

Weddings in Alumni Chapel



To schedule a wedding at Alumni Chapel, contact us at 716.286.8412

Welcome!

Niagara University Campus Ministry welcomes students, employees, and alumni wishing to have their wedding in Alumni Chapel. We join you and your families in rejoicing as you prepare for the day when you pledge your lifelong love for each other in the presence of God and the Church, the body of Christ.

We hope that your planning and preparation will result in an experience that is a true expression of your love for each other and your faith in God as you publicly express your lifelong commitment. To answer questions about this important event in your life, we offer the following information. If you have additional questions, contact the Office of Campus Ministry by phone at 716.286.8400.

Alumni Chapel operates under the auspices of Niagara University and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Buffalo, NY as a Catholic chapel. Therefore, policies and procedures for weddings are consonant with Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church and the Diocese of Buffalo.

Requirements

For a couple to be eligible for marriage in Alumni Chapel, one of the two must be an NU alumnus, current student, faculty, or staff member.

Weddings are celebrated in Alumni Chapel for two practicing Roman Catholics or a Roman Catholic marrying a non-Catholic. The chapel is not available for non-Catholic or non-denominational weddings.

The couple must engage in a Catholic wedding preparation program, which includes several meetings with a parish priest, attendance at a Pre-Cana program, and submission of a recent copy of the baptismal certificate, the pastor's letter giving permission for the wedding to take place at NU, and if previously married, a copy of the decree of nullity. These documents are listed in a separate section.

Since Niagara University Campus Ministry does not offer marriage preparation, it is the engaged couple's responsibility to contact a parish priest and arrange to begin marriage instruction, as well as to register for attendance at a Pre-Cana program. The parish priest will have information on requirements for marriage instruction and the dates and locations of Pre-Cana programs. Weddings can only take place in Alumni Chapel when all required documents have been submitted, and marriage instruction and Pre-Cana requirements have been completed.

Depending on the time of year when the couple is seeking to be married, it may be necessary for them to supply their own priest or deacon for their wedding in Alumni Chapel. The couple will be apprised of this when they confirm the date.

It is the responsibility of the couple to present all the required documentation (listed below) to the Office of Campus Ministry, along with payment of any fees one month prior to the date of the wedding.

Documentation

The following wedding documents are required and must be submitted to the Office of Campus Ministry at least one month prior to the date of the wedding:

From the couple

- For the Catholic party: A copy of the baptismal certificate issued by the parish within six months prior to the wedding date.
- For the non-Catholic Christian party: the same as above.

- For the Catholic party: a letter of permission from the pastor of the parish giving permission for the wedding to take place in Alumni Chapel.
- The “Pre-Cana” program attendance certificate.

From the priest or deacon responsible for the marriage preparation

- The original “PNI” form (Pre-Nuptial Investigation) completed by the couple and the priest or deacon with whom they did the marriage preparation.
- In the case where a Catholic marries a Non-Catholic, the original copy of the dispensation must also be enclosed.

Wedding Times

Weddings are scheduled at these times

- Friday: 4 p.m.
- Saturday: 1 p.m. and 4 p.m.

Weddings are not scheduled on Sundays, other solemn feast days, when the University is officially closed, or on federal holidays. Wedding rehearsals are usually scheduled the night before the wedding beginning at 5 p.m., at intervals of one hour. Other times may be decided in mutual agreement with the couple and Campus Ministry. A sacristan is available to assist at the rehearsal and for the wedding ceremony.

Fees

There is a fee to be married in Alumni Chapel, please contact Campus Ministry for more information.

Music

It is the responsibility of the couple to provide their own musician and/or soloist for their wedding. If the couple chooses to bring in their own musician(s) and soloist for the wedding, one or both must be familiar with Catholic liturgy and the wedding ritual. Campus Ministry provides a contact list of area organists, instrumentalists, vocalists and cantors as a resource for couples seeking assistance. It is recommended that the couple make contact early, as Church organists, pianists, instrumentalists, vocalists, and cantors are often booked for weddings and church events well in advance.

