

Getting Married in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How soon should we inform our parish that we are getting married?

You should speak to your pastor *as soon as possible* after you get engaged and inform him of the proposed wedding date. *This needs to be no less than 6 months prior to the wedding date.*

2. I'm getting married, but I don't belong to a Catholic parish. What should I do?

The first step is to find a parish community in your neighborhood, speak with the pastor, and register. The Archdiocesan [website](#) has a list of all its parishes and their locations. Find the parish closest to you and visit the priest; he will be happy to talk with you about your upcoming wedding, and the process for registering in the parish.

3. What is required of us to get married in the Catholic Church?

Your parish priest will address all of the requirements for getting married in the Church with you, so it is important to set up a meeting with him as soon as possible after you become engaged. Briefly, here are some things you will need to obtain/do in order to marry in the Catholic Church:

- **Baptismal Certificates**
- [Schedule](#) marriage preparation
- Take the [FOCCUS Inventory](#), or other pre-marriage inventory (recommended)
- Complete the Pre-Nuptial Investigation (PNI) with your priest/deacon
- Meet with the assisting priest, or his designate, at least three times
- If one of you had a previous marriage annulled, [Obtain a Declaration of Nullity](#)

There are many other details to work out, and the priest/deacon at your parish will help you in [planning for the ceremony](#), [choosing music](#) and [Scripture readings](#), etc.

4. What is the Pre-Nuptial Investigation (PNI)?

The PNI is an official document the priest preparing you for marriage completes with you.

5. What is Marriage Preparation (pre-Cana)?

Marriage preparation is a time of preparation for the wedding day, *and every day after*. It is a time of meditating on the meaning of the Sacramental union, and what difference inviting Christ into your marriage and your lives makes. Preparation for marriage takes the form of meetings/gatherings held at the parish or an Archdiocese-sponsored venue; or a weekend retreat. This “formal” process is designed to help you, as a couple, grow closer to God and each other, and to come to a deeper understanding of the sacrament of marriage, into which you will soon

enter. Group gatherings and retreats are one aspect of your preparation, and your pastor/assisting priest will guide you through the process by scheduling personal meetings with you.

6. Are there marriage preparation classes in Spanish?

Yes. Classes in are available in Spanish through the Catholic Institute for Evangelization. You can find out more at:

http://archphila.org/evangelization/famlife/famlife_pdf/Hispanic%20Mg%20Prep%20Form%20and%20Schedule-100809.pdf

7. Why do we have to do a marriage preparation program?

Marriage preparation is not just a “requirement” to be fulfilled before you can have a Church wedding. Rather, the Church gives this time to couples as a gift, to help you step away from the details of planning for “the day,” and focus your attention on nurturing a lifetime commitment to each other and to God.

The Church seeks to promote marriage by instructing couples in what they are undertaking in choosing to marry in the Church, namely that they are saying a resounding YES! to the three goods of marriage in their vows:

- * **Indissolubility:** marriage is a covenant, a bond between the spouses and made holy and permanent by God. This covenant cannot be broken and lasts until death. Yet even in heaven, spouses will know each other and the love they forged on earth will endure forever, purified and made even stronger because they will be united to God forever.
- * **Fidelity:** true love is faithful, even when it is difficult. Spouses are called to love each other through good and bad times, and to faithfully give themselves only to each other. This total gift of self - which includes the gift of their bodies – is reserved to husband and wife alone, and is not shared with others outside of the marriage bond.
- * **Fruitfulness:** God calls each of us to be “fruitful and multiply.” Husband and wife are to be open to the gift of children. Their love for each other begets love, and their fruitfulness shows itself through their children (natural or adopted), their commitment to Church and community, and their openness toward those whom they encounter each day.

