



ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church

St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church
Ann Arbor, MI

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 (sta2.org/church/sacraments/marriage) you will find an application and reflection question worksheet. Complete these and submit them to the parish office, attention Dan Vincke (Stthomaswedding@sta2.org). When this paperwork 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 of discussion.

Required Preparation:

1. **Choose a mentor couple** (minimum of five years married and practicing their Catholic faith) to walk with you through the "Witness to Love" program.
2. **Take the Agape Catholic Ministries Pre-Cana Course** on catholicmarriageprep.com [here](#).
3. **Natural Family Planning Class** - there are many natural family planning methods. We highly encourage all couples to research the various methods and complete an entire course in a particular method. The Introduction to Natural Family Planning offered through the Diocese of Lansing is the minimum requirement for anyone desiring to be married in the diocese. Information about various methods, as well as class schedules can be found by visiting dioceseoflansing.org/vocations/natural-family-planning. **These can also be taken online through the Agape Catholic Ministries** - catholicmarriageprep.com.
4. **The Foccus or Prepare and Enrich inventory** - Some couples have already taken the Foccus Inventory. Those who have not taken the Foccus Inventory, will take Pre-Marital Inventory on the Agape program on catholicmarriageprep.com [here](#).
5. **"Love Takes Learning"** online course, taken through the Diocese of Lansing. Contact the St. Thomas Marriage Coordinator to set this up. Cost: \$29.95.
6. We will need **copies of baptism certificates for your file mailed to us 6 months prior to the wedding**. These should come directly from the church of baptism.
7. You will need to obtain a civil marriage license from a Michigan County Clerk's office, within 30 days of the ceremony.

Strongly Recommended:

8. **Attend 3 Parish Catholic Prep presentations** (times/days are to be determined)
OR
9. **2 reflections of your choice on formed.org.** (Parish Code is J8KTVM). Watch/Listen to anything of formed.org that you feel will help the 2 of you grow as a couple in your faith and/or in your relationship. We encourage you to watch “Beloved: Finding Happiness in Marriage.” After watching/listening to the presentation write a reflection of what you learned from the presentation or how it might impact you and send it to Dan at stthomaswedding@sta2.org.
10. **Go to the Sacrament of Confession** within a couple weeks of your wedding. Please contact Dan if you’d like him to set this up with a priest.

Also, take a look at all the resources at the website foryourmarriage.org.