

Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church

GUIDELINES FOR COUPLES PREPARING FOR THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY MATRIMONY

"To say that we are made in the image and likeness of God is to say that we are made to LOVE" -- Thomas Merton

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE: A COMMITMENT TO AN INTIMATE PARTNERSHIP OF LIFE AND LOVE

Marriage is a vocation. The Church understands every human being is called to the fundamental vocation to love. This love is concrete, not abstract, and it wills the good of others. The love of spouses for each other is the way most Christian believers live their vocation. Both in its practice and in its hope, the love of husband and wife who love unconditionally are signs of God's love for each other and the world. In doing so, they help each other attain holiness. This love is revealed in the marital relationship, the love that extends itself to family and friends, and finally, a love that seeks out the good of the "neighbor" in one's community and world.

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE: A COVENANT NOT JUST A LEGAL CONTRACT

Jesus Christ acknowledged marriage as a sacramental covenant. Covenant is a biblical term that describes God's tremendous love to people throughout history. Jesus gave himself to humanity perfectly and concretely in service to all the people he encountered. His great love was shown through his sacrifice by death on a cross. Through living their marriage covenant, spouses mirror Jesus' love for all. Married spouses try to imitate that perfect self-gift through loving service to each other.

To be married in the Catholic Church means that you wish to say something important about your deepest selves. Marriage in the Catholic Church is the announcement that you are called to a sacramental covenant that goes far beyond marriage understood as a "legal contract." When speaking of this covenant, the prophets often referred to marriage as the best way of understanding God's relationship to us - absolute love of imperfect human beings. To say marriage is a "covenant" is to say that a couple commits themselves to each other both in the present and for the unknown future in fidelity and exclusivity.

MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROCESS

By creating the opportunity for dialogue and personal assessment, the church community provides support and encouragement for you to "marry well." The Diocesan Marriage Guidelines consist of two phases that are designed to pastorally guide you. The primary goal is to assist you as you prepare for a sacramental marriage, a lasting union in which Christ is always present, making both of you ministers of Christ's love to each other and the whole world. *During this time, we ask that you make a good Confession to prepare for this sacrament!*

Phase 1 -PROCLAIM YOUR COMMITMENT

Engagement represents a special time in your relationship. The Church views this time as a period of actively preparing for that more complete commitment of marriage. At least six months before the date desired for the wedding, you should contact your parish representative and schedule an appointment. Together, you will talk with your parish representative who will discuss the Church's understanding of the vocation you have chosen and the requirements for the valid reception of the sacrament.

The Church presumes that its members have a basic right to marry. There are many cases, which are clearly defined in Church law, where a wedding may not be possible or may have to be delayed. It is up to the Church leaders to verify your freedom to marry. In those special circumstances where delaying the wedding may be required, the representative will explain the difficulty and help you to overcome any obstacle that is present. Once the difficulty is overcome, a mutually agreeable wedding date may be established. No date will be set until both parties are free to marry in the Catholic Church.

A premarital survey (FOCCUS) to aid discussion will be administered. The results of the survey or inventory will be discussed and a catechesis on Christian marriage will be shared with both of you.

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING is a method used by couples as a means of achieving or avoiding a pregnancy. It fosters respect and acceptance of the total person by teaching couples the nature of fertility. Marriages are enriched through a mutual understanding of the shared responsibility for family planning, creating a deeper appreciation for the value of life. For more information about Natural Family Planning, please call Cathy at 504.861.6243.

Phase 2 - ENRICH YOUR COMMITMENT: MARRIAGE AND THE LAWS OF THE CHURCH

As the next step, you will attend an enrichment experience aimed at helping you gain insight into yourselves and your relationship. Married couples, witnessing their life in the sacrament, will share in this experience with you either in a one on one format or on a weekend long retreat. Topics covered are marriage as a vocation, obstacles in marriage and family life, skills for healthy communication, conflict resolution, as well as human life and human sexuality as gifts from God. You must present a certificate of completion from one of the marriage preparation programs. By the end of this six months of preparation and discernment, you and your fiancé should be comfortable making a positive commitment to the Church to celebrate your permanent sacramental union in the marriage ceremony.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Each person is unique and each marriage is like no other. Couples wishing to be married in a Catholic ceremony sometimes present special circumstances that need to be resolved before a wedding takes place.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Marriages

Marriage between a Catholic and a person of another Christian faith community is often called an Ecumenical marriage. Marriage between a Catholic and a person of a different faith tradition is often called an Interfaith marriage. We treasure our tradition and it is important for all those entering marriage with Catholics to become familiar with our history and beliefs. Catholics entering an Ecumenical or Interfaith marriage should also make an effort to know and understand the faith traditions of their future spouses. Catholics will be asked to reaffirm their faith, and to the best of their ability, continue to practice their faith with their children.

