

# **Catholic Diocese of Alexandria**

## **Marriage Preparation Updated Guidelines**

### **Marriage Preparation:**

On behalf of the Catholic Diocese of Alexandria, we want to congratulate you on the this most joyous occasion of your engagement to be married. It is an honor for us to join you on your journey of faith as you begin the process of marriage preparation. May God bless you as you continue to prepare to enter the Sacrament of Matrimony.

The marriage preparation process in our Diocese is a multi-faceted and collaborative effort that begins under the direction of your local church parish community and is supported by the Diocesan Office of Religious Education and Faith Formation.

Holy matrimony is a sacred occasion in which you exchange consent to marriage before God, a priest or deacon and the assembled congregation of family and friends. During the ceremony, you will publicly vow your faith and your love to each other and your desire to be *united for life*.

Our prayer is that you will enjoy planning your nuptial Mass, or the celebration of holy matrimony outside of Mass. We hope working with the musicians, florists, tailors, caterers, and everyone else will be a pleasure. This day is important and will hold many memories for you. May it be as holy and lovely as you wish!

This day is not as important, however, as the quality of the rest of your life as you live out a holy marriage. Our church family wishes you the best each day of your married life and that the love you have on your special day will be, but a flicker compared to the love and holiness that will grow and mature in the years ahead until *death do you part*!

It is the policy of the dioceses in Louisiana that you begin your premarital preparation by meeting with a priest/deacon at least six months before the anticipated date of your marriage. This allows time for you to look at your relationship in the new light of a lifetime commitment together in holy matrimony. In addition, it allows for the priest/deacon and you to come to know each other better.

The setting of the date and time of your wedding by the parish priest/deacon is initially a tentative booking. The date and time cannot be validly held until there is a validation of both parties being free to enter the Sacrament of Marriage, and it is evident that the essential elements of readiness have been thoroughly considered. We would encourage you not to announce your wedding until the priest/deacon has confirmed with you that these requirements have been met in accord with diocesan and universal law.

# Diocesan Guidelines for the Sacrament of Matrimony

## Step One: Meet with Parish Priest or Deacon

- a. Minimally six (6) months to a year before your proposed wedding date, contact your parish priest/deacon. After your initial meeting, you can expect to meet with the priest/deacon several times during your preparation for marriage to:
  - I. Establish a relationship with the minister who will be performing the ceremony.
  - II. Complete all necessary initial documents to ensure there are no barriers to marriage.
  - III. Receive an overview of the marriage preparation process

## Step Two: Booking of the church

- a. Once no barriers to marriage are established, tentatively reserving the church for the day and time of the celebration can occur.

## Step Three: Premarital Inventory

- a. The priest/deacon will guide you through a pre-marital type survey that you and your fiancé(e) to complete. Two of the most popular surveys used in the Diocese of Alexandria is Prepare-Enrich and FOCCUS. This inventory will highlight areas of strength in your relationship and areas that may need greater focus. This is not a pass/fail survey, but a tool used to help develop a successful marriage. You may meet with the priest/deacon several times going over the survey.

## Step Four: Premarital Preparation to Include Introduction to NFP

- a. **In Person:**
  - I. Register for the diocesan marriage preparation class offered at the Chancery office located at 4400 Coliseum Blvd, Alexandria, LA 71303. This one day workshop is designed as a tool to help you and your fiancé(e) prepare for a lifetime of marriage. This workshop will also introduce NFP (Natural Family Planning). We highly recommend you attend the earliest class possible before your wedding date. More information on class dates and times can be found at [Diocesealex.org](http://Diocesealex.org). There is a minimal cost associated with registration.
    - i. Topics covered:
      1. Finance
      2. Spirituality
      3. Prayer & Communication
      4. Sexuality & Introduction to NFP
      5. Panel Q&A

