

# *A COVENANT OF LOVE*

**Your Preparation Guide for Catholic Marriage**



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# **MARRIAGE PREPARATION**

## **Introduction:**

Congratulations on your engagement! During the next several months, you and your partner will be making a covenant to spend the rest of your lives together. You have many preparations to make before your wedding day—from setting the date and informing your families, to buying special clothes and sending out invitations.

When a couple decides to get married, it is a time of grace and growth. It is also a time of many details and some anxiety. The Church desires to help couples prepare themselves to live this sacrament and to celebrate their marriage with dignity and joy. This preparation is required for all Catholics who intend to get married, even if the marriage is at a non-Catholic church. The priests of the parish are happy to answer specific questions about Church theology, policies, and practices on marriage. The following is a summary of the specific steps of marriage preparation. The Catholic Church wants to help the two of you with the most important of these preparations—your spiritual preparation for a lifelong commitment. In support of this goal, St. Joseph Church presents to you this comprehensive guide to planning a wedding at this parish.

## **Marriage Preparation Requirements:**

To ensure that all engaged couples understand the *sacramental* meaning to the Catholic wedding ceremony, the Diocese of Harrisburg requires you and your fiancé(e) to attend the following marriage preparation programs prior to your wedding.

Complete the **FOCCUS** survey AND attend  
**God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage;**

## **FOCCUS Survey:**

“FOCCUS” stands for “Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding & Study”. This survey is administered by the priest or deacon who will be witnessing your marriage, and is completed prior to Marriage Prep Workshop, God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage, or an Engaged Encounter weekend. The priest or deacon will discuss the results of the survey with you and your fiancé(e) individually, then together as a couple. This survey helps the couple to identify the areas in which they agree, and the areas that will be challenging to them in their married life. Most couples find that FOCCUS is a helpful tool to promote honest communication of their hopes and fears. To schedule an appointment to complete the FOCCUS survey, contact the priest or deacon you have chosen to witness your marriage.

**God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage:**

“God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage” is a one-day seminar hosted by the Diocese of Harrisburg at either the Diocesan Center (4800 Union Deposit Rd., Harrisburg, PA 17111) or at a local parish within the diocese. Though the seminar is sometimes held at St. Joseph Church, registration is always handled through the Diocese (717-657-4804, ext. 317). “God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage” introduces engaged couples to St. Pope John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*. It is a day of meditation and reflection on how living God’s plan for marriage is what ultimately brings a couple deep happiness and joy. Through a series of talks by couple presenters, a priest, and video presentations by Christopher West, engaged couples learn about the beauty of sacramental marriage and sacramental sexuality. The program was developed by the Theology of the Body Institute and is published by Ascension Press. It is an engaging program that takes a new approach to the critical issues of premarital sex, contraception and pornography, each of which adversely affect the health of today’s marriages.

With so many marriages ending in divorce today, “God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage” aims to expose how the culture has shaped our views of sexuality and marriage in a way that goes against what God intended the union of man and woman to be. In addition, in a talk entitled “What are you saying *I Do* to?” couples take an in-depth look at the marriage vows, what they mean and how to really live them in their future marriage. Married love, properly understood and lived, is *free, total, faithful and fruitful* and becomes a sacramental sign to others of God’s love.

The final talks of the day introduce the engaged couples to the concepts and benefits of Natural Family Planning as a way to live this free, total, faithful and fruitful love. In offering this program, the diocese hopes to give couples this understanding of marriage as the image of Trinitarian or “heavenly” love that it really is, and the tools to live a “joy-filled” marriage.