Decorations

The couple may adorn the altar or sanctuary with flowers at their wedding. They may also place bows on the end of pews. The delivery time for flowers and decorating of the Chapel must be coordinated with the Office of Campus Ministry a week before the wedding date. We do not permit the use of rice on the steps after the ceremony, nor the use of flower petals to be strewn in the center aisle before the bridal procession into the chapel. Both are a potential safety hazard.



It is also not advisable to use a 'runner' for the bride's procession up the aisle, as it may cause tripping or falling, especially during the communion rite. If the couple is insistent on using a 'runner', it is strongly advised that it be a cloth one.

Alumni Chapel Logistics

Alumni Chapel is configured in this way: the main (middle) section is comprised of 24 pews (12 each side), and each pew holds 6 people. On the left side there are 6 pews, and on the right side there are 5 pews (11 total). Each of the 11 side pews holds 7 people. The total seating capacity is 221. The middle aisle in the chapel is 43.5 feet long.



Photography

Couples should be sure the photographer they hire is familiar with the format of Catholic wedding liturgies, both the Nuptial Mass and the wedding ceremony. Photographers are not permitted in the sanctuary at any time during the wedding, nor should their presence block or obstruct or interfere with the celebrant or any member of the wedding party. The photographer may also use the choir loft for picture taking, and should inform the sacristan before the ceremony.

Video photographers are welcome as long as they use a stationary stand. Handheld and “roving” video photography is not permitted. Couples are welcome to take family and wedding party pictures in the chapel after the wedding. This must be arranged at the wedding rehearsal with the sacristan to insure it will not interfere with another wedding or events later that day in the chapel.

Social Media

Please consider sharing your memorable day with the Niagara University Alumni Office by sending your wedding announcement and photograph to the Office of Alumni Engagement. Please include names, class year(s), contact information and a high resolution photo.

Previous Marriage/Divorce

If one or both of the engaged party was previously married and divorced, he or she must obtain an annulment by the Catholic Church. The priest or deacon responsible for their marriage preparation can provide information about the annulment process.

If one or both engaged persons were previously married and divorced, and the Church does not recognize the previous marriage(s), a dispensation must be obtained either from the diocesan Chancery or Marriage Tribunal in the person's place of residence before the marriage can take place. This, too, can be handled through the priest or deacon doing the marriage preparation.

Both an annulment and a dispensation take time to process. There is considerable work that must be done to gather and evaluate information. Because of this factor, a wedding date may not be set until the proper annulment or dispensation has been granted.

Planning the Wedding Ceremony

There are many options to consider in planning a wedding liturgy. Together for Life is a helpful resource book used in most marriage preparation programs, providing the format for both the Nuptial Mass and Church wedding ceremony. It also contains a wealth of prayers, Scripture readings, and blessings in the liturgy to help the couple choose what is most appropriate and meaningful for them. For the engaged couple, Together for Life is a valuable resource in planning the wedding ceremony.



Spiritual Preparation for Christian Marriage

Marriage preparation in the Catholic Church has both ecclesial and spiritual dimensions. It is meant to help the couple understand the link in marriage between commitment and faith. Marriage preparation, done with a priest or deacon, provides an opportunity for important interaction and sharing valuable insights on how to better understand both Church doctrine and apply the rich tradition of Catholic spirituality.

Attendance at Sunday Eucharist and participation in the Sacrament of Penance also assist the couple in spiritual preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage. Both the Sunday Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance will enhance and deepen the couple's relationship with Jesus, the foundation of their married life.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the purpose of marriage preparation?

The Church provides marriage preparation to assist the engaged couple in evaluating their readiness to live married life as a sacrament of the Church. It is meant to help them better understand the importance of commitment and their marital vocation.

What does marriage preparation in the Catholic Church actually entail?

