

Marriage

Guide helps couples ready for sacrament

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

What do we need to do to schedule a wedding?

Does our parish priest have to officiate?

Can we include "our song" in the wedding ceremony?

Are there any rules for the photographer?

With the glow of romance in their eyes, couples planning to be married in a Catholic Church may not think of these and similar practical questions as they begin to ready for their wedding day.

The Diocese of Rochester now offers a planning guide to help provide some answers.

Released last fall, the planning brochure provides simple guidelines for preparing for the service — from the needed baptismal information to flowers to the reception.

"What it is is very thorough and simple," explained Sister Karen Dietz, SSJ, diocesan coordinator of sacramental catechesis. "Pastors have been looking for things they can hand to people to make the process more streamlined."

The brochure — which is available on the diocesan Web site (www.dor.org), on disc or in hard copy through the Department of Evangelization and Catechesis — is based on one prepared by Sister Alice Cooney, SSJ, pastoral administrator of St. Joseph's Parish, Rush.

Sister Cooney said that she had developed her brochure after she arrived at St. Joseph's in 1995 and began to prepare couples for marriage. Very often, she not-

ed, she would discuss many of these issues with them at their initial interviews, but the details would sometimes get forgotten in the flood of information.

"It just seemed simpler to have something in written form that they could take home with them," Sister Cooney said. "I just did it solely out of practical need."

Sister Dietz estimated her office gets about a dozen calls a week concerning practical questions — or complaints — about the Catholic Church's marriage ceremony rules. She observed that very often couples have a "lack of clarity" about the way the church views marriage.

"The whole sense of marriage as a sacrament and what that means as church, they don't understand that," Sister Dietz said. "For them it's a social event."

Consequently, she said, there exists a "tension between good liturgy, and our cultural expectations."

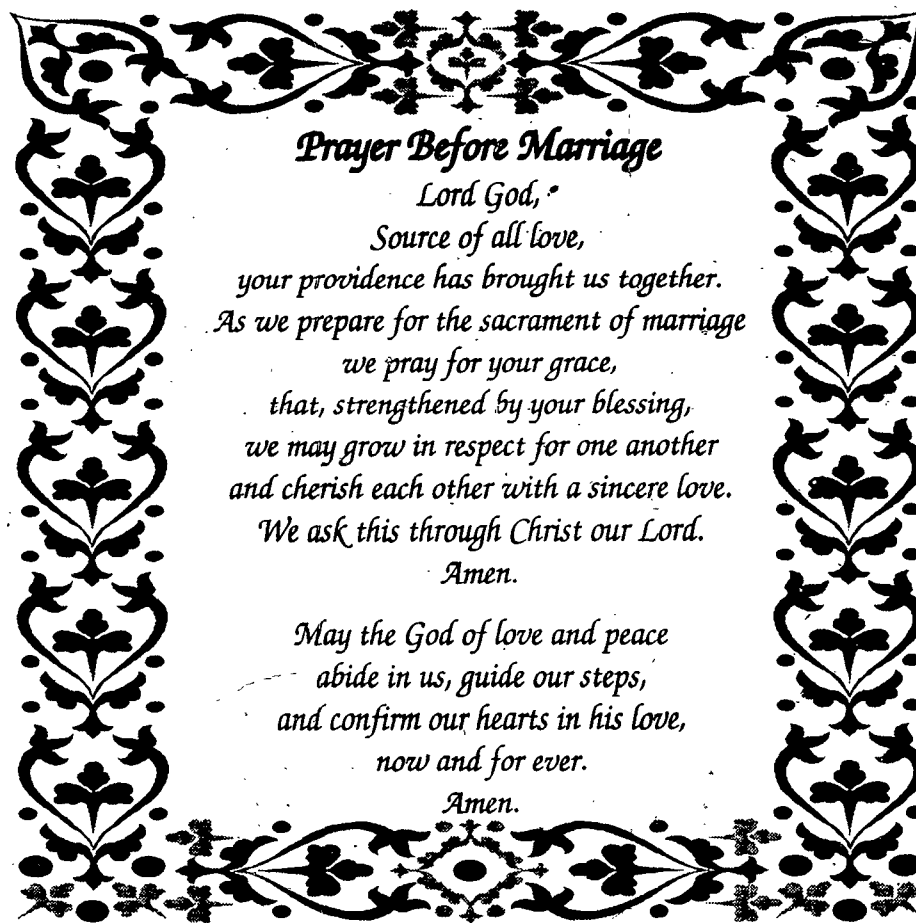
That's where the guide comes in handy, she acknowledged.

"It's a help for the staff because it's concise," Sister Dietz observed. "It's all in one piece. It's something you can go back to."

In the area of appropriate music, for example — one of the areas of frequent questions — the guidelines note that "There are restrictions on the music which may be used at a Church wedding."

They point out, for instance, that using only instrumental music or only a soloist, or using recorded music are discouraged.

In selecting music, the guidelines recommend that the couple ask, "Does this music fit the context of this liturgical celebration? Is the music technically and es-



Prayer Before Marriage

Lord God,

Source of all love,

your providence has brought us together.

As we prepare for the sacrament of marriage

we pray for your grace,

that, strengthened by your blessing,

we may grow in respect for one another

and cherish each other with a sincere love.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

May the God of love and peace

abide in us, guide our steps,

and confirm our hearts in his love,

now and for ever.

Amen.

thetically good? Will it help the assembly to pray?"

The guidelines recommend that the couple talk over musical questions with a competent church musician.

"It's a help for the couple," Sister Dietz remarked.

"It's all practical kind of nitty-gritty stuff," Sister Cooney concluded. "It's such a simple little tool."

Preparation sessions available

According to diocesan guidelines, all couples wishing to be married in the Catholic Church must undergo marriage preparation programs such as Pre-Cana or Marriage Encounter. These programs

must be completed at least four months before the wedding date.

Couples in which one or both have been married previously are also recommended to take part in New Again (see Page 7), completing that program at least three months before the scheduled wedding date.

For several years now, parishes in the Diocese of Rochester have been responsible for offering marriage preparation programs.

In addition to these parish sessions, however, the diocese will offer several daylong Saturday sessions between now and the end of June. Diocesan sessions will be offered at St. Mary Our Mother School, W. Broad Street, Horseheads (March 20); the diocesan Pastoral Center, 1150 Buffalo Road, Gates (April 10); and Holy Rosary School, Lexington Avenue, Rochester, (May 8 and June 12).

The sessions run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The non-refundable registration fee per couple is \$55. For information about the programs, call Jeannie Raisbeck at 716/328-3210, or 800/388-7177, ext. 279.

For information about Engaged Encounter, call Mike and Chris Donnelly at 716/924-4750.

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