*Written by Grace Targonski, Diocesan Director of Natural Family Planning and Theology of the Body Ministries, The Catholic Witness, 2/13/09.*

## **PRE-MATRIMONIAL CHECKLIST**

### **9-12 Months before the Wedding:**

- Pray together with your intended spouse, to seek God's loving guidance as you begin to make decisions about your future together.
- Meet with your parish priest or deacon—he will do the initial paperwork with you, give you a copy of the Marriage Preparation brochure, and tell you how to register for required programs. At this point you will tentatively set a wedding date. At this session the priest or deacon will probably give you information on how wedding liturgies are planned in your parish. This includes information on musicians and what music is acceptable in the wedding liturgy.
- Immediately after you meet with your priest or deacon, register for God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage. Register at least four weeks before your desired program date.
- Make arrangements with the priest or deacon to conduct the FOCCUS survey, and follow through with the arrangements.
- Participate in the diocesan God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage.

### **At Least 6 Months before the Wedding:**

- Return to your priest or deacon and discuss your marriage preparation so far. The priest or deacon will finalize your wedding date with you at this point and explain the next steps to you.
- Contact the parish music director about planning for the marriage rite.
- Discuss with your priest, deacon, or parish sacristan what flower arrangements are acceptable for a wedding in the parish church.
- In regards to Natural Family Planning, begin charting so that you are comfortable with the method before your marriage.
- If you are an interchurch or interfaith couple, be sure to meet with the clergy of the other faith tradition so that you both have a clear understanding of the other faith.

### **At Least 3 Months before the Wedding:**

- Complete any additional sessions with your priest or deacon, where he will instruct you further on the Sacrament of Marriage.
- Finalize the plans for your wedding liturgy. You will have a choice of readings from the Bible that you can choose with your priest or deacon. In most cases you will plan the music with the assistance of the parish organist or music director.
- If you will be using a printed wedding program, this is a good time to finalize what will be in it. Remember, you must have reprint permissions for any songs that are reproduced in the program, and you must include copyright information. The parish will be able to assist you with this.

### **One Week to One Day prior to the Wedding:**

- Register as a new family in the parish office.
- Rehearse the wedding ceremony at the parish.
- Participate in the Sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation/Confession).
- Continue to pray together with your intended spouse, so that your life together may be an abundant blessing to you, your family, and the Church.

## **POLICIES OF ST. JOSEPH CHURCH**

### **Introduction:**

The celebration of Christian Marriage is a unique moment in the life of the Church. The Community is called to rejoice in a special way when a bride and groom commit themselves to each other in faith and love for life. As the Apostle Paul tells us, this is a mystery, “a great foreshadowing,” of the love that God has for all His people. A Christian Marriage is truly a religious as well as a secular event. As husband and wife, you will officially commit yourselves to one another before Almighty God and the community of the Church with the priest or deacon as the Church’s witness. This will raise your relationship to the level of a Sacrament, a holy union binding until death. So it is clearly a solemn event. Everything you plan to surround this event should be fitting to the occasion. The Staff of St. Joseph Parish is prepared to support you and to assist you in making appropriate decisions.

### **Scheduling Your Wedding:**

The Diocese of Harrisburg requires that arrangements for the celebration of marriage must be made at least four months in advance of the proposed wedding date, though it is recommended you begin your preparations at least 9-12 months in advance. Avoid renting a hall or making other commitments until you have spoken with the priest or deacon and confirmed the date and time of the wedding. A ceremony is not guaranteed until the premarital investigation and instruction are successfully completed.

St. Joseph Church will be made available for weddings of members of St. Joseph Parish on a “first come, first served” basis. Couples who are not members of St. Joseph Parish may celebrate marriage here, provided that at least one is a practicing Catholic, and permission of the proper pastor has been granted. Permission is never granted for the wedding to take place anywhere other than a church. Special permission must be obtained when the wedding takes place at another church which is not your parish church.

As a rule, Saturday weddings may be scheduled at 11:00 AM or 2:00 PM. In a sense of fairness to everyone, each couple will be allotted three hours in the church on the day of the wedding. This time limit includes one hour before the ceremony, one hour for the ceremony and one hour for pictures and/or receiving line.

### **Celebrant:**

Ordinarily, a priest or a deacon currently assigned to St. Joseph parish will officiate at marriages taking place at St. Joseph Church. Exceptions to this rule will be made only for Catholic priests and deacons who have permission from the pastor of St. Joseph Church. All visiting clergy must follow the guidelines for marriage set out by the Diocese of Harrisburg and St. Joseph Parish.

