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# ***Walking Together with Christ***

Preparation Guidelines  
and Policies  
for Parish Celebrations of the  
Sacrament of Matrimony



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(Revised: 10/01/2021)

## **CELEBRATING MARRIAGE**

We at the St. Michael Catholic Church realize that you are facing one of the most important decisions of your lives. It is not only a decision that affects your individual lives; it also is a celebration of the whole parish community, indeed the whole Church.

In order to allow sufficient reflection, education, and formation for this most serious decision, in an adequate and unhurried way, a period of approximately **one year** of marriage preparation is required. The main focus of this time will be spent on your preparedness to live your future lives together. In addition, time will be spent on preparing for the liturgical celebration itself.

It is important to realize that Marriage in the Catholic Church is not simply a legal or official recognition that two people have decided to become man and wife in the eyes of society. It is a **SACRAMENT**. Like all Sacraments, the presence of God is found, and in each case our relationship to the Lord is deepened.

Because marriage is a Sacrament, something special happens. The union of man and woman brings about the existence of a new reality, a new creation. "...and the two shall become one body." (Genesis 2:24)

A solid and practical preparation to receive this sacrament is an important first step toward ensuring success. Preparing for marriage entails much more than arranging for the wedding. Marriage preparation is like getting ready for a long journey. It requires a clear knowledge of the terrain, the attaining of those special skills needed for the journey, and last, but in no way least, a deep knowledge of one's traveling companion!

Within the Diocese of Colorado Springs, the marriage preparation process is divided into 6 parts or segments (initial meeting with the pastor; FOCCUS inventory; Marriage Preparation classes (online or in class); Natural Family Planning; an Engaged Encounter weekend retreat; and a final meeting with the pastor or deacon. All of these stages must be completed before the ceremony can be performed.

## **POLICIES OF THE DIOCESE OF COLORADO SPRINGS**

***THE MARRIAGE OF MINORS*** — The general policy is that no one is to assist at a marriage of a person under the age of 18 and/or when the parents are unaware of the marriage or are reasonably opposed to it.

***IN THE CASE OF PREGNANCY*** — A request for marriage in the Church will be considered following the review of the FOCCUS evaluations and professional counseling (if/as needed), as well as consultation of the parents/guardians of both parties if either is under the age of 21.

***INTERFAITH AND ECUMENICAL MARRIAGES*** — In addition to completing the appropriate marriage preparation requirements in this policy, special sessions to acquaint or update the couple's understanding of Catholic beliefs and practices are strongly suggested.

The Catholic party should also become acquainted with the religious traditions of his or her future spouse. The minister of the non-Catholic partner may be invited to participate in the marriage preparation and in the wedding ceremony.

***REMARRIAGE*** — Preparation for remarriage is required allowing for special considerations. Because of the pastoral concern for the person requesting to remarry, and recognizing other special needs, remarriage preparation includes: closure of the first marriage, establishing new ties, blending of families, exploring the expectations of the new marriage, and the development of communication skills. In addition to these needs, a Declaration of Nullity (also called an "annulment") (which applies only to a previous Sacrament of Matrimony) must be obtained in the case of the person wishing to remarry who has had a civil divorce.

***VALIDATION*** — If a couple is not married in accordance with the laws of the Church, a validation (recognition of the marriage in the Church) is permitted only after the couple has completed the marriage preparation process, unless pastoral concern dictates otherwise.

**SPECIAL NOTES:** There is to be **NO** consumption of alcohol, drugs or other chemicals on the church property prior to, during, and after the marriage. To consume such materials prior to the wedding, the parties run the risk of the wedding being cancelled by the celebrant due to a diminished capacity by the parties to express valid consent. Also, there is no smoking in the church or basement areas.

### **PREPARATION:**

The purpose of this preparation time is to assist each engaged couple to share their feelings, attitudes, expectations and beliefs about themselves and the essential elements and meaning of a Christian marriage. This preparation will not focus primarily on the wedding day, but rather on how two people can live out, in a Christian lifestyle, a commitment in life and love.

