

Policies and Guidelines for Being Married in
“The Motherhouse Chapel”
The Chapel of the Incarnate Word



SISTERS OF CHARITY OF
THE INCARNATE WORD

SAN ANTONIO

4503 Broadway
San Antonio, Texas

Policies for Scheduling Weddings in the Chapel of the Incarnate Word

Our policies and guidelines are in keeping with the policies of the Archdiocese of San Antonio. Weddings must be scheduled at least six months in advance, and, because we are not a parish church, it is necessary for you to contact a priest who will commit to preparing you for the Sacrament and presiding over your wedding.

- A couple requesting to be married in the Chapel of the Incarnate Word must have a direct connection with the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, or its ministries. As part of the application process, a letter explaining this relationship is required. Staff will determine if the couple is eligible to be married in the Chapel. The fee for a wedding is \$ 2,000.00 payable to the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, which includes a \$500.00 non-refundable reservation fee.
- Weddings for persons who have no connection to the Congregation or its ministries will not be scheduled. They are encouraged to contact their home parish.
- All couples wishing to be married in the Chapel of the Incarnate Word are to speak to their parish priest to determine their freedom to marry. No date is to be considered firm until the couple has done this. At least one of the couple must be a practicing Catholic, registered in a Catholic parish. Both parties should be free to marry in the Catholic Church.
- All couples wishing to be married in the Chapel of the Incarnate Word must get permission from their home parish to be married in the Chapel, and we require a letter of permission from the home parish before a deposit will be accepted.
- We do allow weddings for couples who have been civilly married and are seeking the Catholic Sacrament of Marriage. They must meet all the criteria set by the Archdiocese of San Antonio, the Chapel of the Incarnate Word, and their presiding priest.
- **We do not allow Renewal of Vows ceremonies.** If a couple has already been married in the Roman Catholic Church, we will not allow a Renewal of Vows ceremony.
- Weddings are scheduled generally on two Saturdays a month, at 2:00 or 4:00pm. Once two Saturdays in a particular month are scheduled, that month is no longer available for weddings.
- Please also read the **Complete Guidelines** to getting married at the Chapel of the Incarnate Word.

Process and Policies for being married at the Chapel of the Incarnate Word

Congratulations on your engagement! Couples normally marry in their parish church, and we would invite you to pray and reflect on why you are considering being married in this chapel, rather in your parish church. You have a strong relationship with the Congregation or one of its ministries that have led you to consider being married here, rather than at your home parish. If after prayer and reflection, you want to be married in the Chapel of the Incarnate Word, we welcome you, and are happy to share our beautiful space with you. Be assured that the Chapel staff will assist you as you begin the process of preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage and the celebration of the Wedding Liturgy.

Process Timeline

Be assured that the Chapel staff and wedding coordinator will assist you as you in the process of preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage and the celebration of the Wedding Liturgy. If you have any questions, please email iwchapelweddings@gmail.com

Inquiry:

After the couples send in an inquiry, the wedding coordinator will respond within one week.

If a couple is eligible, and the date is available for a wedding, there will be a temporary hold placed on the chapel calendar. This date will be held for two weeks. If the couple does not respond with the appropriate forms within two weeks of the wedding coordinator's email, the date will be released.

The wedding coordinator will respond via email to the couple directing you to officially request to be married in the Chapel of the Incarnate Word. This includes completing the General Information Form (Form 1). Baptism and Confirmation dates are required on your general information form (as applicable); the Chapel Office does not need a copy of the certificates. Additionally, you must write a letter officially requesting your desire to be married in the Chapel and explaining your direct connection to the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. Please refer to the sample letter (form 2) to guide you in your request.

The Wedding Coordinator and Chapel Coordinator will review both these forms, and notify you within two weeks of the decision.

Review Chapel and Policies:

The wedding coordinator will reach out to schedule a first meeting which can be either virtual or in-person. If the meeting takes place in person, a tour of the Chapel will be given, along with all of the areas that will be available on the day of the wedding (dressing areas, etc.).

Note If the first meeting takes place virtually, a couple can email the wedding coordinator to request a tour of the Chapel at a later time.