### **Mixed Marriages:**

A marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic is called a Mixed Religion Marriage. In such marriages, the Catholic partner is required to promise to do his/her best to rear any children in the Catholic tradition. This promise is made with the full knowledge of the non-Catholic party.

**Working with the Priest or Deacon:**

In the course of your preparation for married life, you will meet about four or five times with the priest or the deacon who is to preside at your ceremony. The initial interviews with the priest are intended to document and establish an engaged couple's understanding of the Church's expectation of those who are to be married in the Church and their readiness to carry it out.

**Documents Needed by the Priest for a Catholic Wedding:**

- **Baptismal and Confirmation Certificates**
- **For Catholics**—a fresh baptismal certificate with notation of Confirmation. “Fresh” means it has to be reissued to you by the parish of your Baptism no more than six months prior to the wedding. If you were baptized at St. Joseph Church, you can simply inform the priest or deacon and the parish secretary will issue the certificate.
- **For Baptized non-Catholics**—simply bring the original certificate of your baptism which the priest or deacon will copy, or bring a letter from the Minister of the Church where you were baptized stating when and where the Baptism occurred.
- **FOCCUS Completion Certificate;**
- **God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage Certificate;**
- **Two witnesses verifying freedom to marry.** In order to establish the freedom of the bride and groom to marry, the signed testimony of four witnesses is required, two for each party.

**If Either Party Was Married Previously:**

Be certain to inform the priest or the deacon at your first meeting if you have been married previously. Any previously married person must provide a decree of nullity issued by a Catholic Church Marriage Tribunal, or a death certificate for the previous spouse(s).

**Marriage License:**

A Marriage License may be obtained from the Clerk of Orphans' Court located at the York County Court House. There is a three-day waiting period for all licenses. The license is valid for 60 days. You must present the marriage license to the priest or the deacon before the wedding rehearsal. We recommend that you bring it a week in advance, but certainly no later than the rehearsal itself, so that it can be properly endorsed by the priest or deacon before the wedding.

**Other Ministers:**

Friends and relatives of the couple may participate in the liturgy as readers, servers, or in other functions if they so desire, provided that they are competent in the function they are to fulfill. Those chosen as ministers who do not regularly function at St. Joseph Parish must attend the rehearsal. We strongly suggest that children who participate in the ceremony be at least of school age because younger children often become distressed and overwhelmed by the crowd and the strange environment.

### **The Church Environment, Decorations and Flowers:**

St. Joseph Church building is the worship space of this parish community and calls for attitudes of reverence and respect. Decorations, candles, and other furnishings already present in the church may not be moved without explicit permission of the priest or the deacon. Current liturgical law and practice prohibits the use of flowers at weddings during Lent.

- Flowers are permitted in front of the candlesticks on either side of the sanctuary and in the narthex of the church. No formal arrangements or other decorations are to be placed in front of the Emmaus scene woodcarving. It is requested that flowers used to decorate the church and narthex be left for the weekend Masses.
- St. Joseph church has a non-slip tile floor in the aisles, which becomes slippery and dangerous when runners or flower petals are placed on it. Therefore, for the safety of the couple and their guests, the use of aisle runners and flower petals is strictly prohibited.
- NOTHING may be taped to the pews, altar or any other furnishing in the church or narthex. Ribbons and rubber bands (which do not harm the furniture) may be substituted. Balloons are forbidden inside the church and narthex.
- The wedding party is responsible for removing all ribbons, bows, boxes, bags, hangers, clothing and other extraneous items from the dressing areas, restrooms, narthex and church before vacating the building after the ceremony.
- No smoking is permitted in any area of the church building.

