Workshop hosted by the Des Moines Diocese
 - For dates and to register visit: www.dmdiocese.org
 - Online workshops are available for couples who cannot attend a workshop in person.
 - Meet with a Sponsor Couple
 - Engaged couples will meet with a trained sponsor couple. The couple will meet with sponsors three to five times for discussion.
- **Additional Marriage Preparation Opportunity**
 - Natural Family Planning (NFP) Course
 - For more information visit: www.dmdiocese.org
 - Online NFP Training: <https://ccli.org/>
- **Special Cases:** Another sacramental preparation step may be required for those with children from another relationship, if pregnant before the wedding takes place, if this is the 2nd marriage for one of the engaged, or if either party is under 18 years of age. See our wedding staff for specific requirements in those regards.



LITURGY PLANNING

Readings

- **Approved Readings:** Approved scripture readings are listed in “Together For Life” (book provided to couples at orientation).
- **Other Scripture Readings:** Scripture readings outside of the approved list need to be approved by the witnessing priest or deacon.
- **Readings Not Permitted:** No self-authored readings, poems, or testimonials are allowed during the ceremony, including self-authored vows.
- **Special Cases:** Nuptial Masses celebrated after 4:00 PM on Saturdays or on Holy Days of Obligation must use the readings and Mass parts provided by the Church for the day.

Music

- **Purpose of Music:** The Church affirms that music adds prayer and reflection appropriate to the marriage ceremony. Music should be selected not for entertainment, but for the sacred occasion the ceremony celebrates.
- **Approved Music:** Please refer to the Diocese of Des Moines [“Celebrating the Order of Matrimony, 2nd Edition Liturgical Guidelines”](#) for a description of the type of music appropriate to use in the context of a Catholic wedding. All wedding music, accompanist(s), and cantor(s) will be assigned from our professional St. Ambrose family of musicians. No music or musician choices will be made until the music coordinator has reached out to the couple to initiate the wedding music process.
- **Guest Musicians:** Special exceptions may be reviewed and approved if musicians are from other Catholic parishes, are independently sufficient, and are completely versed in the Catholic mass. All wedding music and musicians must be approved by the Cathedral music coordinator and or director.
- **Recordings:** Recorded music is not permitted.

Clergy

- Nuptial Mass is witnessed by a priest.
- Marriage rite outside of Mass may be witnessed by a priest or deacon.
- Visiting Catholic priests and deacons are welcome.
- Clergy from outside of the diocese require a letter of good standing.



Other Roles

- **Lectors:** Lectors/readers must be a practicing Catholic and in good standing with the Church. They are encouraged to come to the rehearsal to practice.
- **Altar Servers:** Those serving as altar servers should be trained and have already served in their own parish. The Cathedral does not provide servers unless requested.
- **Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion:** The priest will distribute the Precious Body. Others may distribute the Precious Body and Blood at the priest's request. Those distributing must be commissioned Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, trained in proper procedure and integrity/service of the ministry role and who have served in their own parish. If you do not have any Catholic relative or friend already trained in this role, then the priest may distribute the Precious Body by himself. EMs may come to the rehearsal if they wish, but not mandatory, and should check in with the priest before the wedding, to make sure they know when to approach the altar, where to stand, where to position themselves for distribution, and the proper procedure at St. Ambrose for emptying and cleaning the vessels.
- **Gift Bearers:** Gift bearers bring forward the bread and wine during Mass. They are not required to have. If used, they should be a practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church and over the age of 7. Gift Bearers do not need to attend the rehearsal, but they need to check in with the priest before the wedding begins.
- **Ushers:** Given the size of the Cathedral, 3 or 4 ushers are recommended. Ushers do not need to be Catholic.

WEDDING DAY INFORMATION

Cathedral Availability

- **Weekdays:** Contact Cathedral staff for availability
- **Saturday Afternoon:**
 - 11:00 AM - Church and parish hall available for use
 - Between 1:00 PM and 2:00 PM - Ceremony start
 - 3:00 PM - Wedding party and guests must be completely out of Cathedral
- **Saturday Evening:**
 - 5:00 PM - Church and parish hall available for use
 - 6:00 PM - Ceremony start
- **Sundays:** No weddings on Sundays
- **Lent:** No weddings during Lent and the Easter octave



- **Anticipatory Mass:** Anticipatory Mass takes place on Saturdays from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM. No wedding activities or decorations are permitted inside the Cathedral during this time.

Rehearsal

- Wedding rehearsals are typically held the day prior to the wedding.
- Rehearsals are led by the witnessing priest or deacon with help from Cathedral staff.
- Please bring the marriage license to the rehearsal.

Marriage License

- The couple is responsible for obtaining the marriage license. Marriage license will be signed at the rehearsal, with two witnesses present. The presiding clergy will sign it upon the conclusion of the wedding. The signed marriage license will be mailed by Cathedral staff.

Decorations

- All wedding decorations must reflect the sacredness of the event and complement the church environment.
- Decorations must not block views of the altar, ambo, presider, vocalist, or lector.
- **Flowers:**
 - Flowers are not permitted on the altar.
 - Only artificial petals may be dropped by flower girls.
- **Seasonal Decorations:**
 - The church will be decorated for the liturgical season (Christmas, Easter, etc.). These will not be moved.
 - Fall decor may be moved with permission from Cathedral Staff and must be returned after the ceremony.
- **Aisle Decorations:**
 - No wagons or wheeled devices are allowed for children in the procession
 - Aisle runners are not allowed due to tripping hazards on the carpet.
 - Pew bows may be used but must be attached with hooks—no tape on any church surfaces.
 - Real candles in decorations are not permitted. LED candles may be used.
- **Vestibule:**
 - A table in the vestibule is provided for programs, guestbooks, etc.
- **Other Prohibited Items:**



- Unity candles
- Rice, confetti, birdseed, silly string, etc. may not be thrown inside or outside.
- Bubbles are allowed outside only.