Cohabitation

If you are currently living together, and are engaging in a sexual relationship before marriage, your parish representative will want to explain the reasons for the Church's concern about this. They will also want to discuss with you the reasons why you have chosen to live together before marriage. The fact that you are now seeking a sacramental marriage in the Catholic Church can be a positive sign of your maturing relationship.

Remarriages

The Archdiocese of New Orleans offers enrichment opportunities for couples when one or both have been married previously. Couples are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities. Before proceeding with a marriage, the Church must resolve the status of any previous bond. If you or your partner have been previously married and an annulment has not been obtained, extra time may be needed to determine if you are free to marry in the Catholic Church. No wedding date can be set until all issues surrounding your freedom to marry have been resolved.

Often the process for marriage annulment is helpful in healing the pain associated with the breakdown of a former relationship. You may come away from the process with a new view of the qualities necessary to sustain a lifelong marriage.

Pregnancy

If a couple has not been planning marriage, pregnancy alone will not be considered sufficient reason to enter marriage or to shorten the marriage preparation process.

Age Requirement

Any person under the age of eighteen must examine the particular issues of their intended marriage. The parents of a person under age eighteen will be contacted by the representative as part of the preparation process.

Validation

If you have been married in a civil ceremony and wish your marriage to be validated, or blessed by the Church, you should contact your parish representative. You will be asked to complete an appropriate preparation before validation.

Delay of Marriage

Circumstances may arise which would necessitate more extended consultation and evaluation in determining a couple's readiness for Christian marriage. These circumstances can exist where:

- The parish representative is convinced that one of the parties lacks an understanding of, or a commitment to, the essential properties of Christian marriage, e.g., fidelity, permanence and the right to children.
- The Catholic partner explicitly rejects the practice of the Catholic faith.
- The couple, in good faith, refuses to take part in the formal marriage preparation.
- One or both is judged to be lacking in the minimal maturity demanded by Christian marriage.
- There is evidence of substantial and undue pressure to marry from external sources, e.g., parental pressure or premarital pregnancy.

In all such cases, the parish representative will be ready to assist the couple. If skills are required beyond those possessed by the parish representative, the couple will be referred to the appropriate professional person.

OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION

The following information is provided for your consideration and use. Our hope is to give you answers to some frequently asked questions.

PARISH -- While it is traditional for the wedding to be celebrated in the parish of the bride's family, this is not a Church rule. The groom's parish may also be considered.

BAPTISMAL RECORD: The Church requires a recent copy of your baptismal record for each of the Catholic parties. This document must be issued within 6 months of your wedding date. You may obtain a recent copy by contacting your church of baptism. Let them know that you are getting married and that you need a copy of your baptism record. They will ask you for some information. The record can be mailed directly to the parish or to your address. This is an official document of your freedom to marry in the Church.

For the PARTY THAT IS NOT CATHOLIC: If you were baptized, a copy of your certificate of baptism that you or your parents may have available will be acceptable. If the certificate is not available, a letter from the pastor or minister of the church in which you were baptized is sufficient.

FOR THE PERSON NOT BAPTIZED: No documents are necessary.

MARRIAGE LICENSE -- The following are the general requirements for the marriage license that you procure from a clerk of court office. **This marriage license should be presented to the church parish representative no later than two weeks before the wedding date.**

- Certified copy of birth certificate or original birth card for both applicants.
- Marriage License Fee. This fee may vary by location, so call before you go. They require **Cash**.
- Social security numbers, addresses, father's name, mother's maiden name and place of birth for both applicants.
- **If either party has been married previously**, please provide the clerk with a copy of the final divorce decree, or if the former spouse is deceased, a copy of the death certificate.
- You must be 18 years of age to marry with out parental consent.
- You must obtain the marriage license at least **72 hours prior** to the wedding ceremony.
- Either party may apply for the license.
- The Marriage license will expire **30 days** from the date and time of issue.

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE: SIGNIFICANCE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

To move unconditionally into a loving and trusting commitment to another person and to do so with one's body, mind and spirit is to witness to God's love. Giving oneself over to the other happens on many levels - the psychological, the physical, the spiritual, the familial, the social, the economic - and it is intended to be permanent. No fuller union of two human beings with one another is possible. It takes TWO to make it, and only ONE to break it. The success and growth of a marriage depends on both.

We are excited to help you move forward with this commitment! Congratulations!

If you have any questions or would like more information on the Marriage Preparation Program, your parish representative would be happy to answer any of your questions.