All questions recording decorations, flowers and the church environment can be directed to our parish sacristan, **Dona Smyser at 755-7503, ext. 221 or Smyser@sjy.org.**

### **The Sanctuary, Altar and Ambo:**

In current Catholic theology, the altar table is the most sacred furnishing of the church and is reserved for the celebration of the Eucharist, the memorial of the Last Supper. Only the needed bread, wine, and ceremonial books are placed on the altar. No flowers, unity candle, or other decoration should be placed on the altar itself, or obstruct it in any way. The ambo is the reading stand at which the Word of God is proclaimed and preached. It should be treated in the same fashion as the altar.

### **A Note on Modesty at Mass:**

In God's House, there is a different standard of decorum and dress. Out of respect for God, the priest, and other parishioners and guests of the parish, it is important to choose clothing for Mass that is modest. This means women and girls of all ages should not wear clothing that reveals any cleavage or bare shoulders. Skirts should be worn at a length just above the knee or longer. Shorts, blue jeans, T-shirts and tennis shoes are not appropriate for Mass on men, women or children. Mass is a celebration of a Sacrament, before God, and should not be considered an appropriate occasion to make a fashion statement or to reveal anything that should be reserved for spouses alone.

**Rice, Birdseed, and Confetti:**

The throwing of rice, birdseed, confetti and other objects is strictly forbidden. This custom originates from pagan fertility rites and is not appropriate in the Christian celebration of marriage. Rice, birdseed and confetti also cause walkways to become slippery and dangerous, not to mention the tedious cleanup they require.

**Alcohol:**

There are to be no alcoholic beverages brought to, or consumed at the church or on church property at any time. Other foods and beverages may be consumed only in the dressing areas.

**Rehearsal:**

The wedding rehearsal is usually scheduled the night before the wedding itself, although it may be at another time agreed upon by you and whoever is doing the rehearsal for you. The rehearsal may take up to, but not exceed 60 minutes. Please make sure that the entire wedding party is present and on time since another rehearsal may be scheduled after yours.

**Photography and Videography:**

Your wedding celebration is a special day you will want to remember throughout your lives. While photographers and videographers are welcome, they are reminded that the solemnity of the Sacrament in the present moment must not be interfered with.

To ensure that all of our liturgical celebrations are first and foremost events of prayer, we hold the following policy regarding photography and videography:

Photographers/videographers may use the area to the left of the altar, near the flexible seating, and the area across the back and behind the pews taking care not to block the view of worshippers. Posed photographs may be taken in the church after the ceremony.

Photographers/videographers should consult with the priest or the deacon in advance of the ceremony.

**Music:**

Once you and the priest or the deacon have agreed upon a date and time, contact the Parish Coordinator of Music Ministry, **Mr. Stephen Falencki, 717-755-7503, ext. 248 or [Falencki@sjy.org](mailto:Falencki@sjy.org)** to secure a musician for the ceremony. Stephen is fully instructed in, and obliged to enforce both Diocesan and Parish policies regarding music. He is knowledgeable of the numerous possibilities for music at weddings and will be available to assist you with suggestions and choices. If you choose to ask people outside our parish musicians, please consult with Stephen for guidance and recommendations.

**Fees:**

Preparing for the wedding liturgy requires the time, energy, and talent of many people. As you express your gratitude to those who have helped in the wedding celebration, the following guidelines are recommended:

	<u>Parishioner</u> *	<u>Non-Parishioner</u>
Priest or Deacon	\$250.00	\$450.00
Use of Church	\$300.00	\$500.00
Music—Organist	\$150	\$150
Music—Cantor	\$75.00	\$75.00
Wedding Sacristan	\$100.00	\$100.00

-The Sacristan will be at rehearsal and wedding.

**Additional Fee**

Altar Servers (each)	\$10.00 ( <i>Cash only</i> )	\$10.00 ( <i>Cash only</i> )
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**Final payments must be made two weeks prior to the Wedding.**

\*Parishioner Rate is available when either the bride or groom, or both, live within the parish boundaries (York County, PA) and have been registered in St. Joseph Parish for at least one year prior to the date of the wedding OR their parents are active members of the parish.