If you have decided to pursue the Sacrament of Matrimony here at the St. Michael Catholic Church, the first step is to set up an appointment with our priest or deacon. At that initial meeting, discussion will begin on the sacramental nature of marriage. In addition, the process of filling out the necessary paperwork will begin. In the event one of you is non-Catholic, the question of raising the children in the Catholic faith will be thoroughly discussed during the meeting and both parties will be asked to attest to this fact—and therefore should be discussed by the couple in advance also.

The main tool of formation during this phase of preparation is known as “THE FOCCUS INVENTORY”. This is not a test with a pass/fail result, but rather a confidential, communication tool. After you have had your initial visit with the priest or deacon, you will be asked to complete this inventory. Your honest responses will help you and your fiancée to recognize some of the strengths and weaknesses of your current relationship and communicative abilities, and aid in your personal discussion on the various aspects of your understanding of marriage, including conflict resolution, common social growth, finances, religious faith, parenting issues, etc.

After the FOCCUS inventory has been processed, the couple will meet with a FOCCUS facilitator couple from the parish to discuss the results. This couple will have the opportunity to present perspective on the essential human and Christian aspects of marriage in the light of their own experience.

The discussions the couple has with these FOCCUS facilitators are carried on in an informal way, and on a couple-to-couple basis, rather than in a class or retreat atmosphere. There is no set number of meetings with the couple. The number will depend on each individual couple's preparedness and peculiar circumstances.

### **THE ENGAGED COUPLE WEEKEND**

This experience is designed to give couples any opportunity in a group setting to talk honestly and intensively about their prospective lives together.

NOTE: The engaged couple is free to schedule the Engaged Couple Weekend anytime after beginning the preparation period. In the event one or both parties are out of town (e.g., away at school or working out of town), it is suggested that arrangements be made to attend the Marriage Preparation Program provided in that city or diocese.

**Catholic Engaged Encounter of Colorado Springs**  
**17902 New London Road**  
**Monument, CO 80132 (719-481-8784)**

Web address to download registration packets and information  
[www.coscee.org](http://www.coscee.org)

**CATHOLIC MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM:** Please refer to: <http://www.catholicmarriagepreonline.com> for more information and registration forms.

**NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING (NFP):** Please refer to: <http://www.coloradonfp.org> or <http://www.denver.ccli.org> or <http://www.novuscor.com> for more information and to register.

During this phase of preparation, the couple will meet with the presider or wedding coordinator to plan the Rite of Marriage itself, (i.e., the prayers, readings, blessings etc.). This preparation is to be a joint effort by both fiancées and should express their values and hopes for their future life together. **In planning the wedding itself, SIMPLICITY should be of primary concern.**

## PROCEDURES

**Baptismal Certificate** — The Catholic bride and/or groom will need to secure a **recent** copy of their baptismal record. This certificate **must** be dated no more than six months prior to the marriage. The certificate must be obtained from the church of baptism. A copy that may be in the possession of the family **does not** suffice. A current copy of the baptismal record gives us documentary proof that the Catholic party is in fact free to marry. If either party to the proposed marriage has been married before, it is requested they discuss it with the parish's priest or deacon, as soon as possible, to ascertain its impact on the preparations for a marriage in the Catholic Church.

**Parent Testimony** — One or both of each of the fiancés' parents will be asked to answer some questions regarding the freedom to marry of the engaged couple. It takes only a few minutes to answer the necessary questions and the parent (s) are asked to call and set up an appointment with the parish priest/deacon, at their convenience, to fill out this questionnaire. If the parent(s) are out of town, a form can be sent to them, which they are asked to take to the local Catholic priest who will ask the questions and return the completed form to our parish. If parents are deceased, another immediate family member who has known the bride or groom all of their life (e.g., aunt, uncle, older brother or sister) may answer the questions.

