



order to limit the size of families. Instead, the Church recommends the use of Natural Family Planning since it is in keeping with the Church's understanding of God's intention for each sexual act to intensify the unity of the couple and be open to creating new life. Therefore, your pastor may require you to receive some special instruction regarding Natural Family Planning. There are online programs that provide this information as well as live instruction through the Office of Marriage & Family Life. Information concerning these instructional opportunities is available on the Office website: [www.MFLDiobr.org](http://www.MFLDiobr.org).



### Step Six: Planning the Wedding Liturgy

At an appropriate time, you will need to meet with the priest or deacon who will be officiating at the wedding to plan the wedding liturgy. If both parties are Catholic, the wedding will normally be celebrated within Mass with a priest as the celebrant. If one party is not Catholic, the wedding liturgy does not include the reception of Communion and so the ceremony would only involve the Liturgy of the Word in which either a priest, deacon or non-Catholic minister would officiate. When the parties are of different religions, it is usually a good idea to invite the non-Catholic party's own minister to take part in some way.

In planning the wedding liturgy, you will have the opportunity to choose your own Bible readings from those approved for weddings. In addition, you will be able

to "personalize" the ceremony by décor, music, and other symbols that you may choose. All of your choices, however, must comply with the liturgical laws of the Church, the applicable parish policies and "good taste." The local pastor will have the final approval of your choices.



### Step Seven: Get a Marriage License

You must obtain a Louisiana State marriage license from the Clerk of Court in a Louisiana civil parish between 30 days and 72 hours before the planned marriage ceremony. This license is usually brought to the wedding rehearsal for the minister to review and determine the procedure for signing it.



### Step Eight: On-going Enrichment

While family & friends pray that your wedding day will be one of the happiest days of your life, the Church knows that the realities of everyday life can eventually challenge your relationship. Therefore, the Church urges you to continually make the effort to enrich your marriage. There are many ways to do this, beginning with praying together as a couple, worshipping together as a family, sharing your gifts within the ministries of your parish and taking advantage of marriage enrichment programs and retreats. With God's help and your continued attention to your relationship, you will be able to enjoy a long and satisfying life together.



# Preparing for Marriage



## Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge

Congratulations! God has called you to holy matrimony and you have generously responded by deciding to marry. The Church shares your joy and wishes to help prepare you for a holy and successful life together. To help you understand what might be involved in that preparation, the Diocese has created this informational brochure to guide you through the process.

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This brochure summarizes the longer, formal 2008 *Marriage Preparation Guidelines* for all seven Catholic dioceses of the State of Louisiana. The full set of these Statewide guidelines is on the Marriage & Family Life website at [www.MFLDiobr.org/diocesan-marriage-documents](http://www.MFLDiobr.org/diocesan-marriage-documents)



Marriage  
Preparation



### Step One: Meet with Priest or Deacon

The preparation process begins by contacting your local parish at least six months before your planned wedding date to arrange a meeting with the priest or deacon. This meeting has three purposes: a) to establish a relationship with the minister, especially if that minister will be performing the wedding ceremony, b) to complete the necessary documentation which ensures that there are no obstacles to marriage (e.g. a previous marriage that has not been resolved by an annulment), c) to review with the minister the Church's basic understanding of marriage as part of God's plan.

The priest or deacon will want to make sure that you understand the Church's view of marriage as a sacred reality, in

which you are called by God to form a "community of life and love," that is meant to be permanent, requires the safeguard of mutual fidelity and is open to the gift of children.

If one party is not Catholic, the Catholic party will be asked to formally promise to remain Catholic and to do all in his/her power to have the children of this union baptized and raised as Catholics. The non-Catholic party will be made aware of this promise by the Catholic party.



### Step Two: Reserve the Space

Once the first step has been completed, you may tentatively reserve the Church for a particular date and time to celebrate your wedding. These arrangements require the approval of the Pastor.

Since the Catholic Church views marriage as a Sacrament and sees the wedding ceremony as an act of worship, the Diocese insists that weddings take place within a church building. However, to avoid interference with regular weekend services, the Diocese does not allow weddings to be scheduled after 3:00 PM on Saturdays (and vigils of Holy Days) or on Sundays (or Holy Days).

When the parties are from different religious backgrounds, the Catholic Church may give special permission for the wedding to take place in a non-Catholic worship space with a non-Catholic minister officiating. In those cases, the attendance and participation of a Catholic priest or deacon is highly recommended, but not required.



### Step Three: Pre-marital Inventory

Within a month after your first meeting, the priest or deacon will make arrangements for you to complete a pre-marital inventory, such as FOCCUS or PREPARE. This inventory is intended to help you, and those involved in your preparation, determine the strengths in your relationship as well as the areas in your relationship that might need some improvement. This inventory is not a test, but rather a tool to help increase your chances for a successful and satisfying marriage.

When you have completed the inventory, the minister will arrange for you to meet with him, a trained lay person or a mentor couple to review the results, highlight your strengths and work with you to improve those areas of your relationship in which you may need some growth. This review process may take several sessions to complete.

If, at any point, the priest, deacon or lay ministers determine that some significant problem might exist in the relationship, the pastor may require you, as a couple, to receive some specialized counseling to address that need. This kind of specialized counseling is almost always required when either party is a minor; when a parent opposes the marriage or when an unmarried woman is already pregnant. Special counseling is also appropriate if there is an indication of drug abuse, problem drinking, mental illness or physical violence within the relationship.



### Step Four: Pre-Marriage Program

At least two months before the wedding, you will need to register for and attend one of the designated pre-marriage programs offered within the Diocese. The approved programs include:

#### Life Choice

(a one day marriage preparation retreat)

#### Engaged Encounter

(a weekend retreat for the engaged)

#### Re-Marriage Program

(for the previously married)

Registration and information regarding these programs can be found online at the website for the Office of Marriage & Family Life at:

[www.MFLDiobr.org/marriage-preparation](http://www.MFLDiobr.org/marriage-preparation)



### Step Five: Natural Family Planning

As you continue to discuss your future life together, planning for a family becomes an extremely important issue to address. The Church certainly urges you to plan responsibly to determine when and how many children you wish to nurture and educate. At the same time, the Church does not approve of artificial contraception or abortion in