

FEATURE

Two city churches are popular spots to tie the knot

By Mike Latona
Staff Writer

Father Thomas Mull loves doing weddings.

"There's so much flexibility in the ceremonies," he said. "Every one's unique and every one's different — the music, the readings."

Father Mull fields numerous wedding requests because he is pastor of Sacred Heart Cathedral, one of the more sought-after diocesan churches for weddings.

However, Father Mull said, he's had more than his fill of nuptials in recent years. In 1997, the parochial vicar left Sacred Heart and was not replaced. Weddings had already been slated all through 1998 — so Father Mull ended up performing up to four ceremonies on many Saturdays between April and November.

"I lost count," he said. "But you can't very well call and say, 'I'm sorry, we can't do it anymore.'"

"Not unless you want a lot of weeping brides."

He said that many non-parishioners looking for a wedding site are attracted to Sacred Heart by attending special Masses and services there, such as the Rite of Election and the midnight Christmas Mass.

One point of intrigue at Sacred Heart, Michelle Kolassa noted, is the church's size. Kolassa, who was married at the cathedral in 1992, said the center aisle is an estimated 125 feet long. (The longest center aisle of any diocesan church is generally believed to be at St. Margaret Mary Church in Irondequoit.)

"When I worked at the rectory, people would ask how long the aisle was. Some of the brides, they were a little scared by



Submitted photo
Father Thomas Mull presides at the Feb. 15, 1992, wedding of Michelle and Scott Kolassa in Sacred Heart Cathedral. The cathedral is among the most sought-after churches in the diocese for weddings.

that," Kolassa said.

However, she said that the cathedral provided a special aura when she got married there.

"It just makes it a regal sort of feel — the organ, the size of the church," Kolassa said.

Father Mull noted with a chuckle that some couples have not only requested to be married at Sacred Heart, but have also asked him to get Bishop Matthew H. Clark to perform their wedding.

"I've had people say, 'You live with him. Could you ask him for us?'" Father Mull said.

Does Father Mull get miffed about being bypassed? Not at all, he said.

"It's not like I lack the opportunities," he pointed out.

Father William Donnelly is pastor of another parish in the hub of the community: St. Mary's Church in downtown Rochester. He, also, fields several requests from couples not formally affiliated with his parish.

"Part of that is because we are a downtown church," Father Donnelly said. "And it's an older, renovated church; to some

people it looks more like a 'church.' It's also adjacent to downtown (reception) facilities."

Yet both Father Donnelly and Father Mull emphasized that despite the many requests they get, top priority goes to the parish community. Father Mull said that couples with a parish connection, by necessity, get first dibs. For instance, Kolassa — whose maiden name is Tuttle — is a lifelong Sacred Heart parishioner and one of seven siblings to be married there.

"We've got a parish of 1,500 families and they obviously deserve first consideration," Father Mull said.

Beginning in 1999, Father Mull cut the wedding schedule down from four to two

time slots per weekend — 11:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. Saturdays. Unfortunately, he said, this makes for a growing number of requests that he cannot personally honor. Yet he did say that a couple is welcome to bring in their own priest if the church is available.

Meanwhile, Father Donnelly said he saves the 1 p.m. Saturday time slot for parishioners, with non-parishioners unable to reserve that time more than 10 months in advance. St. Mary's also holds 10:30 a.m. Saturday weddings as well as occasional 6:30 p.m. weddings on Fridays or Saturdays, he said.

When possible, Father Mull and Father Donnelly said, couples should initially consider their home parishes before going to another church. He and Father Mull added that they prefer the sacrament of marriage — rather than the church architecture — be a couple's chief focus.

"Very often they have the image of a beautiful church wedding, but that's not what we're about," Father Donnelly said.

"If they call up the cathedral and say that it's nice-looking and has a long aisle, they're not going to be married there," Father Mull said.

At the same time, Father Donnelly said he tries to be flexible with couples who are from out of town, or who aren't registered at a local parish.

"We feel we have a responsibility there. I think that's one of the roles of a downtown parish," he said. "We need to try to be welcome to them. Many young people are very mobile and not identified with a parish, and this could be a point of re-entry for them."

Father Mull, also, said he tries to be as accommodating as possible because of his parish's special reputation.

"We're not just the parish church, we're the diocesan church," he said. "And the bishop has wanted us to offer hospitality because of that."

Marriage prep sessions planned

The diocese requires couples wishing to be married in the Catholic Church to participate in marriage-preparation, pre-Cana, or Engaged Encounter programs. It recommends completing such a program six months before the wedding.

Diocesan-sponsored marriage preparation sessions are scheduled to take place from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at: March 18 at St. Mary's Church, Watkins Glen; April 15 at the Pastoral Office, Gates; May 20 at Holy Rosary Church, Rochester; and June 3 at the Pastoral Office.

Early registration is recommended, as the sessions fill up quickly. A non-

fundable fee of \$65 per couple is required. Forms are available through parishes and on the diocesan Web site, www.dor.org. Questions may be directed to Jeannie Raisbeck, 716/328-3228, or 800/388-7177, ext. 279.

Numerous parish-based sessions also have been scheduled. Couples may obtain information and register for these sessions only by contacting the parishes. Parish-based sessions also fill up quickly, so early registration is recommended.

For information on Engaged Encounter weekends, call Michael and Chris Donnelly at 716/924-4750.

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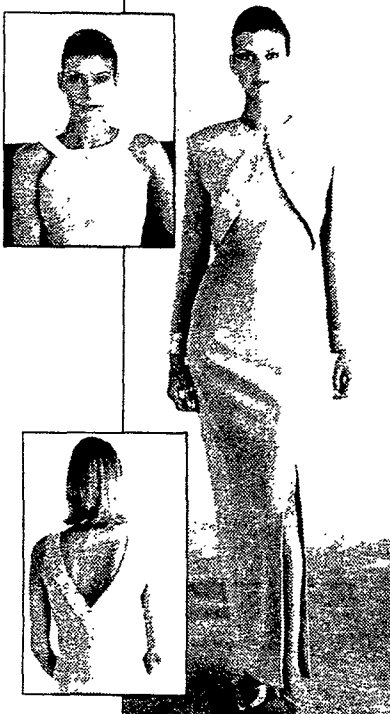
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