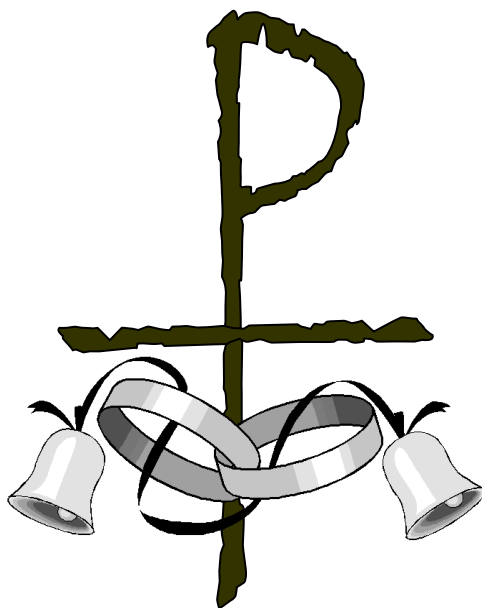


*Preparing for Marriage
in the
Diocese of Buffalo*
Guidelines for Engaged Couples



We, the members of the Catholic community
wish to congratulate you on your decision
to be married in the Church.

We want you to know of our supportive love
and, therefore, have provided the following guidelines to assist you in preparing for your
marriage.

A man and a woman make a very serious and sacred commitment when they decide to
marry in the Catholic Church. Through the Sacrament of Matrimony, Jesus calls them
to draw closer to each other and to their God and faith community.

Marriage is a permanent commitment to a way of life. It requires careful thought,
prayer, and preparation.

It is a covenant between a couple and God.

Revised Edition: 11/2017

Preparing to Receive the Sacrament

Marriage is both a serious and sacred event. It is serious because two complex individual lives are joined together as one. It is sacred because it is only through God's love made manifest in His Church that they can accomplish this amazing and lasting union. Marriage is a sacrament and a privilege of being a practicing member of God's Holy Church. This means that engaged couples must be ready - mentally and spiritually - to receive this sacrament.

The Church has developed procedures which will assist you both in becoming ready to participate in this sacrament, but the procedures will do nothing unless you both put your whole selves to the task. It is for your benefit to go through these procedures with a positive cooperative attitude because they will help you to grow in faith and love as you prepare to celebrate this wonderful sacrament.

As you do so, consider this point, on your wedding day you two will not go alone to an empty building to echo your vows off lonely walls. You will have gathered family and friends to witness your public exchange of vows. Your wedding has profound meaning for those you have gathered, and indeed, for the whole people of God. To quote from the Marriage Rite, the love you two will share in this sacrament "becomes the mirror of God's everlasting love, and symbol of Christ's love for His Church."

If you wish to be married in the Catholic Church you are to contact your parish priest or deacon immediately after you make the decision to marry (formal engagement). However, this contact should be made 8 to 12 months prior to the anticipated time of your wedding (check with your parish to be sure of what is expected). No date may be reserved in the Church until the couple has met with the priest or deacon preparing them.

The wedding of two Catholics takes place in the parish of the bride or the groom. To be married in another parish, although is an exception and is granted for only special reasons (e.g. regular attendance), it is proper that permission is received from the parish in which you wish to be married, as well as either of your pastors. The wedding in which only one of you is Catholic, an inter-faith marriage, takes place in the parish of the Catholic party. The Bishop may permit you to celebrate your wedding in the place of worship of the non-Catholic party when a pastoral reason exists. A non-Catholic clergy person is welcome to assist a priest if the person is requested by the non-Catholic person. **For all couples, weddings in private homes, out-doors, or in most other chapels are not permitted in this Diocese.**

All engaged couples are asked to participate in a process designed to help you and the Church assess your readiness for marriage. This process begins with the initial interview with the priest, or deacon. Discussion with them will include: your faith experience, your individual maturity and your relationship as a couple, as well as your views on Christian marriage. At this meeting please share with the priest or deacon any of the following special circumstances: if either of you are teenagers, if you are currently pregnant, if you are presently living together, if one of you is of another faith tradition, if you have been married before, or if you are now civilly married and wish to have your marriage convalidated in the Catholic Church. If any of these special circumstances exist, *it does not mean that you cannot be married in the Church. It does mean that an honest discussion of these circumstances is called for in order to decide what steps need to be taken before your marriage in the Church.*

