



## Sacramental Preparation for Marriage Steps to Marrying in the Church of the Diocese of Grand Rapids

### Preparation Process

Congratulations on your upcoming marriage. This is a time of great joy. And the Catholic community shares in the joy of your marriage. We are here to support and assist you in your preparation for sharing your lifetime in marriage. The Diocese of Grand Rapids outlines the following process for preparing for your marriage.

### Step 1: Initial Contact

Your preparation in the Church formally begins when you make initial contact with the parish. It is the policy of the diocese that a couple is to formally begin preparation **at least six months in advance** of the date they wish to marry. When you contact a parish, you can expect to be greeted by a member of the parish staff who will connect you with the pastor (or the parish staff person responsible for marriage preparation) to set up a formal meeting with you and your fiancée.

### Step 2: Assessment

#### Initial Meeting

The priest or deacon is the person responsible at this first meeting. Their role during this first session involves assisting you in assessing your readiness for marriage.

As the Church's witness to your marriage, the priest or deacon has a serious responsibility and wants to make sure that there are no serious obstacles to the creation of a Christian marriage. To enter a valid marriage, it is necessary to be free to enter this union, to understand what marriage is and what it requires, and to make a permanent commitment. If you have been previously married, this needs to be communicated at this meeting so that the priest or deacon can act accordingly.

As part of the initial meeting then, the pastor or deacon will consult forms provided by the diocesan chancery which indicate whether or not dispensations are required. If dispensations are needed, more time for preparation may be required.

The other goals for this first meeting are:

- To get an overview of what the entire marriage preparation process will involve.
- To discover the options available for participating in marriage preparation programs.
- To arrange a date for your wedding.

#### Premarital Inventory

Another part at this stage of preparation is the premarital inventory -- an assessment tool for you as a couple, with the assistance of the marriage preparation minister(s), to explore and strengthen dimensions of your relationship. It is not a test for getting married. After completing the response forms for the inventory, these are sent for scoring and returned to the marriage preparation minister(s) -- who will then set up meetings with you to share and discuss the results.

### Step 3: Formation

#### Marriage Preparation Program (Pre-Cana)

The parish or diocesan marriage preparation team directs this part of the preparation. Pre-Cana programs enable couples to concentrate more intensely on the many facets of married life. The topics covered during a Pre-Cana program will include: Sacramental Marriage, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Children, Careers, Commitment and Church, Family of Origin, Intimacy, Sexuality, and Natural Family Planning.

Some Pre-Cana programs are offered as a conference/retreat. Other programs are offered as series of sessions. A schedule of [Pre-Cana programs](#) is posted on our diocesan website.

Some Pre-Cana programs are run by sponsor couples in your parish. The role of the Sponsor Couple is provide the same content, but the format of meeting couple-to-couple allows you more opportunity to dialogue about the various dimensions of married life.

### **Worship and Prayer**

A key dimension of the Christian life is to participate in a life of prayer, both personally and with your parish community. This period of preparation is an opportunity for the parish to prayerfully support you; some parishes offer a blessing rite for your engagement during Sunday Mass. This is also a time when the two of you can practice praying together, for one another and for your marriage. Your parish has resources to assist you.

### **Service**

When a couple makes a marital commitment to one another, through the grace of the sacrament, Christ himself becomes present in your life in a new way, empowering them to be witnesses of God's love. As you prepare for your marriage, the Church encourages you to participate in Christian witness to others together as a couple. Most parishes provide opportunities for service throughout the year.

## **Step 4: Review**

### **Follow-up with the priest or deacon**

The priest or deacon is the responsible person for this session. This meeting is an opportunity to reflect on your time of preparation. It is a time to affirm the positive aspects of your developing relationship that you have been observed during preparation. The minister can discuss with you any aspects of your relationship that might need further development.

If not already completed, a minister will also spend time taking care of the necessary canonical papers which have been explained in the initial meeting.

## **Step 5: The Wedding**

### **Planning the Wedding Liturgy**

The Church has a specific formula for order of the wedding ritual in which you have some choices. In planning the wedding liturgy, the priest or deacon or parish staff member will assist you in choosing readings and appropriate music, as well as outline the parish policies for wedding liturgies. You may ask for a copy of the parish policies at your initial meeting.

### **Rehearsal**

The priest/deacon/pastoral associate or church volunteer will lead this session. The Rehearsal is usually scheduled for the evening before your wedding day and provides you, your wedding party and family the overview of the wedding liturgy. It is also an opportunity for your friends and family to pray for you and with you in anticipation of your marriage.

### **Wedding**

The day has finally arrived. All your efforts in preparation and planning are complete, and you can celebrate. The liturgy of the wedding is set so that with the whole Church, you can celebrate the gift of love that God has given you to share with one another and to bear witness to the world.

As you formally enter into your married life through the exchange of your vows in witness before the community, your relationship with the community continues. The Church is a community that will continue to support and challenge you as you grow in your vocation to married and family life.