

FAQs about the Marriage Preparation Process

WHY IS PREPARATION REQUIRED?

Because of what marriage is—a life-long covenant and sacrament of love in which couples experience and embody the grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the Catholic Church, marriage is a “vocation,” a calling as holy as that of the priesthood. Just as those who become priests need intentional education in the nature and duties of the priesthood, so engaged couples need education in the nature and duties of marriage.

In considering the years of preparation spent forming men for the priesthood, the demands of marriage preparation don't seem as daunting. Besides, with divorce rates rampant, even among Catholics, the need for more thorough marriage preparation is obvious. That's why Pope St. John Paul II urged his fellow bishops to develop marriage preparation programs which are “serious in purpose, excellent in content, sufficient in length, and obligatory in nature.”

WHAT IF WE CAN'T AFFORD THE COST?

Scholarship funds are available for those with legitimate needs. For information, contact the Family Life Office of the Catholic Diocese of Lexington at (859) 253-1993 ext. 212.

WHAT IF WE LIVE IN DIFFERENT CITIES OR CAN'T COORDINATE OUR SCHEDULES ADEQUATELY?

We'd recommend the Christian Marriage Weekend, in which you can complete the “God's Plan” and “Married Life” components in one opportunity. In extreme circumstances, your pastor may know other creative ways to fulfill the preparation requirements.

WHAT IS NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING?

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is term for certain methods used to achieve and postpone pregnancy. These scientific methods, 98% effective when practiced faithfully, are based on the observation of the natural signs of the fertile phase of a woman's fertility cycle. Couples using NFP to achieve pregnancy engage in intercourse during the woman's fertile phase. Couples wishing to postpone pregnancy simply abstain from sexual relations during the time of fertility.

No drugs, devices or surgical procedures are used in the practice of NFP. NFP also reflects the dignity of the human

person within the context of marriage and family life, promotes openness to life, and recognizes the value of every child. By respecting the love-giving and life-giving nature of marriage, NFP enriches the bond between husband and wife.

WHAT IF ONE OF US IS NOT CATHOLIC?

It is still possible to get married in the Catholic Church. However, because of the deeply spiritual nature of marriage you must get permission from the Church. You can discuss this during your initial meeting with a priest, deacon, or preparing minister.

Of course, the marriage preparation process is for both the bride and groom, even if one is not Catholic.

CAN OUR WEDDING BE HELD IN A NON-CATHOLIC CHURCH, OR OUTDOORS OR ANOTHER SETTING?

The normal location for a Catholic wedding is at the local parish of one of the engaged persons. This helps ensure and protect the sacramental dignity of the ceremony. Special permission must be requested from the Bishop to have the wedding in a non-Catholic Christian church (and is usually approved), or a non-church setting (which is sometimes but more rarely approved).

ONE OF US HAS BEEN MARRIED BEFORE. HOW WILL THIS AFFECT OUR PREPARATION?

In your initial meeting with your priest or deacon, you will need to provide documentation to indicate that your previous marriage has been declared null.

If so, your priest or deacon may ask you to complete an alternate or additional preparation program.

If the previous marriage has not been annulled, it is important to understand Catholic teaching on this difficult issue. Jesus taught that true marriage is indissoluble, except by death, which means that divorce is a spiritual impossibility. When an annulment is pursued, the Church investigates to determine if what looked like a Christian marriage (which ended in civil divorce), in actuality, was not—meaning that God did not join them together in the first place.

Declarations of nullity (the official term for annulments) are never guaranteed. Therefore, the previous “marriage” must be declared null (it never truly existed, in the Christian sense) before the persons involved are free to seek a Catholic marriage with someone else. If you need to seek an annulment, contact your pastor.



Marriage Preparation Process for Engaged Couples

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LEXINGTON



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FIRST MEETING(S)

with your priest or deacon 6 months or more before wedding.
Get scheduled for FOCCUS

1 INITIAL MEETING WITH PRIEST, DEACON, OR PREPARING MINISTER

After you are engaged (congratulations!), contact your parish to set up this meeting, in which you will have the pre-marital preparation process explained, and receive help in scheduling the next steps in the process, which will likely include the completion of a pre-marital survey (FOCCUS) used to identify strength and growth areas in your relationship.

If either party has received a civil divorce for a previous marriage, then a declaration of nullity (annulment) must be granted before marriage prep can begin.