OR

**b. Online: Options**

- I. *Catholicmarriageprep.com*. This mentor based online option can take several weeks to complete. There is an associated cost to the platform of \$239.00. This fee is not paid to the Diocese of Alexandria. This online course offers an option in Spanish. If this option is chosen, a couple must also include an online option for NFP; see below for options.
  - i. Topics covered:
    1. “Knowing you better”
    2. God’s plan for humanity
    3. The Sacrament of Matrimony
    4. Formation of Conscience
    5. Saying no to contraception (not NFP training)
    6. The Rite of Matrimony
    7. Forgiveness/your body as a temple
    8. Relationship tools
- II. *Themarriagegroup.com*. This non mentored based platform where couples self-navigate through the coursework. Couples that take this course cannot move onto the next segment until they have watched all components and completed all exercises. On average, this format will take 8 hours to complete. There is an associated cost to the platform of \$195.00 per couple. This fee is not paid to the Diocese of Alexandria. Once completed the couple will get a certificate to present to the minister preparing them for marriage. This online course offers an option in Spanish.
  - i. Topics covered:
    1. Theology and Spirituality of Marriage
    2. Balancing values, careers and practical issues
    3. Finances
    4. The beauty of sexuality and intimacy in marriage
    5. Communication skills and conflict resolution
    6. Becoming effective communicators
    7. Family of origin
    8. Natural family planning (NFP) Introduction
  - ii. Prepare-Enrich
    1. If this online option of Marriage Preparation is used, couple access to Prepare-Enrich is already included and does not require a separate purchase.
- III. NFP Online.
  - i. Register for an online introduction to Natural Family Planning. A couple of options that satisfy this introductory course:
    1. *Learnnfp.org*. Natural Plan and Intro to NFP consist of 10 video modules plus bonus muddles with resources to help couples choose which method of NFP is best for them. The

current fee for this online introductory course is \$15.00 per couple and takes about 1 ½ hours to complete the course.

2. *NFPBasics.com*. Vines in Full Bloom will teach couples the basics and will get support in integrating NFP into their lives. The course consists of instructional videos along with one-on-one accompaniment that will walk couples through the first steps of integrating NFP in their lives. The current fee for this online Basics to NFP course is \$30.00 per couple. This online course offers an option in Spanish.

**OR**

- c. **For extreme** pastoral reasons only, in parish marriage preparation can be offered by the pastor/deacon that fulfills equivalency to an in person/mentored/online marriage preparation program to include an introduction to NFP (Natural Family Planning).

### **Step Five: Planning the Wedding Liturgy**

- a. As the wedding date draws closer you will need to meet with the priest/deacon who will guide you in planning the liturgy for your wedding. In this planning meeting, you will be able to choose the scripture readings, and music. The priest/deacon will also go over the movements of the ceremony getting input on the preferences of the bride and groom. The priest/deacon of the church will have the final approval of the choices made.

### **Step Six: Sacrament of Reconciliation**

- a. The Sacrament of Reconciliation should be included in the pre-marital process for the spiritual preparation of the Sacrament of Matrimony. This Sacrament fosters an ongoing conversion preparing for the selfless giving which is required in every marriage.

### **Step Seven: Acquiring a Civil Marriage License**

- a. A couple must obtain a Louisiana State Marriage License from the Clerk of Courts office from a Louisiana Civil Parish. This must be obtained between 30 days and 24 hours prior to the planned marriage ceremony. To acquire one must have:
  - I. Birth Certificate of each party
  - II. ID
  - III. Both parties' social security numbers
  - IV. Knowledge if either party was previously married, divorced or a spouse is deceased along with proof of divorce decree or a death certificate.
  - V. Fees to the Clerk of Courts office range from \$27.50 to \$60, and many only accept cash, check or money order. Please visit your Clerk's office for more details. A list of hyperlinks to the civil parishes is included on the final page of this document.

## **Step Eight: Ongoing Marriage Enrichment**

- a. The day of your wedding is just the beginning of life together as a couple. The Church encourages you to always enrich your marriage by first praying together, going to mass together, sharing your gifts in your church community and taking advantage of all the church as to offer in programs or retreats. With God's help along with your continued devotion to each other, you will be able to enjoy a long and satisfying life together.

*Detailed information can be found on the following pages.*

### **Additional Considerations:**

Offered by ECHO Retreats; ECHO is a dynamic and immersive Catholic retreat experience of St. John Paul II's landmark teaching on Theology of the Body. ECHO is not just an intellectual exercise, but a journey into the heart where we discover the distant echo of God's plan for life and love from the very beginning. Focused on identity, prayer, vocation, relationships and Catholic Church's teachings on human sexuality, participants are invited into a new level of freedom to be the gift that God has called them to be.