**Marriage License** — The marriage license must be applied for within 30 days of the marriage, not before. ***PLEASE BRING THE MARRIAGE LICENSE TO THE REHEARSAL. PLEASE REMEMBER WITHOUT THE MARRIAGE LICENSE, THE MARRIAGE CANNOT AND WILL NOT TAKE PLACE.***

## WHO MAY MARRY IN THE ST. MICHAEL PARISH?

The answer to this question is governed in part by the Code of Canon Law. Registered members of our parish may celebrate their weddings here at St. Michael Catholic Church. Catholics who live within the boundaries of the parish, but who have no formal relationship with the parish, will speak to the pastor about establishing a relationship with the parish with an eye towards celebrating a wedding in the future. Those outside the parish must also confer directly with the pastor.

## SETTING THE WEDDING DATE

Dates for a wedding are only **tentative**, until the engaged couple has met with the priest or deacon and completed all of the marriage preparation process required of the Diocese of Colorado Springs.

## SHOULD WE MARRY AT MASS, OR JUST A SIMPLE CEREMONY OF THE EXCHANGE OF VOWS?

When a wedding is celebrated at Mass, the rite of marriage takes place after the homily and before the prayers of the faithful; the liturgy of the Eucharist then follows. When a wedding is celebrated outside of Mass, it is celebrated in a liturgy of the Word in which the rite of marriage takes place after the homily and before the prayers of the faithful. This rite concludes with prayers and blessings. You should make this decision as a couple, and in consultation with the parish's priest or deacon.

**If both parties are Catholic:** What is our relationship to the Sunday Eucharist? Remember it is the model on which our marriage Mass should be based. **As a reminder, if one party is non-Catholic,** that person would not be receiving Holy Communion, you may want to consider what this means.

**WHO WILL YOUR GUESTS BE?** If many or most are from outside the Catholic Community, you may want to consider preparing some way for them to follow the Eucharistic Liturgy or consider celebrating your Marriage in a liturgy of the Word and Exchange of Vows only.

**LOCAL PARISH POLICIES** — Please read carefully

**Hours of Weddings** — Weddings may be scheduled subject to the approval of the pastor. Because of liturgies and regularly scheduled Mass, confessions, etc., weddings **must** begin on time.

**Wedding Coordinator** — The parish coordinator will be available to help plan the rite itself and will actually facilitate the rehearsal. Scheduling of the rehearsal is to be made directly with the coordinator. Usual time for the rehearsal is the evening before the wedding at approximately 7:00 pm. **THOSE TAKING PART IN THE REHEARSAL MUST BE PROMPT!**

**Rice** — Rice and other substances (such as bird seed, confetti, rose pedals, etc.) are not permitted to be thrown on the Church property (inside or outside). Such substances can be hazardous and require considerable time and expense to remove. Please use balloons or bubbles outside the church building.

**Photographs** — Photographs may be taken before or after the wedding. Photo sessions should not take more than 30 minutes. Photographs may be taken during the ceremony; however, the photographer must consult with the wedding coordinator and presider before the wedding begins. Furniture or flowers may not be removed, changed, or altered. Any debris, (e.g., flashbulbs, film wrappers, corsage boxes, etc.), must be removed after the ceremony.

**Candles** —Use of a unity candle is not permitted; as it has no place in the Catholic liturgical tradition. Candelabras are also discouraged.

**Aisle Runners** — Use of aisle runners is not permitted because of safety hazards.

**Flowers and Decorations** —No floral arrangements may be placed on or in front of the altar, ambo or credence table. Florists are not to remove or change any church furniture. No pins, tacks, putty, tape, florist clay or nails may be used to attach bows or flowers to the pews. Only plastic pew holders or rubber bands are acceptable.

**Altar Servers**—If altar servers are desired, please call the parish office. The couple may choose altar servers from family or friends.

**Flower Girls and Ring Bearers**—In consideration of other people using the Church after you (should you have a flower girl) please do not have them drop petals on the aisle. It is the responsibility of the best man to have and present the ring(s) during the ceremony.

