



Pastoral Policies & Guidelines for Marriage Preparation for The Catholic Church of New Jersey

COUPLES' GUIDE

Congratulations on Your Engagement!



You are engaged to be married and, desiring the blessing of God on your union, have approached the Church to witness and seal your vows to each other.

Marriage is a divine vocation involving an enduring sacred relationship lived in the community of the Church and the wider human family. For baptized Christians, it is a sacrament of Christ's love expressed in a couple's living their marriage vows day to day in the grace of God.

In ministering to engaged couples local parishes and campus ministries are guided by the Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation, issued by the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey. These Policies and Guidelines are also an expression of the Church's wish to be of practical assistance to you as you embark upon what perhaps is the most important decision and commitment of your life.

The marriage covenant is by divine law indissoluble. It is a covenant promising enduring love between the parties and an openness to children who will be born from their loving union. The Church community stands ready to be of continuing support to couples who are preparing for and who are living out their marriage covenant in the Lord.

The pastoral assistance of the Church will involve meeting with the Church's pastoral minister. The process will help you to discern your readiness for marriage, to be affirmed by your strengths and to deal objectively, honestly and confidently with issues that call for further communication, conversion, and deeper growth. More than ever, this is a time for you to seek God's assistance, to forge a bonded spirituality, to worship together, and to participate in the sacramental life of the Church.

A Commitment of Time

The preparation process for your wedding should begin as soon as you become engaged even if that is more than a year before the proposed wedding date. Normally the preparation process should begin not less than one year before the desired date of your wedding. This will give you adequate and less stressful time to prepare for the details of the wedding celebration and to reflect more deeply and prayerfully upon your upcoming marriage.

Contacting the Parish

The marriage preparation process is initiated with your first call to the parish inquiring about being married in the Church. A member of the parish staff will facilitate arrangements for you to meet with the pastoral minister (usually a priest or deacon of the parish) as soon as possible. A date for your wedding may not be entered into the parish calendar until such a meeting takes place.

The Initial Meeting

At the time of your first meeting, the pastoral minister will explain the marriage preparation process and provide information about the available marriage preparation programs you are required to attend. You have the option of selecting a program best suited to your needs. The pastoral minister will begin to fill out the necessary canonical forms and advise you as to what Church and civil documents are needed. The pastoral minister will also make certain that there are no canonical or civil impediments to your marriage. Once it is established that there are no impediments or other serious obstacles evident the wedding date may be set.

In order to obtain a deeper understanding and appreciation of your individual and shared experiences, the pastoral minister may have you complete a premarital inventory, i.e. **F.O.C.C.U.S.** (*Facilitating, Open, Couple, Communication, Understanding and Study*), to assist you in identifying strengths and areas for growth in your relationship, areas of agreement or disagreement you may have with each other or with Church teachings, that is, areas that need more of your reflection and discussion.

At this time in your preparation process, the parish may provide an opportunity for family and parish members to support and affirm your decision to marry through an Engagement Blessing.

Meetings With The Pastoral Minister

Following participation in a marriage preparation program you will once again arrange to meet with the pastoral minister. This will be an opportunity to share your experiences about the session you attended and to discuss any serious issues or concerns that may need to be addressed. It will also be the time to collect any outstanding documents and complete any remaining paperwork. Once your readiness for marriage is affirmed, the planning for the wedding liturgy may begin.

Issues That May Require Consultation

During the course of your preparation, the pastoral minister may find that you may be experiencing a significant difficulty or perceive that there is a serious issue that needs to be addressed. Such a situation may involve theological, medical or psychological consultation. When this occurs the pastoral minister is required to refer such concerns to be reviewed through a process that has been established in the diocese where your preparation is taking place. In such circumstances the pastoral minister will inform you that the marriage preparation process will have to be extended. It is your right to appeal directly to the Bishop or his representative if you wish. The pastoral minister will assist you in making such an appeal.

Immediate Plans For The Wedding Liturgy

The pastoral minister will assist in planning the wedding liturgy by providing information and resources that may be helpful in making the appropriate choices for this celebration. The Rite of Marriage contains various options for prayers, Scripture readings, blessings, and wedding ceremonies. Parish guidelines and local policies may also be available. Other parish ministries might also provide guidance in various areas (music, environment, etc.). A date and time for the rehearsal is confirmed. Prior to the rehearsal all details regarding the wedding liturgy should be reviewed and approved by the officiant.

Parish Life After The Wedding

The pastoral minister will be happy to provide information and resources that may be helpful to you when contacting the parish you will be joining as a married couple. This will enable you to become registered and actively involved in the parish where you will be living as soon as possible.



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"For as God of all made Himself present to His people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the Savior of men and the Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the Sacrament of Matrimony. He abides with them thereafter so that, just as He loved the Church and handed himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal." (Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 48, Vatican II Council)