At ECHO, retreatants will hear dynamic talks, life-giving discussions. They will experience music and art, daily mass, outdoor activities, quiet prayer, adoration & worship along with life-giving free time.

For more information, please visit ECHO at <https://www.echoretreats.com/>

### **Upcoming Retreats/Dates**

**Engaged Couples Retreat February 7-9, 2025 & September 12-14, 2025**

**Married Couples Retreat October 25-27, 2024**

## Premarital Inquiry

The Catholic Church understands marriage to be a life-long commitment. The wedding, or the celebration of matrimony, is the formal initiation of the commitment. As a couple lives their marriage vocation out, they will experience “joys and hopes and sorrows and anxieties.” (Gaudium et spes 1.) These experiences are not isolated in the couple’s relationship, but with their fellow Christians as well. Through the pastor, the community is made aware of your intention to marry so the community can offer support in your marriage.

The premarital (prenuptial) inquiry is a careful and personal questionnaire that seeks to assess basic readiness and eligibility to marry in the Catholic Church. You and your fiancé(e) can expect to complete this questionnaire in-person with your pastor/deacon, apart from your fiancé(e). Honesty is extremely important and necessary. Prepare for this step by obtaining sacramental records of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation, along with the address and contact information for the parish in which you received these sacraments. The religion of your parents, your thoughts and intentions related to the fundamental aspects of Catholic marriage, and whether you’ve been married before are all the things that will come up during this step.

The prenuptial inquiry questionnaire is completed at the first meeting of the formal preparation allowing ample time to address any impediment(s) or other potentially invalidating cause(s) promptly. During this inquiry, the minister preparing you for marriage will also use this time to learn more about you as a couple if he does not already know you.

## Premarital Inventory

In the initial stages of working together, you will meet with the priest/deacon and take a kind of opinion survey. From the results, an individualized/custom program is designed to facilitate open communication between you and your future spouse. In the Diocese of Alexandria, the online tool that is most often used is called Prepare-Enrich, but some other inventory survey like FOCCUS may be used. This online inventory is completed by both parties separately. Once completed, the preparing minister will make arrangements with you to meet again to review the results of the inventory.

This process has been created with the realization that you have strengths and weaknesses, as do all couples, in the way in which you relate to each other and to those around you. This program is useful in helping the two of you identify areas of your relationship in which you have strengths and weaknesses.

This inventory is not a pass/fail test, but rather an opinion survey that provides a snapshot of how each of you thinks and what each one feels regarding a set of issues that may come up in your future together.

After, your opinions are compiled and as a couple, you and the priest/deacon may set up subsequent follow-up visits to do a series of communication and goal setting exercises to help you learn the results of the survey. You can then take appropriate steps to celebrate your strengths and build up your weaknesses. These follow-up appointments should be completed within the first two months after your initial meeting with the priest/deacon.

## Premarital Diocesan Session

The couple must also attend a session presented by the Office of Religious Education and Faith Formation. Special arrangements for marriage preparation may be needed for various ethnic groups or people who are entering a second marriage. The couple is also required to attend at least the introductory session on Natural Family Planning which is included with the onsite Diocesan Session. If the couple is not able to attend an in person Diocesan session, please see option B and C of the Diocesan Guidelines for the Sacrament of Matrimony.

## Premarital Couple Mentoring

A parish may have married couples assist engaged couples in the formal preparation of marriage. This could be of great impact as married couples may be more credible in presenting the Catholic Church's moral teachings about risk factors for marriage, such as cohabitation and premarital sexual activity. They can also share lived experiences that can benefit and challenge their conception of an always blissful marriage. This ministry of couples can also enhance the life of the parish community by giving an emphasis to the sacrament of matrimony in the parish.

## Couple Mentoring

A parish may have separate married couples accompany newly married couples for up to one year after their marriage. It is encouraged that couples meet once a month, for the first year of marriage, to assist them in their adjustment to everyday married life. A resource that could be utilized during these monthly meetings is "Better Together" from Dynamic Catholic.

