

Marriage Preparation Process

Thank you for choosing to get married in the Catholic Church! Your choice is a beautiful expression of your faith in Jesus Christ and your desire to make Him an intimate part of your love for one another. May God bless you through this time of discernment, preparation, and planning!

You will find some great information and resources at: www.FatherT.com as well as on our Diocesan website: <http://www.dolr.org/offices/familylife/gettingmarried.php> The general outline of the marriage preparation process is as follows:

1. Initial Meeting. We will review the steps involved in marriage preparation and begin the necessary paperwork.
 - a. Before our next meeting, you *may* be asked to get copies of the following:
 - _____ Request the church where you were baptized mail Fr. Tom a recent copy of your baptismal certificate (this is for the Catholic party only).
 - _____ Have the “Testimony of Freedom to Marry” form filled out and signed in front of a Notary Public (this is for the non-Catholic party only).
 - _____ If applicable, mail your former spouse(s) death certificate(s) to us.
 - _____ If applicable, mail a copy of your annulment decree(s) to us.
 - _____ If applicable, mail a copy of your civil marriage license to us.
 - _____ If applicable, mail a copy of your divorce decree(s) to us.
2. FOCCUS. The FOCCUS is a values-inventory that engaged couples take in order to have a clearer sense of how well they have communicated their values, past history, and future plans. The inventory is done online and takes about 45-60 minutes. It is then scored by a computer and the results are printed at the church. **You should receive an e-mail from FOCCUS shortly after beginning marriage preparation with a link to the online inventory. Please note: the e-mail sometimes ends up in spam folders.**
3. FOCCUS Results. We schedule a 1-hour meeting in order to go over your FOCCUS results and, hopefully, provide some helpful insight into various areas of your relationship. You can contact Fr. Tom at FatherT@FatherT.com to schedule that meeting, usually about a month after you take the FOCCUS.
4. Prayer Session. Many couples struggle to integrate their prayer in their relationship. Therefore, we have created an online class on prayer. It can be found on the marriage preparation page at www.FatherT.com

5. Pre-Cana Retreat. This is a one-day retreat sponsored by married couples and covering many of the issues and topics that are essential to marriage. You can find a schedule of upcoming Pre-Cana Retreats, as well as a registration form at:
<http://www.dolr.org/offices/familylife/marriageprepprograms.php>
 - a. For some engaged couples, we substitute the “Sponsor Couple Program” in place of the Pre-Cana Retreat. If this is the case for you, please contact Fr. Tom.
6. Natural Family Planning. NFP is a beautiful form of natural birth control/family planning that is advocated by the Catholic Church. To find out more about how it can radically reduce your chances for divorce, visit www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/nfp/information.shtml. Because of the amazing ways that NFP enhances marriage, it is now a required part of marriage preparation in the Diocese of Little Rock. To find out where classes are being held and to register for them, go to <http://www.ccl-ar.org/>
7. Ceremony Planning. If Fr. Tom is going to be the celebrant at your wedding, please contact him to discuss and plan the ceremony.
8. Miscellaneous. Based on the individual needs of each couple, there might be additional meetings that offer further tools for building a solid, lasting marriage.

(Below are some suggestions for planning your ceremony)

Planning the Wedding Ceremony

Here are a few practical considerations regarding the wedding ceremony:

- ❖ **THE THEME:** The theme is **the most important element** of preparing for the wedding ceremony. Please pray and discuss what “theme” you would like to have for your wedding. The theme should be something that is meaningful to the two of you. The Scripture readings we pick out for the wedding will highlight the theme you pick out, as will my sermon. Some couples even pick out songs that highlight their theme.

Here are some examples of themes other couples have chose—“God Builds Marriage,” “Wedding Vows Build on Baptismal Vows,” “Friendship,” “Guided by Love,” and “Meant to Be.” Don’t be discouraged if your theme doesn’t seem very “spiritual.” I might be able to help see the spiritual aspect of the theme you’re thinking about. I will also help pick out Scripture readings that focus on the theme you choose.

- ❖ **MUSIC:** It is important to contact an organist and/or musicians and singers well in advance of the wedding day. For more information about this aspect of your wedding, as well as other pertinent information, please see our [wedding guidelines](#).

- ❖ **THE ENTRANCE PROCESSION:** The procession into the church at the beginning of the wedding include these elements—

1. The seating of grandparent and moms (there is usually a song played here)
2. The priest will bring the groom out in silence.
Either the groomsmen can enter with the priest and groom, or they can escort the bridesmaids in.
3. The bridesmaids process down the aisle—either alone or escorted by grooms. There is usually a special song played here.
4. Then the ring bearer and flower girl(s) enter.
5. The bride is escorted while another song is played.

- ❖ **VOWS:** There are two forms of the vows. Please prayerfully choose which one you like the best. Either one can be done by each of you reciting the vow after me, or in the form of a question, where each of you would simply respond, “I do.”

- ❖ **Form 1:** I, _____, take you, _____ to be my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love you and honor you all the days of my life.

- ❖ **Form 2:** I, _____, take you, _____ for my lawful wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.

- ❖ **MISC:** A few other things to discuss include—are you going to use a unity candle during the service? Will you be presenting flowers to the Blessed Virgin Mary? Will you be presenting flowers to your moms or parents? Are there any other “traditions” that you want to include? If so, please contact me and let me know.