

What is the Catholic Church's Marriage Preparation Process ?

1. Call your parish (generally at least 8-12 months before the wedding). Call as soon as a couple is engaged, they are encouraged to schedule a meeting with their pastor/deacon to discuss your wedding preparations, as soon as possible. The parish to start the Marriage Preparation process is normally the parish having jurisdiction over the couple (i.e., where at least one of the parties lives) or is/are registered. Please remember: Contact the parish church responsible for starting the marriage preparation before scheduling the wedding reception location, ordering invitations, booking honeymoon reservations, etc.

2. **Initial Meeting** (8-12 months before the wedding): With the priest/deacon, the couple learns about the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony preparation process and the needed documentation for their marriage.

3. **FOCCUS Inventory** (8-12 months before the wedding): The FOCCUS Inventory provides the couple with a detailed profile of their current standing in a myriad of subject categories that have proven to be crucial in a successful relationship and marriage. The parish will schedule the couple's inventory session and, upon completion, schedule the couple to meet and dialogue with a trained FOCCUS facilitating couple to discuss the results. These sessions aim to facilitate better communication between the future spouses. Only after the FOCCUS Inventory is taken should a tentative wedding date be set.

(Note: (1) If the couple intends to be wed at another parish (other than where the marriage preparation began), the priest/deacon must know, as soon as possible – since written permission to marry at another Church is needed by the Pastor or Bishop, and (2) If the wedding is to be officiated by other than the priest or deacon of the parish where the marriage preparation is occurring, likewise the parish priest/deacon must know, as soon as possible – since written delegation of authority to marry is needed by the Pastor for the desired priest or deacon to witness the marriage.)

4. **Marriage Preparation Classes** (8-10 months before the wedding): Various programs are available within dioceses. The most popular in the Diocese of Colorado Springs is Catholic Marriage Prep Classes (available in person and on-line); which focus on theology of Catholic marriage and important life skills.

5. **Natural Family Planning (NFP)** (5-6 months before the wedding): NFP respects the love-giving and life-giving natures of marriage, and enriches the bond between husband and wife. This course gives couples a natural approach to understanding the human body's natural cycles of fertility and infertility.

6. **Engaged Encounter Retreat** (2-4 months before the wedding): This or an equivalent retreat designed for couples in the preparation process for the Sacrament of Matrimony is strongly encouraged.

7. **Final Meeting** (2 months before the wedding): This meeting with the priest/deacon (who generally began the couple's marriage preparation process) will review the couple's completion of all of the preparation process stages and remaining paperwork; and finalize the liturgical planning for the wedding.

8. **Sacrament of Reconciliation** (1 week before the wedding): Catholics preparing for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony are strongly encouraged to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Reconciliation ensures the recipient(s) is/are properly disposed to receive the graces of the sacrament.

Marriages in which the partners do not share the same religious beliefs and affiliations are considered "mixed" marriages. If a Catholic and a baptized non-Christian, the marriage is considered interfaith.

Baptized Catholics are required to follow the laws and norms of the Church and marry according to "canonical form," that is: in a Catholic Church, witnessed by an ordained priest/deacon with faculties for that jurisdiction, and utilizing the church's prescribed ritual of marriage.

Any previous marriage(s) by either partner is an impediment or obstacle to receiving the Sacrament of Matrimony in the Catholic Church, unless the previous marriage(s) has been annulled.