While it may vary slightly from diocese to diocese, it basically involves three elements: instruction from a parish priest or deacon for two or three sessions; attendance at a Pre-Cana program run by the parish or diocese (usually held on a weekend day for several hours); and compiling information for the file, such as baptismal certificates, letters of permission from the parish pastor to be married at NU, and other relevant information (such as a copy of the annulment decree if previously married).

What is meant by instruction by the priest or deacon?

A priest or deacon charged with marriage instruction usually meets with the couple several times. The first is to collect information needed for Church records (called Pre-Nuptial Investigation, or PNI) and to discuss marriage from a Catholic and Christian perspective. Also, the priest or deacon may give the couple a survey to fill out that will help them measure their understanding of key aspects of their relationship and of married life. At the second meeting, the priest or deacon will go over the results of the survey with the couple and invite their input. He will continue discussion of Christian marriage, inviting them to share their insights and concerns. The third and final meeting will be to plan the wedding ceremony with the couple. The above is but an outline; dioceses or parishes may use different formats to accomplish what is listed above.

What is a “Pre-Cana” program?

Pre-Cana is different from instruction with a priest or deacon. It is done in a workshop format and is sponsored by a diocesan office. The format is a series of talks by married couples on the social, psychological, spiritual, and financial aspects of married life. In between presentations, participants gather into small groups for discussion. It is usually held on a Saturday or Sunday at a retreat house or parish and runs several hours, ending with a meal. A “couple to couple” type of workshop, it is generally well-received.

Another Pre-Cana option for the couple is to do a weekend retreat. Often known as “Engaged Encounter,” the program entails much of the same elements of a one-day Pre-Cana, with more time built in for in-depth discussion and reflection on marriage.

How does “Pre-Cana” program differ from marriage instruction?

Pre-Cana is a crucial element of marriage preparation and is done with other married couples, while marriage instruction includes time for marriage preparation with a priest or deacon. Pre-Cana is always done in group format, while marriage instruction is between the couple and the priest or deacon giving the instruction.

Why are some dates unavailable for a wedding?

While Campus Ministry tries to accommodate couples wishing to be married in Alumni Chapel, the office is bound by the university calendar. When NU is closed for religious or federal holidays, services on campus are vastly reduced. Additionally, in the months of October and May there are a number of University-sponsored events in which Alumni Chapel is used. These include Alumni and Family Weekends, Admissions Open House, and Commencement Weekend. Besides the chapel being unavailable, campus parking is at a premium at these times.

Why must we find our own priest if we want to be married at Alumni Chapel at certain times in the year?

There are certain times when the priest staff will be unavailable because of Campus Ministry weekend programs for students which require a priest, such as retreats. Also, due to the decreasing number of Vincentian priests, participation in University functions and campus events must take precedence over outside weddings.

What is the difference between a wedding ceremony and a Nuptial Mass?

Nuptial Mass is a liturgy which contains a wedding ceremony as part of the Mass. It has all the elements of a regular Mass, except after the homily, the couple exchanges vows and their wedding rings are blessed. In a wedding ceremony, there are scriptural readings, hymns, the exchange of vows and rings, and prayers without the Eucharist (Holy Communion).

A wedding ceremony is done instead of a Nuptial Mass when one of the parties to be married is non-Catholic, since the non-Catholic party cannot receive the Eucharist. A couple who are both Catholic may opt for the wedding ceremony instead of a Nuptial Mass. However, it should be noted that the Church believes the Eucharist to be the "source and summit of Christian life," and a profound way for a couple to begin their living out of the marital covenant.

How soon should a couple begin marriage preparation with their parish priest?

In these days of “doing more with less,” parish priests and deacons are very busy people, so it is advisable to start at least a year in advance of your wedding. Please know that the seasons of Advent and Lent are filled with many duties for priests and deacons. Since marriage instruction involves several meetings, and gathering the paperwork takes time, the couple should plan ahead for adequate time to meet with the priest or deacon. While most parishes require six months of notification to begin marriage preparation, it is advisable to aim for ten to twelve months to begin preparation with a priest or deacon.