The wedding coordinator will review and explain all policies, processes, contracts and forms during the first meeting. This is the best time to ask questions.

Due within two weeks of the first meeting is the \$500 non-refundable deposit.

If you are confident you wish to proceed with holding the wedding at the chapel, you may bring it to the first appointment. If you wish to wait until after the meeting to further review the policies (or if the meeting is virtual), you can drop off the payment or mail your deposit along with Payment 1 Form within two weeks of the first meeting.

Once the deposit is received, the temporary hold will be replaced with a permanent hold on the calendar.

Note: If another couple inquires about having a wedding on a date that is temporarily held, both couples will be notified of the inquiry and hold on the calendar. The second couple may start the process of officially requesting and touring the chapel while a temporary hold is still in place, but the date will not be given to the second couple unless the first couple does not submit their materials on time. If the first couple does not send in their forms or payment within the due date(s), the temporary hold will be released. Whichever couple officially requests, is approved, has the first meeting, and sends in the deposit first will have the permanent hold on the calendar and the other couple must request a different available date.

Forms Due:

After the first meeting, the wedding coordinator will send the contract and waiver through docusign. These two forms, along with the second payment, are due three months after the send date of the forms. The due date will be noted on the forms.

The second payment of \$750 may be dropped off in-person or mailed along with Payment 2 Form.

The Chapel Office requires a Letter of Commitment from the presiding priest (and, if applicable, the preparing priest) within six months of the wedding date. It is best to give the instructions (form 5) to the priest(s) as soon as possible. This letter is due 6 months before the ceremony.

Note: It is an Archdiocesan requirement for the priest to have at least six months of preparation time with the couple for the Sacrament of Marriage.

All couples wishing to be married in the Chapel of the Incarnate Word are to speak to their parish priest to determine their freedom to marry. We request a completed form (form 4) from the couple's home parish(es) granting permission to marry outside the parish. This form is due 6 months before the ceremony.

Final Appointment:

The final appointment with the Chapel Wedding Coordinator is scheduled 30 days before the wedding. This meeting can be virtual or in-person, but it is preferred that it is in person; this is a very important meeting. All the details of the ceremony will be discussed, including the order of the procession, details of the service, and names of all participants. Couples should come prepared with the following:

Form 3 which is the information for the Chapel's official register

Form 10 which is the day-of information for all vendors, procession and liturgy

Payment #3 which includes the security deposit. It is highly requested that this payment is brought to the meeting. However, if the meeting must be virtual, the payment is due within two weeks of the meeting.

The wedding coordinator will send a form during the third meeting allowing the security deposit to be refunded via direct deposit within 1 week of the wedding.

Rehearsal:

The rehearsal takes place the Friday before the wedding ceremony. The rehearsal will be led by the chapel wedding coordinator. Though not required, a wedding planner and/or priest is welcome to attend. The doors will be opened at 5:00pm, with the rehearsal starts at 5:30pm and ends at 6:30pm.

Policies

Once a wedding is scheduled and the deposit given, the permanent hold is placed on the Chapel calendar.

- The deposit is non-refundable, but, within 2 weeks of the date the deposit is given, the wedding date may be changed without a penalty provided the new date is available on the Chapel calendar.
- If a postponement becomes necessary, and we are able to book the original date for another couple, payments given may be applied to the new date. Please keep in mind that we are unable to schedule weddings closer than 6 months from the date of the ceremony.
- If a couple finds it necessary to cancel their wedding, there is no refund.
- Payments are broken up into 3 parts:
 - The first is a \$500.00 non-refundable deposit, given when the Chapel is booked.
 - The second payment of \$ 750.00 is due within 3 months of booking when the contract is signed.
 - The last payment of \$1,050.00 is due at the 30 Day Appointment. This amount covers the last payment of \$750.00, plus the security deposit of \$300.00.
- The security deposit of \$300.00 will be refunded after the wedding provided all the policies are observed, there are no overages of time, and there are no damages to the Chapel.
- The one-hour rehearsal is held on the evening before the wedding.
- On the wedding day, 2 ½ hours of access time is allowed in the Chapel. The day and time can be arranged with the Chapel Wedding Coordinator.