**Bride's Area**—This area can be discussed and identified by the parish's Wedding Coordinator during the rehearsal. The parish is not responsible for anything left in the bride's area during or after the wedding. It is recommended that those using this area bring nothing of value that may end up being left unattended. We ask that the area please be left in the same clean order in which it was found.

**Offerings or Fees:**

- Refundable cleaning deposit (returned after clean-up) \$100.00  
(This deposit includes the cleaning of the church and any other rooms used during the time of the rehearsal and the actual wedding.)
- Church \$100.00
- Celebrant (Priest or Deacon) (Optional, free-will offering)
- Wedding Coordinator (Suggested) \$100.00
- Accompanist (Suggested) \$125.00
- Vocalist (Suggested) \$125.00

Fees are to be paid at the time of the rehearsal to the Wedding Coordinator.

**Note:** The wedding couple will be held liable and responsible for any damage done to the church, reception area and grounds during the wedding rehearsal and/or wedding ceremony.

***The presiding priest or deacon reserves the right to cancel any wedding, if he deems that impeding abuses have occurred (e.g., the bride and/or groom have consumed alcohol or drugs; the bride or groom did not disclose a previous marriage, for which no Declaration of Nullity (annulment) has yet been granted, etc.).***



### Music for the Liturgy:

- \* Music serves to unify the assembly and to enhance the prayer and faith of the community. As a result, the choice of music for the ceremony must be liturgical in nature. That is, music whose texts are drawn from biblical sources and whose context is the worship to God. Weddings are religious events, thus religious music is used.
- \* Given the nature of the Catholic liturgy, prerecorded music may not be used during the ceremony; except as a prelude.
- \* Any secular music that you may want to have played may be deemed more appropriate for the prelude portion of the ceremony or better suited for use at the reception.
- \* The Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel Acclamation will be chosen after the readings are selected to ensure they compliment each other and project a single sacramental theme or message.

*The pastor of the St. Michael Catholic Church, or the parish's Music Coordinator must approve all music used for preludes and the Mass or ceremony at least one week before the scheduled event.*

### Prelude Music:

- \* Prelude music, vocal and instrumental, is performed 15-20 minutes before the start of the wedding ceremony.
- \* The couple may choose a traditional **processional & recessional** selection.
- \* In the case of a wedding Mass, the following appropriate music selections (e.g., Preparation/Presentation of the Gifts, etc.) must be selected.

### Communion Song:

- \* A parish accompanist and vocal soloist are available for use by the couple.
- \* Outside musicians and vocalists may be used, however, they must meet the musical competency of the pastor and/or Music Coordinator.

- \* If the couple decides to use outside musicians and/or vocalists who are not Catholic, the pastor and/or Music Coordinator must be advised and approve their use a minimum of one month in advance of the scheduled liturgical event.

## HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT....?

The Catholic Church places a great deal of emphasis on the fact that marriage is for life. One of the prerequisites for a valid reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony is that the persons involved intend “*to enter a life-long union, to be dissolved only by death.*” It is the responsibility of the Church to see that a couple is adequately prepared to enter into this state of life.

During the time of marriage preparation it is important for the engaged couple to reflect on the values of Christian Marriage, their personal relationship to God, and their participation in the Church Community.

Here are some questions for reflection:

**What meaning does the Catholic Church have in my (and our) life?**

**How important is the Eucharist?**

**Have I (we) been faithful to the Parish Sunday Eucharist?**

**Have I (we) lost contact with the faith community?**

**If so, will I (we) begin to re-establish this contact?**

It is not sufficient to look upon marriage in the Catholic Church as a social convention only. Christian marriage is not intended as a means to appease parents or friends or keep peace in the family. The issue of relationship to the church community must be faced honestly and squarely. Sacraments cannot be looked upon merely as spiritual vaccinations that ease our passage into eternity.