

Welcome! Congratulations on your recent engagement!

This page is intended to give basic information on marriage preparation in the Catholic Church. It cannot substitute for a conversation with a priest, deacon or pastoral associate about your specific situation and needs, but it can provide you with a sense of the normal requirements and procedures required by the Diocese of Lansing.

Catholic teaching about marriage

For Catholics, marriage is not merely a civil contract but is a covenant between a man and a woman before God. A marriage is a lifelong commitment and a wedding is never a casual event. Because it is such a serious moment, the Church asks that those wishing to be married prepare themselves by taking part in a preparation program that is established by our Diocese. As you prepare for marriage, we ask you to prayerfully reflect on the nature of this sacrament. Before we look at some of the steps of that preparation process, consider some of the points made in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (references* are to paragraph number):

***1660** The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament.

1661 The sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life.

1662 Marriage is based on the consent of the contracting parties, that is, on their will to give themselves, each to the other, mutually and definitively, in order to live a covenant of faithful and fruitful love.

Catholics are obliged to marry in the Catholic Church, following the marriage rite of the Catholic Church. Their exchange of vows must be witnessed by either a priest or deacon and two other witnesses. A Catholic can receive permission to marry a non-Catholic, in this case the Catholic must seek a written dispensation from our Bishop.

Preparing for marriage

Most couples reserve a reception location as much as a year in advance. Before you do that, or contract a photographer, or think about invitations, or make any other agreements, please follow the process. Diocesan guidelines say you should do so at least 6-9 months before the time you'd like to get married. (Note: if either of the couple has been married in a civil ceremony they must file for an annulment, call the parish office for more information.) Our church calendar fills up quickly so a year in advance is suggested.

Initial interview

At the St. Thomas the Apostle Parish website (www.sta2.org) you will find an application and reflection question worksheet.

Complete these and submit them to the parish office, attention Julie Mussio, (jmussio@sta2.org) wedding coordinator. When this paper work is submitted we can look at tentative dates.

Canon law states that a wedding date cannot be confirmed until you have had the initial interview with a priest or deacon in which it is determined that you are free to marry.

This is also an opportunity to explain the marriage preparation process.

Marriage readiness

Another aspect of the discernment process looks at your readiness to marry. While there is no possible way to determine this definitively, there are clear indicators that can predict potential problems or even the eventual failure of the marriage. You'll be asked to complete a premarital inventory, which will give both of you an opportunity to reflect on your attitudes and your relationship. This isn't a test, but is an aid for you and the priest or deacon to use in highlighting important areas for discussion.

Preparation steps required by the Diocese of Lansing:

1. Obtain a recently issued copy of your baptismal record from your respective places of baptism. The certificate must be dated within 6 months of your wedding. A copy of the original does not work.

2. The **Foccus or Prepare and Enrich** inventory – these are scheduled through Julie Mussio.

3. A communication and conflict resolution workshop – there are two offered in our Diocese:

We CARE, offered by Catholic Social Services *or* **Engaged Encounter**, offered by the Diocese of Lansing. You can register for either of these by visiting their website.

4. Natural Family Planning Class – the three session class is strongly recommended for anyone in the child-bearing age, register through the Couple to Couple League. The Diocese of Lansing offers an introductory workshop that is the minimum requirement.

5. Attend six sessions of "Beloved". These cover a variety of topics and cover the basic catholic teaching about the sacrament. They are held once per month on a Saturday evening from 7-9 pm. During your year or so of preparation choose six dates to attend these sessions. The dates are published at our parish website.

6. You will need to obtain a civil marriage license from a Michigan County Clerk's office, within 30 days of the ceremony.

Parishioners who seek to prepare only

We ask for a good-will offering of \$200. This covers the file preparation that follows the process required by the Diocese. The application and reflection questions are required to begin this process.

The Rite

The Church provides three different rites for marriage:

- a. a sacramental rite during the Eucharist, which is the usual (but not mandatory) form when both parties are Catholic;
- b. a sacramental rite outside Eucharist, which is the usual (but not mandatory) form when one party is baptized, but not Catholic;
- c. a non-sacramental rite between a Catholic and an unbaptized person.

The *Liturgy of the Word* (b & c) will follow the format as at any Mass. The readings may be selected from the many options given in the lectionary, or may be other appropriate Scriptures. Non-scriptural readings are not used. The psalm is preferably sung, as is the gospel acclamation. The general intercessions should address the needs of the world and the universal Church as well as the needs of the couple. We will guide you in planning your ceremony.

Music

Be sure to ask. In general, when deciding what music to use, consider the following questions:

- a. Is this a well-written piece of music?
- b. Are the text and music in keeping with the nature of the liturgy?
- c. Can the music be used to help the assembly to pray?

The music used before or during the liturgy should be clearly identifiable as prayer by all present. Secular love songs and ballads that have personal meaning to the couple are best played or sung at the reception.

We reserve a parish organist for you, and ask you to use one of our parish cantor's – all musicians must be approved by the music director, Lucia Campbell.

Other important information:

Wedding times are scheduled when the church is normally available, this means on Saturdays at either 11:00 AM or 1:30 PM only. For Friday evening weddings, we suggest the ceremony begin from 4 to 5:30 PM. Rehearsals are typically the evening before the wedding at 5:30, and last about one hour.

The church fee will be somewhere between \$300. and \$1,000, the lower fees are for people registered at St. Thomas for at least six months, (or their parents), and those who volunteer and contribute regularly. Additionally, there are musician fees and a Priest (or Deacon) stipend.

Miscellaneous items:

Please dress for a prayerful, sacred event; we ask you and your wedding party to dress modestly. Someone from the church (a sacristan) will be there to help you through the rehearsal and ceremony. We also provide two altar servers if the ceremony is included in a Mass.

Flowers and pew bows are permitted, the flower arrangement that we suggest is a tall arrangement to be placed in front of the ambo (it is white). Pew bows should not be taped, but tied or clipped on only.

Because of the busy nature of the church space itself, receiving lines should be held at the reception, not at the church.

Unity candles are not properly part of the liturgy of the Mass and are not allowed.

For safety reasons, the use of an aisle runner is strongly discouraged.

Flash photography is allowed only during the procession, not during the ceremony.
Up to thirty minutes following the ceremony is allowed for picture taking.