- *The Chapel capacity is limited to 500; keep in mind that parking is often limited as well.*

Guidelines

Marriage is a sacred vocation in the Catholic Church. The wedding ceremony, therefore, is a most sacred moment in the lives of the couple and their families and friends, and the whole Church. The wedding is first and foremost a time of prayer and everything done at a wedding must be conducive and respectful of that prayer; anything not consistent with prayer must be excluded from the ceremony and its environment.

Planning the Ceremony: The priest you are working with will assist you in planning your wedding liturgy. Your wedding must follow the directives and norms of the Catholic Church, though you do options to personalize your wedding celebration. The priest will give you options for Scripture readings and petitions. If both the bride and groom are Catholic, it is most appropriate to celebrate your marriage within the context of the Eucharist. If one of the parties is of another Christian faith, it may be more appropriate to celebrate the wedding ceremony outside the Eucharist, that is, within the context of the Liturgy of the Word, which would enable all guest to fully participate. If either the bride or groom is not baptized, the wedding ceremony outside the Eucharist is the only option. The priest who is preparing you for marriage will assist you with the decisions.

Practices: If you were being married in your parish church by your parish priest, you most likely would be familiar with the guidelines and practices there, or your priest would share them with you. The Chapel of the Incarnate Word has specific guidelines about celebrating weddings in this space, and you will be asked to agree to these guidelines:

- Number of Bridal Attendants and Groomsmen to no more than six each, including the Best Man and Maid or Matron of Honor. For the Bride, this means she may have up to six, including Junior Bridesmaids, Bridesmaids, and the Maid or Matron of Honor. For the Groom, this means he may have up to six, including Junior Groomsmen, Groomsmen, and the Best Man.

Remember, there are many other ways friends and family can participate in the Marriage Ceremony; for example, as: lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, reader of the Prayers of the Faithful, bearer of the Offertory Gifts. Please note that lectors and Eucharistic Ministers must be Catholic. Eucharistic Ministers must be trained and serve in a parish.

- The Flower Girl and Ring Bearer must be at least 5 years of age and able to walk down the aisle without assistance.
- The wedding party will sit in the second row, behind the families. The Flower Girl and Ring Bearer may sit with their families.

- Everyone who participates in the Procession and Ceremony must abide by the Dress Code. *(The Wedding Coordinator for the Chapel will review this policy at the first meeting with the couple.)*
- The Customs of the Arras, Lasso (Veil and Cord), Bible and Rosary, may be observed during the wedding ceremony. The Padrinos do not walk in the procession. They will be seated before the start of the wedding. The priest will call the Padrinos to the altar at the appropriate time for the blessing and presentation of the symbols.
- The lighting of the unity candle is not part of the Catholic Rite of Marriage. It is, therefore, not part of the weddings at the Chapel.
- The practice of bringing flowers to the Blessed Virgin Mary during the wedding is not part of the Catholic wedding ritual. If this custom is important to the bride and groom, they may present flowers after the marriage ceremony.
- The Rite of the Sacrament of Marriage is to be strictly adhered to. Couples may not write their own vows, or deviate from the Rite in any way.

Music: Music in a liturgical setting has theological and pastoral significance and must be sacred in nature. Popular music is not appropriate or allowed during the celebration of the Sacrament. *Only live music is allowed for weddings in the Chapel of the Incarnate Word and must be contracted through one of the organists from our Approved List of Organists.* No electronic instruments or sound reinforcement devices may be brought into the Chapel. Additional musicians are allowed, but must be contracted through the selected organist. If these musicians require rehearsal time other than the scheduled access time for the rehearsal and wedding, they must arrange this time with the wedding office through the organist. The fee is \$175.00 per half hour. A vocalist is required to cantor certain parts of the Mass. The vocalist is selected and contracted through the organist.

The organist you choose will guide you through the music selection process. In general, traditional, classical music is acceptable. If, however, the origin or current association of the music piece overshadows, or has the potential to distract from the liturgical and ritual focus of the sacrament, then the piece is inappropriate in a worship setting. The wedding marches written by Wagner and Mendelssohn are considered popular music because they originated in operas and were played either during bedroom scenes or in scenes which mocked the religious nature of marriage. Therefore, the Church does not consider them appropriate for a Catholic wedding.