## Celebration of Marriage

### a. Liturgical Preparation and Celebration

When a couple exchanges their vows during the wedding liturgy, the celebration not only pertains to the couple, their family, and friends but they are also offering a visible sign of God's presence to the parish and the larger church. As ministers of the sacrament of marriage, the couple should strive for a wedding liturgy that is "valid, worthy, fruitful, simple, and dignified. Inasmuch as it is a sacramental action of the church, the liturgical celebration of marriage should involve the Christian community, with the full, active and responsible participation of all those present." (*JP II, Apostolic Exhortation On the Family, November 22, 1981*) For couples who are convalidating a civil union or entering into a second marriage, they are encouraged to celebrate the marriage with simplicity.

## **b. Blessing of a Couples Engagement**

The use of blessing for an engaged couple can help integrate the couple's religious practices. The *Book of Blessings* (VI. Order For The Blessing Of An Engaged Couple pg. 96) can be used especially if the blessing takes place at a parish Mass.

## **c. Preparation of the Wedding Liturgy**

The priest, deacon, or parish representative will assist the couple in preparing for the celebration. The preparer works with the couple by sharing or explaining the various options for readings and other official liturgical texts for the rite and chooses which will be used. The process of selecting the wedding texts can be a pastoral occasion for further instruction on marriage, reading scripture together as a couple or praying together.

The bride and groom have the opportunity to choose between different options for several elements of the wedding liturgy. Those elements will vary depending on the form of the wedding liturgy and may include: the opening prayer, the readings, the responsorial psalm, the Gospel acclamation, the form for declaring consent, the blessing and exchange of rings, the general intercessions, the prayer over the gifts, the nuptial blessing, the prayer after communion and the final blessing.

## **d. Considerations of Date, Place, Time**

Due to each parish having different daily schedules, the specific date and time available for a wedding celebration will vary. Before a wedding date is finalized, the couple must discuss the date they have chosen with their priest/deacon to verify the date is available in their parish and that there are no liturgical limitations determined by the date to oppose the use of the wedding liturgy form they have chosen.

If needed, the couple should be advised of the nature of Lent and that weddings celebrated during this season must be consistent with the penitential spirit of the season. As a rule, marriages are not celebrated during Holy Week and are prohibited on Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

Also if needed, the couple should be advised that the nuptial Mass with its prayers and readings cannot be used during the Triduum; Christmas; Epiphany; Ascension; Pentecost; the Sundays of Advent, Lent and Easter; Ash Wednesday; the weekdays of Holy Week; the octave of Easter, the solemnities of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints listed in the general calendar; All Souls; and proper solemnities.

If the wedding Mass is celebrated on a solemnity, a Sunday during the Christmas Season, or on a Sunday in Ordinary Time, the proper prayers for the Mass of the



day are used. On such occasions, one of the readings may be chosen from the texts provided for the celebration of marriage, the nuptial blessing is given, and the proper formulary of the solemn blessing is used. Universal law allows marriages between Catholics to be celebrated in churches and in oratories (popularly called chapels) with the permission of the local ordinary or pastor. Marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons are to be celebrated in a sacred place. Marriages between baptized Catholics and those who have not been baptized may be celebrated in an appropriate place. (Weddings in the Diocese of Alexandria are not permitted to be celebrated outdoors, in parks, or in private homes).

**e. Forms of the Wedding Liturgy**

The marriage of two Catholics should normally take place during Mass. However, the pastor may determine cases that it might be better to celebrate the sacrament outside of Mass.

A marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic or between a Catholic and one who is not baptized should take place outside of Mass. In the Diocese of Alexandria, marriages of a Catholic and a baptized Christian who is not Catholic are always celebrated in a church.

If the marriage is between a Catholic and a catechumen, it is appropriate to celebrate the marriage within a celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.

**f. Convalidation of Marriage**

When spouses (at least one being Catholic), who are free to marry, enter a union without the use of the canonical form required by canon law, the union can be convalidated in one or two forms.

**If neither** have been married previously:

The preparing minister performs the Pre-Nuptial Inquiry and the couple will participate in the diocesan Marriage Preparation program.

**If either** party has previously been married before the current civil union:

Couples may elect to participate in the diocesan Marriage Preparation program.

**i. *Simple Convalidation***

Priest/Deacon can offer more information and explain the process of Convalidation.

**ii. *Radical Sanation***

Priest/Deacon can offer more information and explain the process of Radical Sanation.

