

# Steps to the Altar Checklist

## STEP 1 - Orientation

- Contact any priest or deacon for a meeting 6-8 months before the ceremony.
- During this meeting, complete the "First Step to the Altar" form.
- Make official arrangements with the church where the marriage will occur.
- Complete the pre-marriage inventory (FOCCUS, Prepare/Enrich, etc.).

## STEP 2 - Diagnostics

- Discuss the pre-marriage inventory results with marriage prep ministers.
- Begin liturgical wedding planning.
- Gather the necessary documentation.

## STEP 3 - Instruction

- Complete a marriage preparation program at least 2 months before wedding.

## STEP 4 - Sacramental & Liturgical Preparation

- Have a wrap-up meeting with any priest or deacon.
- Complete the liturgical wedding planning and gather final paperwork.
- Obtain your own civil marriage license and present it to your parish.

## Please gather these documents during the marriage preparation process:

- Baptismal Certificates issued within 6 months of wedding date
- Certificate of attendance from your marriage preparation program (step 3)
- Copy of the civil marriage license
- Ask your priest or deacon if any additional documents are required.



**D**ear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Marriage is indeed a sacrament of the Church and a vocation to which God calls men and women to unite their hearts in love for one another and for Christ. Thank you for responding to the vocation of marriage. This marriage preparation program gives you an opportunity to reflect again on the serious nature of the vocation of marriage.

You and your future spouse will enter into dialogue in order to be fully prepared to live out this life-time commitment with one another and with Christ. I encourage you to enter whole-heartedly into this marriage preparation experience and to allow yourself to be led by the Spirit of God. Please know that you are remembered in my prayers as you prepare to unite yourself to one another and to God in marriage. May your love for each other and for the church influence others and draw them closer to Christ.

Most Reverend Gregory Aymond  
Archbishop of New Orleans

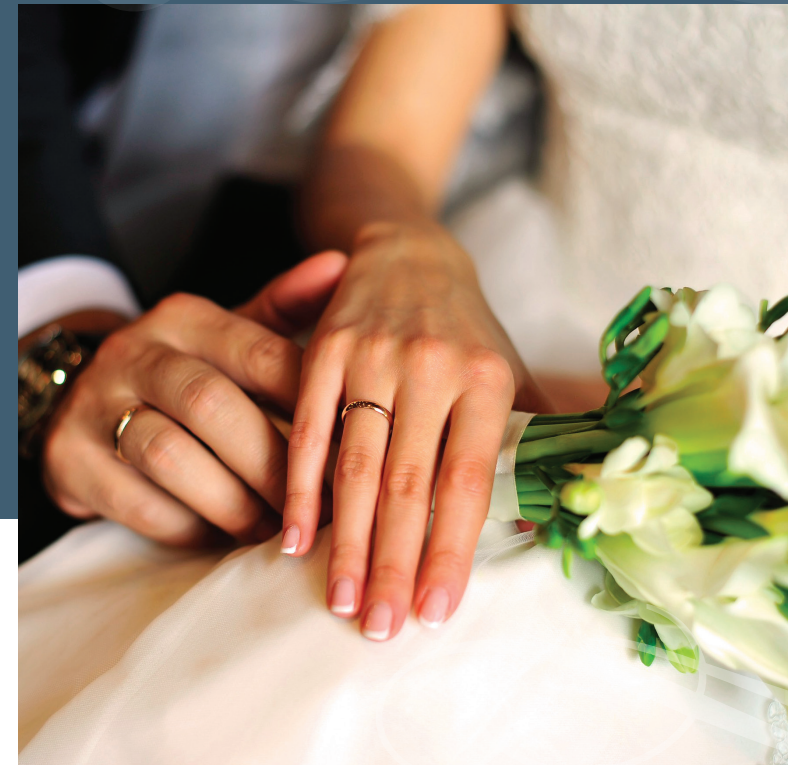
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# Marriage Preparation

## Steps to the Altar



## Step 1: Orientation

A couple seeking marriage in the Church must **contact a priest or deacon preferably eight, but at least six months** prior to their proposed marriage date. This preparation period allows couples adequate time to learn Natural Family Planning.\* This time will allow the couple to gain the benefits of their pre-marriage inventory and marriage preparation program so as to make an informed decision on their own readiness for marriage.