Photography and Videography

- **General Guidelines:**
 - The procession may not be stopped or blocked for photos.
 - No flash or external lighting during the ceremony.
 - No access to the balcony.
 - Do not stand on chairs or pews.
 - No photos in or near the bishop's chair (cathedra) or tabernacle area.
 - If taking pictures in the courtyard during the 4:00 PM Mass, please remain quiet as sound carries through the windows.
- **Scheduling Photos at St. Ambrose:**
 - **Saturday Afternoon Weddings**
 - Indoor photos may begin after 11:00 AM and must end no later than 30 minutes before the ceremony, to allow guest seating.
 - Photos may resume after the ceremony and continue until 3:00 PM.
 - Outdoor photography is allowed before and after the wedding, but please maintain quiet from 4:00–5:00 PM during parish Mass.
 - A 6:00 PM wedding party may also be taking outdoor photos after 2:30 PM. There is ample space for both parties.
 - **Saturday Evening (6:00 PM) Weddings**
 - Indoor photography is allowed after the ceremony only.
 - Outdoor photography is permitted before (after 2:30PM) and after the wedding, but again, please be quiet from 4:00–5:00 PM during parish Mass.
 - A 1:00 PM wedding party may still be present outdoors during this time. There is ample space for both parties.
- **Friday Weddings**
 - Timelines vary. Contact Cathedral staff for specific scheduling details.
 - Be aware of daily Mass (12:10–1:00 PM) and Friday rehearsals.

Chapel Weddings

- St. Anne's Chapel is available for small weddings, convalidations, and vow renewals. It can comfortably accommodate 50 guests. Please contact Cathedral staff for availability and pricing.



PERMISSION TO MARRY AT ST. AMBROSE

Bride: _____

Child of: _____

Groom: _____

Child of: _____

Proposed Wedding Date: _____

Parish Responsible for Marriage Preparation: _____

I hereby grant permission for the marriage of my above-named parishioner(s) to be celebrated lawfully outside of his/her/their proper parish (c. 1115).

Signature of Pastor or Parochial Vicar

Date



WEDDING AGREEMENT FORM

Proposed Wedding Date/Time: _____

Proposed Rehearsal Date/Time: _____

Cathedral Availability on Wedding Day

11:00 AM

Church and Parish Hall open for use.

3:30 PM

The wedding party and guests must be completely out of the Cathedral.

Wedding Fees

- \$2,500 – Cathedral Rental Fee
A \$500 deposit is due at the time of booking to secure the date. The remaining balance is due 3 months prior to the wedding.

Auxiliary Fees

- \$250 – St. Ambrose Organist Service Fee
- \$200 – St. Ambrose Vocalist Service Fee
- \$200 – Recommended Donation to Witnessing Priest and/or Deacon
- \$50 (In person), \$250 (Online) – Marriage Workshop, paid to the workshop directly.

We have read, fully understand, and will abide by the guidelines of St. Ambrose Cathedral in planning and orchestrating our wedding. We understand that violating these guidelines could result in fines or cancellation of the event. Our deposit is enclosed and our date has been confirmed by Cathedral staff.

Groom's Signature:

Date:

Bride's Signature:

Date:

Please mail or deliver signed form and \$500 deposit to:

St. Ambrose Cathedral
607 High Street
Des Moines, IA 50309



CHECKLIST FOR WEDDING PLANNING

Marriage Preparation

- ☐ Prenuptial Investigation Form
- ☐ Diocesan Marriage Preparation Certificate (proof of Attendance)
- ☐ Parish Marriage Preparation (sponsor couple)

Records for Marriage File

Groom Bride

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| ☐ | ☐ | Current Baptismal Certificate (issued within the last 6 months) |
| ☐ | ☐ | Profession of Faith Certificate/Letter (<i>if Convert to Catholicism</i>) |
| ☐ | ☐ | First Communion <i>if Catholic</i> (notation on baptismal certificate) |
| ☐ | ☐ | Confirmation <i>if Catholic</i> (notation on baptismal certificate) |
| | ☐ | Marriage License (unless it is a convalidation) |

Additional Records if Required

Groom Bride

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| ☐ | ☐ | Declaration(s) of Nullity (<i>if either spouse has a prior bond where the spouse is still living</i>) |
| ☐ | ☐ | Death Certificate (<i>if either spouse had a previous marriage which ended with the death of the spouse</i>) |
| | ☐ | Civil Marriage Certificate (<i>if it is a validation/convalidation</i>) |

Records for Liturgy Planning

- ☐ Final Wedding Music Selections
- ☐ Final Wedding Day Details (*submitted via Google form*)

Payments & Forms

- ☐ Signed Agreement Form
- ☐ Permission from Pastor (if not parishioner of St. Ambrose)
- ☐ \$500 Deposit (due at time of booking)
- ☐ \$2000 Cathedral Rental + Music Fees (due 3 month prior to wedding)

