



DIOCESE OF  
Jefferson City

BETTER  
TOGETHER

# MARRIAGE PREPARATION POLICY

JULY 2020

The Catholic Church teaches marriage is a covenant, a contract and a bond between a man and a woman that forms a partnership for life. The marriage bond is a unique and exclusive relationship between husband and wife for the sanctification of the couple and for the procreation and Christ-centered nurturing of children in a family.

The family, with its foundation in marriage, is a fundamental unit of the Church. Marriage is also a basic social institution of human society. Marital love is at the service of the couple, the children, the community, and of the world. Because of its timeless importance, the Church teaches marriage between two baptized Christians is a sacrament, a source of grace and a sign of God's love for the world.

Every sacrament needs preparation for its fruitful celebration. The Church wants to ensure that those entering the life-long commitment of marriage are adequately prepared for the riches and the responsibilities intrinsic to it. This is why the Diocese of Jefferson City has a policy for marriage preparation. It is not to make the couple "check the boxes" or "jump through hoops." In her efforts of remote, proximate and immediate preparation, the Church is not trying to make it more difficult to get married, but rather provide the best opportunity for equipping the couple to live a shared life of love, compassion and nurturing grace.

The diocese therefore mandates the following process of formation for those preparing for the celebration of a wedding recognized by the Catholic Church, which also serves as a guide for those pastoral agents responsible for that preparation.

## COMPONENT I – FIRST STEPS

### USUALLY 6 TO 12 MONTHS PRIOR TO WEDDING

- ▶ Two meetings with parish priest or deacon

First meeting:

- Initial interview, documentation and forms, discussion of tentative wedding date, discussion of the Policy for the Celebration of Weddings
- Information about marriage preparation process
- Instructions for the completion of the couple assessment (*Prepare/Enrich*)

Second meeting:

- Address important topics or issues based on the inventory results
- Refer the engaged couple to a trained Marriage Prep Facilitator

- ▶ Two to four meetings with a trained Marriage Prep Facilitator (in-person or virtual)

- Opportunity to talk about important topics based on the inventory results shared by the engaged couple
- Discussion about and identification of the best option(s) for the Instruction/Communal Experience for the couple
- Discussion about the Natural Family Planning requirement—it is highly recommended couples look into this as early as their preparation begins

## COMPONENT II – INSTRUCTION/COMMUNAL EXPERIENCE

This phase offers an educational opportunity to strengthen the couple's relationship, faith, spirituality and understanding of the sacrament of matrimony. In addition, the following programs provide an opportunity for the couple to interact with other engaged couples and married couples willing to share their experiences on topics critical to a healthy marriage.

Couples participate in at least one of the following programs:

- ▶ Option 1: Marriage preparation program— any program the parish is using or one of the programs recommended by the diocese
- ▶ Option 2: Engaged Encounter weekend
- ▶ Option 3: Diocesan Pre-Cana conference
- ▶ Option 4: Online marriage preparation program
- ▶ Option 5: Retreat

## COMPONENT III – NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING (NFP)

The methods of NFP provide the couple the ability to honor the love-giving and life-giving nature of the conjugal act as designed by God. The couple learns about the many benefits of practicing a reliable and scientifically-based NFP method, which will help them to effectively and responsibly achieve or postpone pregnancies in accord with God's will discerned by the couple.

Couples are required:

1. To view the online NFP introductory video— (not necessary if NFP was addressed at their Instruction/Communal Experience) and,
2. To attend a live or online introductory session with one of the three NFP providers of the diocese; attending a full course instead of an introductory session is highly encouraged.

## COMPONENT IV – FINAL STEPS

- ▶ Final meeting with parish priest or deacon
  - Prior to the meeting, the Marriage Prep Facilitator informs the priest or deacon about the couple's progress
- ▶ Plans for the wedding liturgy in accordance with diocesan policy

## FOLLOW-UP - SUPPORT AFTER MARRIAGE

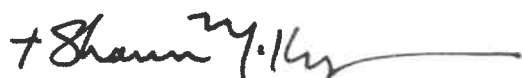
(6 TO 12 MONTHS AFTER THE WEDDING)

Couples will be contacted by a Marriage Prep Facilitator from the parish and will be offered support and assistance for their new marriage. The couple will be offered the *Enrich Your Marriage and Family Resources*.

### NOTES:

- ▶ The diocese will provide:
  - Trainings for clergy and Marriage Prep Facilitators on the PREPARE/ENRICH Assessment and the diocesan marriage preparation process.
  - Resources for parish implementation.
- ▶ Pastor/deacon: If your parish does not have a Marriage Prep Facilitator, contact a neighboring parish who does and who may be able to facilitate the second half of Phase I, Phase II and Phase III of the marriage preparation process for your parish.
- ▶ Refer to the Supporting Document and Recommendations for more detailed information.

Date Enacted: First Sunday of Advent, 29 November 2020



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Most Rev. W. Shawn McKnight  
Bishop of Jefferson City