With a priest or deacon they must complete the form titled the "First Step to the Altar." This meeting cannot be delegated to a lay person. Once this form is completed, the couple is free to schedule their marriage with a church. During step 1, a rapport is established between the couple and the priest or deacon who will assist the couple to select which marriage preparation program is best for them. If the priest or deacon finds any special circumstances that might affect their marriage, these are discussed with the couple, and he will apply for any dispensations. In addition, personal information and documentation is obtained.

The administering of a pre-marriage inventory takes place in step 1. A pre-marriage inventory is a series of questions that results in a relationship profile. Step 1 may take place in one or several meetings with the couple.

## Step 2: Diagnostics

In this step, the priest, deacon, or lay ministers will discuss with the couple their unique pre-marriage inventory results so that the couple may assess their readiness for marriage, as well as relationship strengths and weaknesses. The couple may begin the liturgical wedding plans. They will review parish guidelines and any costs or offerings involved. This step may take place in one or several meetings with the couple.

If the priest or deacon feels it necessary to delay the marriage date, he is to consult with the Family Life Apostolate, the Chancellor's Office, or the Metropolitan Tribunal for assistance. After this consultation, the priest may propose a delay of the marriage to the couple or refer the couple to another priest or deacon.

## Step 3: Instruction

This is the instructional step where the essential human and Christian aspects of marriage are presented to the couple. A priest or deacon who has the initial meeting with the couple (step 1) will guide the couple in choosing which marriage preparation program is best for them. They will select one program below keeping in mind that preference is to be shown to the first two programs listed. If the priest or deacon judges that a serious obstacle inhibits the couple from participation in one of the first two programs, then the Days for the Engaged may be selected.

These include:

- **Mentor Couple Program:** (In-Home Marriage Prep, Witness to Love, etc.) This parish-based program is guided by a married couple in their home over a series of meetings. Contact your parish to enroll.
- **Engaged Encounter:** This program gives couples a weekend retreat that fosters couple dialogue guided by married couples and a priest.†
- **Days for the Engaged:** This is a seminar-based program and requires two separate day sessions.†
- **CatholicMarriagePrep.com:** This program is substantial and is usually for couples that are separated by distance.
- For engaged couples who are bringing children into their marriage after a previous marriage was terminated by death or annulment: [Re-Marriage Preparation](#).†
- For couples seeking validation of their civil marriage: [Special Marriage Preparation](#) or [Mentor Couple](#) as described above.†

†The couple will contact the Family Life Apostolate to enroll.

The marriage preparation program will include an opportunity for the couple to have access to a certified Natural Family Planning trainer. The trainer will answer the couple's questions and further encourage them to participate in the full Natural Family Planning course.

The marriage preparation program will be completed at least 2 months in advance of the planned date of the wedding ceremony.

## Step 4: Sacramental & Liturgical Preparation

During this final step, the couple will again meet with any priest or deacon (this meeting cannot be delegated to a lay person) to discuss what they have learned and experienced at their formal marriage preparation program and their understanding of the sacramentality of marriage. He will discuss with the couple their responsibilities as members of God's people, as spouses and future parents. He will complete all documentary requirements: permissions, dispensations, etc.

Before the marriage ceremony, it is best for the couple to make use of the **Sacrament of Reconciliation**.

### \*Natural Family Planning

The fundamentals of Natural Family Planning (NFP) will be given to each couple in their marriage preparation program. However, they will only learn to effectively use NFP by attending the NFP course. This course is optional, but should begin during step 1 of the marriage preparation process.

**To enroll in the course contact the Family Life Apostolate.**



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