**g. The Wedding Liturgy Rehearsal**

All who will take an active part in the wedding liturgy, including the families of the bride and groom, should be present at the rehearsal for the wedding liturgy. A prayer or prayer service should be offered to begin and end the rehearsal. The Sacrament of Reconciliation should be offered before the wedding liturgy to the bride and groom.

**h. The Ceremony: The Wedding Liturgy**

Marriage is the only sacrament in which the persons receiving the sacrament are also the ministers and signs of the sacrament. The priest/deacon is a witness to the vows. Therefore, the couple should conduct themselves during the marriage liturgy in a mature manner mindful of their dignity as ministers and signs of the sacrament.

**i. People in the Wedding Liturgy**

The wedding liturgy includes those ministers needed to serve in the liturgical celebration. Care should be taken in selecting those who will exercise liturgical ministries in the marriage celebration. These ministers include competent cantors, musicians, lectors and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, greeters, ushers, altar servers, gift bearers and others. Friends, relatives, or parishioners who already serve in these ministries at their own parishes are often better suited to serve in the capacity in the wedding celebration.

**j. Music in the Wedding Liturgy**

The responsibility for effective pastoral celebration in a parish community falls upon all those who exercise major roles in the liturgy. Music is an important part of all liturgies, but it brings on a special meaning to weddings. Therefore, it is important for early meetings with the Pastor, Music Director if one in the parish, and couple to take time to discuss the music selections.

Music selections should be based upon the liturgy. Secular music, or a popular selection can have an important place in the relationship of the couple, but rarely have a proper place in the liturgy.

Many parishes have prepared lists that suggest appropriate songs. Revisions should be made regularly to acquire appropriate new material. A parish must rely upon the talents available within the community.

**k. Photography and Videography**

Photographs and videos are an important remembrance of the wedding liturgy. Special care should always be taken by each parish when choreographing the photographing or videography of the wedding liturgy to ensure that the action does not become a distraction to the participants, nor does it interfere with the movement and dignity of the liturgy.

Your wedding day is a special moment in your life and in the life of the church. We are thankful for your upcoming sacramental union. If you have any questions, please contact your preparing minister or the Diocese of Alexandria Office of Religious Education and Faith Formation, at (318) 445-6424 ext. (207)

## Pre-Cana Diocesan Session

### St. Joseph Center

Offered Four times a year. 2025 Feb 8<sup>th</sup>, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, Aug 2<sup>nd</sup>, Oct 11<sup>th</sup>

#### Schedule subject to change

7:30am – 8:00am	<b>Arrival &amp; Sign In</b>
8:00am - 8:30am	<b>Introduction to include Choice/Readiness to Marry</b> – Presenter
8:30am – 9:10am	<b>Spirituality/Sacrament</b> – Presenter
9:10am – 10:00am	<b>Communication</b> – Presenter
10:00am - 10:15am	<b>Break</b>
10:15am - 11:00am	<b>Prayer &amp; Faith</b> – Presenter
11:00am – 12:00pm	<b>Topics of Conversation-</b> Presenter
	<b>Family of Origin</b>
	<b>Cohabitation</b>
	<b>Children</b>
	<b>Careers</b>
	<b>Commitment</b>
12:00pm - 12:30pm	<b>Lunch</b>
12:35pm - 1:35pm	<b>Finances</b> – Presenter
1:40pm – 2:30pm	<b>Sexuality &amp; NFP</b> – Presenter
2:30pm – 2:45pm	<b>Break</b>
2:45pm- 3:45pm	<b>Couple Panel Discussion</b> (below currently participate at Cabrini)
3:45pm	<b>Blessing of the Engaged Couples</b> – Presenter
4:00pm	<b>Dismissal</b>

## State & Civil Resources

[\(State of Louisiana\) Application for Marriage License](#)

[Avoyelles Parish Clerk of Court](#)

[Caldwell Parish Clerk of Court](#)

[Catahoula Parish Clerk of Court](#)

[Concordia Parish Clerk of Court](#)

[Franklin Parish Clerk of Court](#)

[Grant Parish Clerk of Court](#)

[LaSalle Parish Clerk of Court](#)

[Madison Parish Clerk of Court](#)

[Natchitoches Parish Clerk of Court](#)

[Rapides Parish Clerk of Court](#)

[Tensas Parish Clerk of Court](#)

[Vernon Parish Clerk of Court](#)

Winn Parish currently does not offer free online Clerk of Court access.