Singing together is an essential sign of our communion with God and with each other. There will be several opportunities during your wedding for this to take place. You are encouraged to print responses and words to hymns in a worship aid (booklet). If your Catholic Marriage is taking place within Mass, we require the Communion Song be one the assembly is familiar with and can sing as they process to Communion. Your organist can help you with this music selection.

The Chapel Office reserves the right to review and approve the music selections.

Photography and Videography: Many couples and their families desire to remember the wedding day with photographs. The following rules are meant to allow this to be done while celebrating the wedding in a dignified and religious manner:

- Only a professional photographer from our pre-approved list is allowed to take pictures of your wedding. The photographers on this list have signed a contract with the Chapel agreeing to be responsible for the type of pictures they take in the church and for following all the Chapel rules. The photographer and assistant are the only ones allowed to move about the Chapel taking pictures during the ceremony.
- Please be advised, if you hire a photographer off the list, you may find it difficult to contract one of our photographers for just the ceremony. This could result in no pictures of your church ceremony, or formals afterwards.
- If for some reason you engage the services of a photographer not on the chapel's pre-approved list, the photographer must sign a contract with the chapel regarding appropriate photographer practices. If the photographer breaks any of the signed rules during the wedding, they will be asked to cease taking photographs for the remainder of the time. This can lead to no formal pictures being taken after the ceremony.
- Any contract negotiated between a photographer and the couple is strictly between them. The Chapel is not responsible for those contracts, other than to insist both parties follow the Chapel rules.
- Videography is not allowed during weddings in the Chapel of the Incarnate Word.
- Flash photography is allowed only for the Procession in, the Procession out, and for the formal photos after the wedding.
- Guests are not allowed to take pictures or video during the wedding ceremony. This type of activity obstructs the view of others, and disrupts the prayerful participation of other guests.
- Without a contract with one of our pre-approved photographers, no formal pictures will be allowed after the ceremony. The contracted photographer is the primary person in charge of taking the formal pictures after the wedding. Guests must not interfere with this photo session.
- The formal photo session after the wedding should take approximately 30 minutes and is limited to standing poses only on the first group of altar steps. No sitting on the altar steps is allowed by anyone, including children, and no leaning over, horizontal, or otherwise inappropriate pictures may be taken in the Chapel.

- The altar to the Holy Family and the Blessed Sacrament Chapel are not backdrops for this session. The only other locations for formals inside the Chapel would be of just the couple or the bride in the center aisle or on the first level of the winding staircase.
- The photographer is not allowed to take pictures from the choir loft. The choir loft is for musicians only.
- The rules of modesty in dress extend to the photo session. Wraps must stay on for all pictures inside the Chapel. The photo session will end if this rule is not followed.

Flowers, Decorations, & Commemorative Items: You will find that the Chapel needs no decoration. For this reason, the only flowers that may be brought into the Chapel are the personal or body flowers: corsages, boutonnieres, and bouquets.

- Nothing may be hung on the furniture or dropped on the floor (for example, flower petals).
- No liturgical dressing already in place in the Chapel may be moved or removed.
- Runners may not be used, and no banners of any kind may be carried or displayed.
- Personal flowers must be delivered to the Chapel level and placed on the table near the staircase. Water must be dried from the base of bouquets, and containers of water carried out of the Chapel. The Chapel staff is not responsible for disposing of these containers.
- No farewell or commemorative items (like bells, bubbles, flowers, streamers, or wands) are to be distributed inside the Chapel or used outside. Decorations are not allowed anywhere on the Chapel steps or railings, or on the Chapel grounds. No rice, birdseed, or confetti is to be thrown inside or outside. No light shows are allowed, and nothing is to be released into the air. Please consider the spirit of this rule when considering any other celebratory ideas not listed here.

Wedding Procession: The Wedding Procession is the ritual entrance of the ministers of the liturgy. The bride and groom will walk at the end of the procession because in Roman Catholic weddings they are the primary ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage and primary ministers enter last in liturgical processions. The rite calls for you to process as a couple, or you may be escorted by your parents and your witnesses.

