Archdiocese of Philadelphia
General Marriage Preparation Guidelines

Please note: *In addition to the steps outlined below, some couples may have additional requirements depending on their particular circumstances. This includes couples who are already civilly married, those marrying a baptized or unbaptized non-Catholic, those seeking permission to marry outside the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, or those requesting to celebrate their marriage outside of a Catholic church. In any of these situations, additional documentation, permissions, or dispensations may be required. Therefore, it is important to consult with the priest or deacon assisting with your marriage preparation as early as possible.*

Congratulations on your engagement! Preparing for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is an exciting and meaningful journey. The following outlines the steps, required documents, and recommendations that will help you prepare for a joyful and grace-filled Catholic marriage.

1. Prenuptial Investigation (PNI)

The Prenuptial Investigation (PNI) is the first step in preparing for marriage. During this meeting, the priest or deacon assisting with your marriage preparation will meet with you as a couple—preferably in person, although a virtual meeting is also acceptable.

The purpose of this session is to:

- Collect basic personal information.
- Provide an overview of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.
- Discuss the Church's understanding of marriage and your intentions.
- Identify and address any issues that could impede a valid sacramental marriage.

Following this initial meeting, you will need to obtain the following documents:

- **Recently Issued Baptismal Certificate**

Each baptized Christian should contact the parish or church where they were baptized and request a recently issued baptismal certificate (or baptismal record).

Please note: This request should not be made earlier than six months before your wedding date, as the Catholic Church requires a recently issued record.

- **Witness Forms**

Each person is asked to have two witnesses complete and sign a witness form stating that they know of no reason why you should not be married in the Catholic Church.

Ideally, your witnesses should include:

- One immediate family member, such as a parent or sibling.
- One close friend, cousin, or another person who knows you well.

Witnesses do not need to be Catholic.

After completing the form, each witness should take it to the nearest Catholic parish so that a parish representative can verify the witness's identity and have the parish sign and affix its official seal.

Occasionally, a parish that is unfamiliar with the witness may hesitate to sign the form. If that happens, please contact the priest or deacon who is assisting with your marriage preparation.

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2. Marriage Preparation Program (Pre-Cana)

Every couple preparing for marriage in the Catholic Church is required to complete a Marriage Preparation Program (Pre-Cana).

This requirement may be fulfilled through:

- Any Catholic parish
- Any Catholic diocese
- A Catholic retreat center
- An approved online Catholic marriage preparation program

You are not limited to the diocese or parish where your wedding will take place.

In-Person Pre-Cana Programs

A list of Marriage Preparation programs offered by parishes within the Archdiocese of Philadelphia can be found on the Office for Life and Family website. You are also welcome to attend programs offered by neighboring dioceses in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, or Delaware if they better fit your schedule.

Online Pre-Cana Programs

Many couples appreciate the flexibility of online programs, which offer professionally produced presentations and allow you to complete the material at your own pace. The following listing and links are among the most commonly used and highly recommended programs:

- The Marriage Group – Living Our Faith in Love: Living Our Faith in Love – Online Pre-Cana – The Marriage Group
- Ascension Press – Joy-Filled Marriage: Joy-Filled Marriage, Self-Paced Online Course with Live Guided Discuss – Ascension (ascensionpress.com)
- Agape Catholic Marriage Preparation: Catholic Marriage Prep – Pre-Cana Online
- Thrive Marriage Preparation: https://thrivemarriageprep.com

Any of these programs will satisfy the marriage preparation requirement.

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3. Marriage Inventory (FOCCUS or Similar Assessment)

After completing your Pre-Cana program, you will participate in a Marriage Inventory.

Your facilitator will register both of you and send each of you a separate email containing a personal link to complete the inventory.

Each person should complete the inventory individually, without discussing the questions or answers with one another.

The inventory contains approximately 200 questions covering many aspects of married life, including:

- Communication
- Finances
- Family relationships
- Children and parenting
- Faith and values
- Personality differences
- Expectations for marriage

Once completed, the inventory generates a personalized report that serves as the basis for one or more follow-up sessions with your facilitator. These sessions may be conducted either in person or virtually and are designed to help you better understand one another, celebrate your strengths, and discuss areas that deserve further conversation before marriage.

When you have completed your Pre-Cana program, simply contact the person assisting with your marriage preparation to begin this step.

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4. A Final Word

Marriage is much more than a wedding day—it is a lifelong vocation and a sacred covenant through which a husband and wife help one another grow in holiness while building a family centered on Christ.

During your engagement, take time to pray together, communicate openly, and discuss your hopes, dreams, expectations, and the kind of marriage and family you wish to build. These conversations are among the greatest gifts you can give one another as you prepare for your life together.

To further assist you, I encourage you to explore the For Your Marriage website. It is an outstanding resource developed by the Catholic Church that offers practical guidance and spiritual encouragement for couples—from dating and engagement through the many years of married life.

It truly is a treasure chest of wisdom that I highly recommend you bookmark and return to often. My hope is that it will help your relationship and future marriage become ever more joyful, fulfilling, and holy.

Website: For Your Marriage: https://www.foryourmarriage.org

ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA
PRE-MARRIAGE WITNESS TESTIMONY

Name of Bride: _____

Name of Groom: _____

Parish where testimony is taken: _____ Address: _____

1. Name of witness: _____ Address: _____

2. Witness is testifying on behalf of: *[please circle one]:* **BRIDE** **GROOM**

3. Relationship of witness to above-named party: _____

4. Has the person to be married ever contracted or entered a previous marriage, either by a civil or religious ceremony?

YES ____ NO ____ If yes, to whom? _____

Where? _____

How was the marriage dissolved? _____

5. Is this person entering marriage free from pressure and fear? YES____ NO ____

6. Has this person ever expressed an intention against permanence, exclusiveness, and openness to children in marriage? YES____ NO ____

7. Has this person concealed anything significant from his/her intended spouse?

YES____ NO ____

8. Do you know of any other reason or circumstance which would be an obstacle to the present marriage or reason why these two parties should not marry? YES____ NO ____

9. Do you swear to the truth of your statement YES____ NO ____

Date: ____/____/_____ Signature of Witness: _____

Signature of Priest/Deacon: _____

PARISH SEAL

Visum est: _____ Diocese: _____

SEAL Date: ____/____/_____