

Rehearsal dinner way to thank family, friends

With stomachs rumbling as a wedding rehearsal proceeds, thoughts of the forthcoming meal may cause even the most alert participants to lose focus of their instructions.

It's traditionally up to the family of the groom to feed members of the wedding party after they have absorbed their responsibilities for the upcoming nuptials.

Etiquette doesn't dictate if the rehearsal dinner should be fancy or casual, but it does command who should be included in the invitation list, according to two different Baltimore-area wedding consultants.

"The bride and groom, all of their parents, immediate family members, grandparents and the entire bridal party should be invited to the rehearsal dinner," said Christina A. Hagan, a coordinator for Extraordinary Occasions, a Columbia-based wedding and event consulting firm. "These are the people that will be involved in the actual wedding rehearsal."

The hosts of the rehearsal dinner may also include readers, ushers and any other people involved in the actual ceremony, but those invitations are optional, Ms. Hagan said.

"The rehearsal dinner is a wonderful celebration and really comes with very few hard and fast rules," she said. "The guest list can be expanded if the host and hostess wish."

Sometimes the hosts will also invite the significant others of members of the wedding party and out-of-town guests who have arrived early for the ceremony, said Natalie West Makel, owner of Unforgettable Weddings in northwest Baltimore.

"But, you have to be careful about that, or you run the risk of having 100,000 people at the rehearsal dinner," Ms. Makel said with a laugh. "I let the hosts know it's better to limit the number for the rehearsal dinner, so you don't have chaos or lose

sight of what that event is supposed to signify.”

In addition to feeding hungry wedding party members, the rehearsal dinner is meant to be an expression of gratitude for the sacrifices they make to participate in the wedding, she said.

“The rehearsal dinner also gives the bride and groom an opportunity to give the members of their wedding party their gifts for being in their wedding,” Ms. Makel said.

Both consultants recommend sending formal invitations to guests of the rehearsal dinner at least two weeks before the event, and ask for an R.S.V.P. to get an accurate count.

“I also recommend holding the wedding rehearsal and dinner on a Thursday, if the wedding is going to be on a Saturday,” said Ms. Makel. “That way, the bride and the groom can have Friday to take care of any last minute details, and to have a day of pampering, before the big event.”