8. When should we schedule our marriage preparation (pre-Cana)?

You should enroll in a formal preparation program **as soon as possible upon your engagement**. Some parishes have pre-Cana teams that run sessions twice a year in various formats. Check with your parish to see if they offer marriage prep. If you parish does not offer classes, you may be able to attend classes at a neighboring parish, but be advised: **most parishes limit attendees to parishioners, and will accept couples outside the parish only if there are spaces open**. Also, be aware that parishes do not advertise their schedules with the Archdiocese, so you will have to contact local parishes on your own. You can find a list of parishes in the Archdiocese here: <http://archphila.org/parishes/index.htm>

****The Archdiocese of Philadelphia Family Life Office offers 4-session gatherings and weekend retreats. Although the sessions are large-group programs (except for retreats), these programs fill up quickly. It is best to reserve your space in a class as soon as possible. Waiting until the last minute to register may result in difficulty getting into your first choice of program, so make arrangements early. Six to eight months before the wedding date is not too early to schedule marriage preparation!** You can find out more about marriage preparation options and the Family Life Office's schedule here:

http://archphila.org/evangelization/famlife/marriage_prep/mpoptions.htm

9. What do we do if one of us isn't Catholic?

Marriage between Catholics and non-Catholics is not prohibited, but there are some additional steps to be completed. Talk with your pastor/assisting priest as soon as possible, and he will guide you through the steps for preparing for an interfaith marriage.

10. If my fiancé(e) is not Catholic, why does he (she) have to go to marriage preparation?

Even though your future spouse is not Catholic, it will be helpful for her/him to attend marriage prep and learn about your faith, and how you value marriage. This can be a great time of exploring and sharing your views about God, your common values and priorities, and learning how to grow closer to one another and God. The marriage prep process can also be a fruitful time of learning for both of you, as you discover more about each other's faiths and how you will incorporate God into your daily lives as a couple and a family once you are married.

11. My fiancé (e) is not Catholic. Can we be married at her Church?

It is possible for a Catholic to marry at the church of his/her non-Catholic fiancé (e), but a dispensation must be obtained in order for the marriage to be recognized by the Catholic Church. Talk with your parish/assisting priest about your plans, and he will take the necessary steps to obtain a dispensation.

12. We're already married "civilly"; how can we get our marriage "blessed?"

A couple married in a civil ceremony may have their marriage recognized by the Catholic Church through *convalidation*. This is a marriage ceremony whereby you exchange your consent with each other before a priest and witnesses, and become sacramentally married. It is important to note that a convalidation can only take place if you and your spouse have been civilly married; if either of you were married previously, you must obtain a declaration of nullity (annulment). Please talk with your parish priest about the steps that need to be taken to have your marriage recognized by the Church.

13. If we are having our marriage convalidated, is it necessary to go to marriage prep classes?

Your pastor/assisting priest will determine what the best course of preparation is for you. It is very beneficial for you to learn more about the sacramentality of marriage and the grace obtained by being "married in the Lord." Your priest may want you to attend a marriage preparation program at your parish or Archdiocese-sponsored

venue. One good option is an [Archdiocesan weekend retreat](#), which accommodates smaller groups and provides a greater opportunity for you to talk about your specific situation with each other, our retreat leaders, and with a priest.

14. Ours is a second marriage. What do we have to do to prepare for marriage?

If you are a widow/widower the process for marriage preparation outlined above applies. If, however, one or both of your previous marriages ended in divorce, you must obtain a declaration of nullity (annulment) before you can proceed with a marriage in the Catholic Church. Your pastor will be able to help you begin this process.

Even if you have been married before, some form of preparation before the new marriage is a good idea. Talk with your pastor/assisting priest about your specific situation and the best mode of preparing to receive the Sacrament of Marriage.

15. Do our witnesses (maid/matron of honor and best man) have to be Catholic?

No. The best man and maid of honor are witnesses to the marriage. Their religious affiliation does not affect the sacramentality or validity of your marriage.

16. What is NFP, and should we take a class before we get married?

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is a system of fertility awareness whereby a couple can determine the times during which they are fertile. NFP is used by married couples to achieve pregnancy or, through discernment of God's will for their family, to postpone pregnancy. NFP has many other benefits for women and their reproductive health, and certain methods can be used to diagnose and treat disease.

NFP classes can be taken at any time, but engagement is a wonderful time to not only learn about NFP and the various methods available, but to grow closer as a result of learning more about God's wonderful design of our bodies. You can learn more about NFP and where to find classes at the Family Life Office's [NFP webpage](#).



Igor Stoyanov's Icon of the Wedding Feast at Cana in Galilee