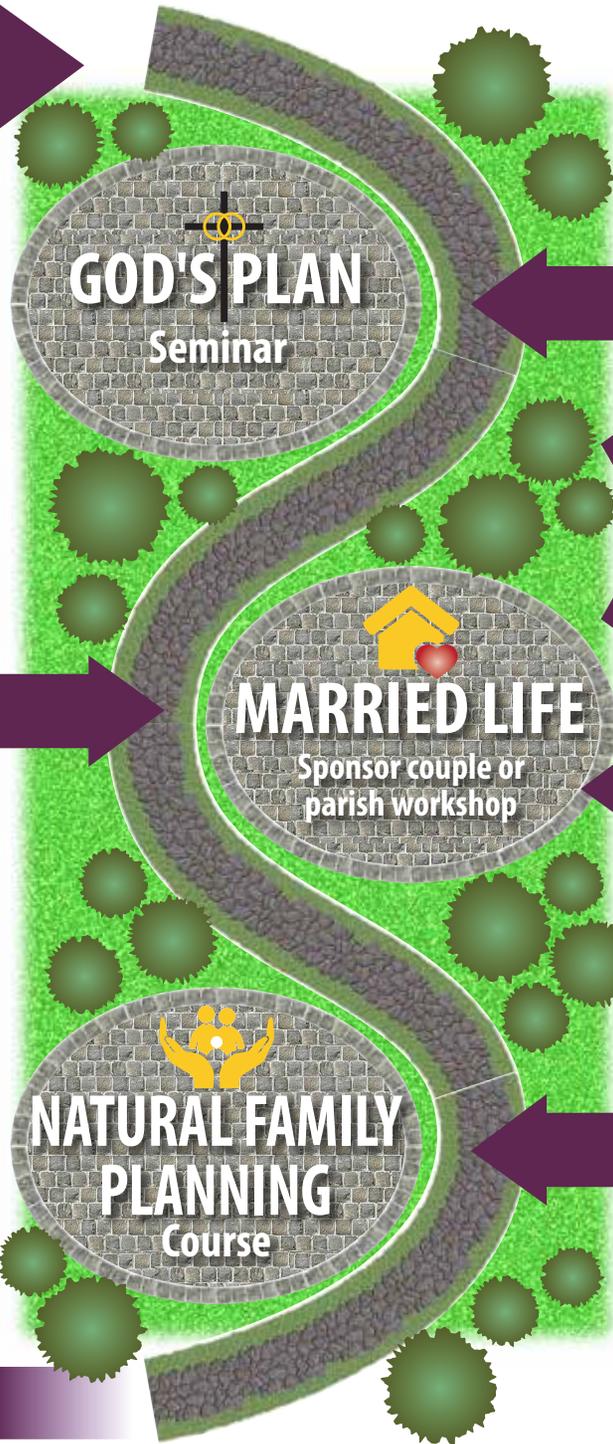
3a "MARRIED LIFE" COMPONENT

Learn from an experienced couple about the practical issues (communication, resolving conflict, finances, etc.) involved in the daily living of marriage. This component is fulfilled by attending a parish-based workshop—see class schedule brochure—or by having several meetings with a sponsor couple from your parish.

5 FINAL MEETING(S) WITH THE PRIEST OR DEACON

The final meeting with your priest/deacon may address the music and liturgical readings for your ceremony. This should take place a few weeks before the wedding.

Additionally, Catholic participants are strongly encouraged to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist (and Confirmation, if applicable) prior to the ceremony.



2 "GOD'S PLAN FOR A JOY-FILLED MARRIAGE" SEMINAR

This seminar is your next step in the preparation process. "God's Plan" is a 6 hour course in which each engaged couple will be presented with a clear understanding of the nature of Christian marriage and sexuality. The course is offered several times a year—see brochure for dates.

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE WEEKEND

Three times per year, the diocese's Family Life Office offers a Friday-Sunday retreat near Danville, KY, in which couples can fulfill both the "God's Plan" and Life Skills components in one weekend. See CMW brochure for more information.

3b ENGAGED ENCOUNTER

Another option for the Life Skills component is "Engaged Encounter," a weekend retreat offered in the Louisville, Covington, and Cincinnati areas.

4 NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING (NFP)

In order to better understand the gift of fertility, couples seeking marriage in the Diocese of Lexington must take a full course of Natural Family Planning. NFP courses are offered several times per year, as well as via home-study and on-line versions. Exceptions are possible for couples unable to bear children.