

Marriage Preparation Quick Guide

FOR USE BY CLERGY & Trained Staff Only **Marriage Prep always begins with the local Pastor and/or his delegate**

Married Christians, in virtue of the Sacrament of Matrimony, signify and share in the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and his Church; they help each other in attaining holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children; and they have their own special gift among the people of God.

“The Church’s role, as well as the primary task of clergy and others in marriage preparation it seems, is to assist the couple in making a judgment about their relational readiness and personal faith, not to make those judgements for or about them.” (USCCB Faithful to Each Other Forever pp.63)

“The goal of the initial contact is to communicate an attitude of openness toward couples seeking to marry, whatever their religious background or level of faith and to direct the couple to an initial face-to-face interview with the proper pastor or his trained representative. Couples are to be treated with respect, openness and warmth, regardless of their faith development, registration status in the parish or financial contributions. This step should not be done over the phone or by clerical staff and volunteers.” (USCCB Faithful to Each Other Forever pp. 58-59)

What follows is an outline of Marriage preparation steps, key elements of formation and necessary forms & certificates. Please view this simply as an outline and neither a mandate nor an all-inclusive document.

I. Marriage Preparation Steps

1. Warmly greet and get to know the couple, hear their story. Begin to ascertain the couple’s attitudes, beliefs and expectations.
2. Begin the process of assessing the couple’s readiness for the Sacrament and/or valid matrimony.
3. Explain to them what is involved, help them to understand why this is important and valuable to their future marriage.
4. Discuss time expectations and impediments (any previous marriage, etc.).
5. Begin completing the prenuptial questionnaire.
6. Discuss and provide appropriate formation (different programs and several sessions).
7. Complete marriage assessment (Foccus, Re-Foccus or others).
8. NFP& retreat for most couples if appropriate.
9. Complete and gather all forms, (permissions/delegations/dispensations) & certificates.
10. When appropriate, set a tentative wedding date.
11. Discuss and prepare ceremony (with-in Mass or outside of Mass).

II. Key Elements of Formation/Catechesis

1. Secular context of marriage today (contract, dissolvable).
2. Church understanding: Sacrament/Grace & validity/Covenant-permanence.
3. Requirements for validity.
4. Role of faith (including Scripture and prayer).
5. Theology of the Body (sex and sexuality).
6. Value of children and parenting.
7. Roles, expectations and responsibilities.
8. Natural Family Planning (when appropriate).
9. Communication and conflict resolution.
10. Meaning of permanence and forgiveness.

11. Self-awareness and personal healing (repentance).

III. Necessary Forms

1. Diocesan Marriage Envelope (white).
2. Prenuptial Interview (MA).
3. Freedom Affidavits (MB) two each witnessed by a Catholic cleric.
4. Baptism certificates, recently issued or affidavit from witnesses (if applicable).
5. Dispensations and/or permissions from bishop/chancellor as required.
6. Completion certificates (formation, NFP, retreat, Foccus* or different assessment).
7. Decree of nullity if applicable.
8. Death certificate if applicable.

**note: we no longer require the four page Foccus report (MD) from assessors. Please discontinue using. A simple certificate indicating completion will suffice.*

IV. Helpful Practices

1. If possible, maintain a digital scanned copy of all marriage files that leave your parish office (marriage being celebrated in a different parish or diocese).
2. Pastoral Services is glad to approve marriage files making use of a scanned copy for any marriage where the preparation took place in your parish and will be celebrated in your parish. This reduces the risk of postal failures and saves you and your staff time.
3. Marriage files leaving your parish and/or leaving our diocese requires more time to handle at the chancellor's office. (out of diocese, allow at least six weeks)
4. Pastors may decide to use different "formation" programs. There is no "one size fits all". If you have questions regarding formation programs or content, please contact Pastoral Services. A comprehensive curriculum is available on our website for your convenience.

Please do not hesitate to contact Pastoral Services with any questions regarding marriage prep and celebration of Holy Matrimony.