Diocesan Guidelines for Special Cases

1. **Marriage of Minors:** Special care and concern is given to young people because of the difficulty early marriages are experiencing today. Whenever one or both parties are under 18 years of age, consideration for marriage in the Church will be given only after the priest or deacon has evaluated the couple's readiness for marriage upon completion of the pre-marriage counseling.
1. **Pregnancy:** In the case of a pregnancy during engagement, the following norms are followed:
 - a. If the couple made the decision to marry, or were engaged prior to pregnancy, and both have celebrated their nineteenth birthdays, plans for marriage may be made if the priest or deacon assesses them to be sufficiently prepared for marriage.
 - b. If the couple has not made a decision to marry prior to pregnancy, or if either party is under nineteen years of age, then the procedures for pre-marriage counseling should be followed.
3. **Reasons to Delay Marriage:** The priest or deacon will not lightly refuse to witness the marriage of a parishioner who is free to marry. However for a just cause he may delay the witnessing of a marriage. A just cause would include the following:
 - a. Non-practice of the Catholic faith by both parties with no intention of returning to its practice.
 - b. Substantial lack of preparation for the spiritual sacramental aspects of marriage.
 - c. Lack of readiness for marriage as assessed by the priest or deacon in consultation with the counselor and/or parents.
 - d. Refusal of the engaged couple to participate in any of the Marriage Preparation Programs which apply to them.
4. **Appeal:** The couple may appeal to the Chancery of the Diocese of Buffalo, which will consult the Bishop to decide whether or not a marriage has been delayed improperly.

If you feel the need to set up a pre-nuptial agreement before marriage; please consult the Tribunal of the Diocese of Buffalo for advice on this matter before setting up the agreement.

Referral to professional counseling may be advised depending upon the special circumstances mentioned above or other reasons noted by the priest or deacon. This professional evaluation would help him to determine a couple's readiness for marriage; and provide the opportunity to deal with issues too important to be left unaddressed.

Some minimal paperwork will be required of you. Please obtain and present to the priest or deacon a recently obtained copy of your Baptismal Certificates. Also, you will be individually asked by the priest to answer the questions of pre-marital investigation regarding your freedom to marry and your views on Christian marriage. These documents will be kept on file at the parish where the ceremony takes place.

Catholic engaged persons are encouraged to celebrate the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist as part of their preparation process. This sacramental preparation will prepare you for a more meaningful experience of your wedding liturgy, and will deepen your relationship with Jesus, the foundation of your married life together.

Formal Marriage Preparation Programs in the Diocese of Buffalo

All couples are required to attend one of the Diocesan approved marriage preparation programs. Your parish will provide you with information regarding the time and location of available programs, or refer you to the Diocese's Office of Family Life Ministry for more information. It is required that you take a marriage preparation program if you are being married in the Diocese of Buffalo. The time frame for completion of a marriage preparation program is determined by each parish.; please be sure to find out your parish's requirements early in your engagement.

Journey Into Love: A marriage preparation program that is designed for engaged couples whom are marrying for the first time. It is a seven hour program, held one day each month that utilizes presentations offered by married couples. Engaged couples participate in exercises that focus on areas including effective communication, intimacy, marital roadblocks, natural family planning, finances, and sacramental commitment. The program costs \$150 per couple, and includes a continental breakfast, and full lunch. Check with your parish or the diocesan website for dates and locations.

<https://www.buffalodiocese.org/for-the-engaged>

Cana II: A program designed for couples who are remarrying. Topics addressed include communication, intimacy, sacramental commitment, marital roadblocks, step-parenting, and step-family structure. This program is designed to fit the specific needs of couples where at least one person is widowed or divorced. In the latter case, first marriages must have been annulled or declared invalid by the Church.

FOCCUS: is an online pre-marriage inventory for couples preparing for marriage. Couples who complete the FOCCUS inventory, then participate in a facilitated discussion on key topic areas have the opportunity to review, reflect, and discuss strengths and growth opportunities within their relationship as they prepare for lifelong marriage.

FOCCUS is a supplement to a pre-Cana program; it is not a substitute for one.

Online Catholic Marriage Prep Course: *Living Our Faith in Love*, is a Catholic marriage preparation course developed in collaboration with the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit, Michigan and The Marriage Group, LLC. The course is available for couples separated by distance and those who cannot attend the traditional program. Please visit the Family Life Website for more details, www.buffalodiocese.org/fortheengaged

Individual Parishes occasionally offer Diocesan approved marriage preparation programs. Please check with your parish, or the Office of Family Life Ministries for more information on these.

**For more information or to register for any of these programs, please contact :
the Office of Family Life Ministries at 716.847.2210**

It is you who must take the planning of your wedding liturgy seriously. The care and effort that you put into this, especially in choosing readings and music, and the way that you involve your family and friends, will speak volumes about who you are as a couple and how much your faith means to you. To help you with this, suggested guidelines and a wedding planning sheet are generally available at your parish.

In regard to a suitable financial offering to the parish, it is important to find out if there is already a determined amount that is expected for you to pay. The Diocese has guidelines provided to each parish.