

Diocese of Biloxi “Couple Guide” Formation for the Sacrament of Matrimony

Why Marriage: Marriage is a sacred calling! Marriage is about God and serving God’s purposes. It is a vocation just as the priesthood of a priest is a vocation. Marriage is a covenant relationship wherein a man and a woman establish themselves in a partnership for life. God is present in this relationship to bless, assist and guide you. This relationship is ordered for the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children. Through Matrimony God raises up the “Domestic Church” where faith is planted in the hearts of children and radiated to the surrounding world.

Why Prepare: The marriage formation process is to assure that you are free to marry, have the capacity to marry and the right intention to marry. Further the formation process provides assistance in your final months of discernment of the sacramental bond where you will promise to be faithful “for better or for worse” and to love and honor each other every day of your life.

What to Expect during Marriage Formation: “Immediate Preparation” for marriage should begin six to nine months ahead of the anticipated date of your wedding. The process begins with an initial meeting/s with a Priest or Deacon, followed by four educational steps and concludes with a final meeting with the Priest or Deacon just prior to the ceremony. These pastoral and educational steps are listed and described below.

- Initial Meeting/s with Priest or Deacon and Prenuptial Investigation
- Educational Components
 1. Completion of the Premarital Inventory Assessment
 2. Education in Natural Family Planning
 3. Participation in a Sponsor Couple Program
 4. Participation in a Premarital Retreat or Workshop
- Final Meeting with Priest or Deacon

Overview of the pastoral and educational steps including your responsibilities.

- Initial Meeting/s with Priest or Deacon

Date: _____

At this meeting the priest or deacon will do a “Prenuptial Investigation” and determine if there are any impediments (obstacles) to marriage. You will be interviewed separately, about 15 minutes each. If there are no impediments a tentative date for the wedding can be set and you can proceed to the first educational step. Additionally you will need to provide the following documentation verifying your sacramental status:

- Baptismal Certificates with notations
- Confirmation Certificates (unnecessary if noted on Baptismal Certificate)

If impediments exist such as the proposed marriage is a second marriage while the first spouse is still alive, or one partner is not Christian, or other special circumstances exist, the discussion may continue in a second interview. If a delay is necessary to deal with impediments, you will be advised on how to proceed.

- Educational Components:

1. Completion of the Premarital Inventory Assessment Date: _____

This is a tool to help you explore aspects of your future marital relationship. This tool assesses your readiness to marry and how well you communicate with each other. The tool identifies potential strengths and weaknesses in your relationship and indicates where additional dialog could be useful. Typically the assessment is administered at the parish office and takes about an hour to complete. It will take about a week to assess the results and then a second meeting with your priest or deacon will be set to review and discuss the results.

2. Natural Family Planning Date: _____

The Catholic Church guards the sanctity of life from conception until natural death and teaches natural family planning as the method to plan for the timing and growth of your family. The Church does not approve of the use of artificial birth control or contraceptives. To this end all engaged couples are required to attend Natural Family Planning classes conducted by a certified Natural Family Planning Trainer. Your priest or deacon will provide you with the necessary information so you can coordinate class times and location.

3. Sponsor Couple Program Date: _____

In this “peer-to-peer” program you will meet with a “sponsor couple” in the parish who will assist in your marriage preparation. Typically you will meet with the sponsor couple 6 to 8 times over a period of several weeks. There are reading assignments and questions for you to answer before each session. You will participate in conversations on: families of origin, marital communication, marital spirituality, family planning, sexuality and intimacy, and problem solving. Your priest or deacon will match you with an appropriate sponsor couple.

4. Premarital Retreat or Workshop Date: _____

After the completion of items 1-3 above you should attend a Premarital retreat or workshop. The Engaged Encounter Weekend retreats are offered in the three surrounding diocese (New Orleans, Mobile and Jackson). Your priest or deacon will provide you with contact information and options for your retreat.

- Final Meeting with Priest or Deacon Date: _____

When the educational aspects of your marriage formation are completed you are ready for a final meeting with your priest or deacon to discuss any remaining questions or concerns. At this meeting the appropriate Rite or Order of Matrimony (During Mass, Outside of Mass or between a Catholic and an Unbaptized Person) is discussed. Additionally specific readings and prayers for the Rite may be selected with the aid of the *Together for Life* handbook. A date and time for a wedding liturgy rehearsal should also be set at this time.

One last thing! Remember to pray often with your fiancé/fiancée about your future life together. The old adage “Families that pray together, stay together” is so true. May God Bless You!