



DIOCESE OF TRENTON

PARISH GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING ENGAGED COUPLES FOR MARRIAGE

Introduction: These guidelines will assist parish staff and marriage ministers to help couples as they journey toward marriage. Pastoral ministers should refer to the Common Policy - *Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation for the Catholic Church in New Jersey (PP&G)*.



1. The marriage preparation process begins as soon as the couple becomes engaged and contacts the parish, preferably at least one year before proposed wedding date. Couples should be welcomed joyfully by the parish and congratulated for deciding to marry in the Church.
2. A meeting with the Pastoral Minister (usually priest or deacon) is scheduled as soon as possible. The initial meetings allow the pastoral minister to get to know the couple, discuss their hopes and dreams for marriage, convey the essential meaning and purpose of Catholic marriage, and begin to assess their readiness (*Note: A date for the wedding should not be set, nor should couples attend Pre-Cana until the initial meeting has taken place and Part I of the Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form has been completed*).
 - Pastoral Minister (PM) explains marriage prep process and discusses options for fulfilling instructional sessions of marriage prep requirement (see list of options below).
 - Begin filling out necessary forms (Part I of Prenuptial Investigation), discuss church and civil documents needed, assess if there may be impediments to marriage.
 - Arrange to administer the FOCCUS Pre-marital inventory. Upon completion of Part I of the PNI tri-fold and if no obstacles exist, a wedding date is set.
 - "The marriage preparation process can provide teachable moments for evangelization, particularly for those couples who do not have a strong faith commitment. Therefore, a caring response from the pastoral minister may be an invitation for the couple to take a deeper look at their faith." (*PP&G, p. 10*)
 - "Review and explain the pastoral concerns and commitment of the Church as expressed in the Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation. The couple's edition* of this handbook should be given to the engaged couple to facilitate their understanding of the requirements of the marriage preparation process." (*PP&G, p. 10*)
 - At this time the engaged couples might be matched with a mentor couple of the parish who accompanies the engaged couples on their journey toward marriage (and beyond).

3. Pastoral minister sets up a series of sessions to discuss FOCCUS results, incorporating catechetical formation into the pastoral sessions, and customizing sessions to each couple's unique needs. If concerns about marital readiness or serious issues arise, PM should consult pastor to discuss the Special Circumstances process (*see PP&G, pp. 5; 32-55*)
4. Couple attends required marriage preparation program recommended by pastoral minister (*Note: Couples with one or both parties remarrying should attend To Trust Again*)
 - Parish Pre-Cana Conferences
 - Engaged Encounter Weekends
 - Diocesan Pre-Cana Conferences
 - *To Trust Again* Remarriage Workshop
 - Private Mentor Couple Instruction using *Before "I Do"*
 - Other approved marriage prep programs (online programs are available for logistically-challenged couples; contact Dept. of Evangelization & Family Life for more information)
5. Following participation in marriage prep program, PM and couple have final meeting(s) to discuss experiences from marriage prep program; discuss any serious concerns; complete remaining paperwork (Parts II and III of Pre-Nuptial Investigation).
6. Schedule session to plan the wedding liturgy. It is strongly recommended that the preparation process be completed at least six weeks prior to the wedding date, to allow couples to focus on personal reflection and last minute preparations.
7. Follow-up: Parish welcomes newly married couples into parish life. For couples who will reside elsewhere after their wedding, it is recommended that the pastoral minister send an introductory "referral card" to their new parish; see Pre-Nuptial Investigation Forms C-1 and C-2.

**Couples' Edition of Pastoral Policies and Guidelines and a host of other marriage preparation and catechetical resources available at www.dioceseoftrenton.org/marriageministryresources*