The rite suggests two alternatives for the opening procession of a wedding:

- One option is to have the priest or deacon greet you at the door of the church and process before you toward the altar; similar to the start of a typical Sunday Eucharist.
- The other option is to have the priest or deacon standing at the foot of the altar to greet you as you process toward the front of the church.

- The Liturgical Ministers may enter, followed by the Priest or Deacon. The bridesmaids and groomsmen enter the church next as couples, followed by flower girls and ring bearers.
- The groom enters with his parents. Last to enter is the bride with her parents. There are variations of this, and the Chapel staff will work with you.
- We realize this is not the procession typically seen at weddings; however, this is the processional entrance observed at the Chapel of the Incarnate Word. Special circumstances can be discussed.
- Only one piece of music is allowed for the entire Wedding Procession, including the bride. The “traditional” wedding marches by Wagner and Mendelssohn are not to be used. These music selections are taken from operas that do not reflect favorably on marriage as a Sacrament.

Dressing Areas: The Bride’s Room is available for the bride and bridesmaids as a dressing area, and the Sacristy is available for the groom and groomsmen. *Both of these areas must be cleared of personal items **before the wedding begins**.* Neither the staff nor the Congregation is responsible for items left in either of these places.

Decorum: The Chapel is a house of worship, and is to be treated with reverence.

- No chewing gum, food, or drinks of any kind are allowed in the Chapel. We will ask you to remove them.
- Cold water will be available in the Bride’s Room and Sacristy for the couple, clergy, and wedding party and must be consumed in those areas.
- No alcohol is allowed anywhere on the premises, and anyone bringing alcohol into the Chapel or onto the property will be asked to leave. Breaking this rule could cost the couple the security deposit. **If the bride or groom has consumed alcohol, the wedding will be cancelled.**
- Smoking is not permitted in the Chapel or on the grounds.
- Cell phones are a necessary part of life, but please turn them off or on silent / vibrate for the rehearsal and the wedding. Talking on the phone while in Church is irreverent and unacceptable.
- Restrooms and the water fountain are located on the first floor of the building adjoining the Chapel and can be accessed by the elevator.
- We ask adults who bring children into the Chapel to be responsible for their supervision. There is no cry room in the Chapel; upset children may be taken to the lobby area on the first floor of the adjoining building, close to the restrooms and water fountain.

We hold that the celebration of the Sacraments is Christ revealed to the People of God, "par excellence." Therefore, the Chapel staff works directly with the bride and groom, their clergy, and other ministers to plan the details of the ceremony so that the Sacrament is worthily celebrated. Chapel staff will advise the couple regarding the order of the procession, and works with the clergy to run the rehearsal. Wedding Coordinators may attend meetings and come to the Chapel as guests of the couple, but must not interfere with the liturgical duties of the Chapel staff.

Dress Code

First and foremost, your wedding is a Sacrament of the Church, and your attire should reflect the regard with which you hold the Sacrament of Marriage. When you and your guests enter the Chapel of the Incarnate Word, you are greeted with a quote from scripture, "My House is a House of Prayer." The Chapel of the Incarnate Word is a place held in particular reverence by the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word.

- To respect the sanctity of marriage and the sacred space in which you are being married, we expect brides, grooms, the wedding party, and anyone participating in the ceremony to dress in modest, formal attire.
- Clothing should be in keeping with the couple's families cultural heritage, and attire should be within the cultural norm one would wear for a wedding in a sacred space. If any of the below guidelines are not in keeping with your cultural norm, please alert the wedding coordinator.
- Dresses and shirts must not have a plunging neckline or a bare back (below where a bra typically sits) and must have straps over the shoulders that are wider than a "spaghetti strap". If any dress or shirt does not comply, a wrap, shawl, or removable sleeves must be worn.
- Pants, skirts, and dresses must be at least knee length.
- The color of the bride and groom's attire must be kept within the cultural norms of a wedding.
- No sandals / flip flops are allowed for footwear.
- No hats are to be worn while inside the church.

Note: This extends to the rehearsal as well as the ceremony and pictures. If you have any questions about a particular article of clothing, please reach out to the wedding coordinator.