

Preparing for
MATRIMONY



**ARCHDIOCESE OF
LOUISVILLE**

Effective: January 2025

A Message from Archbishop Shelton to All Engaged Couples

Greetings in the Lord!

Congratulations on your upcoming marriage. We all rejoice with you!

The vision of Christian marriage, given to us by God, calls you to a covenant that is permanent, faithful, and open to new life. Your courtship and romance have led you to embrace a sacrificial love, reflected in this sacrament of the Church, which along with Holy Orders, is “for others.” Through the sacrament of marriage, you will receive the grace and power to live out this public witness of love that contributes to the common good.

The Church commits itself to assisting you as you make this commitment of love with a deep trust in God and in each other. We rejoice as your love deepens and comes to reflect the very love of Christ for his Church.

Your love today, as beautiful as it is, is the beginning of a journey. My prayer is that your journey together through life’s laughter and tears will deepen your love and strengthen your faith.

It is not easy in these times to sustain the life-long pledge of married love. Yet in the Sacrament of Matrimony, you have the promise and power of the Lord Himself to help you. Invite Jesus into your marriage. Together in prayer, ask for His help, and you will be able to weather any storm or endure any trial life may bring. As you prepare and live out this exciting, demanding, and sometimes challenging vocation, please know that the Church is always with you. Your parish community is there to help. Do not be afraid to reach out when you need assistance.

As a sign of the concern and support of the church community, the many resources here in this booklet and on our website have been developed to help you prepare well, both for your wedding and for your life together.

As you approach your marriage, I urge you to take time to reflect on the sacrament you will receive and on the promises you will make to one another. Pray together for God’s blessings in your life.

With an assurance of my prayers for you, and kindly asking your prayers for me, please know that I remain,

Sincerely in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shelton J. Fabre". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre
Archbishop of Louisville



Marriage as a Sacrament

From the beginning of Christianity, marriage has been regarded as unique and special. St. Paul spoke of Christians as being married “in the Lord,” and many Fathers of the Church extolled the value and benefits of marriage.

The Catholic theology of marriage regards this union of man and woman, not as just a legal contract, but as a covenant of love. The Second Vatican Council wrote of this covenant, “Marriage is an intimate partnership for the whole of life, ordered equally to the well being of the spouses and to the generation and nurturing of children.”

In the Catholic Church, marriage is regarded as a sacrament. The wedding ceremony itself is a sacred ritual as are baptism, confirmation, ordination, and the other church rituals that Catholics call sacraments. The word “sacrament” means a sacred sign, and all of the sacramental rituals in the Church are signs in one way or another of God’s love. The wedding ritual, in this sense, is a sacrament.

Marriage is also a sacrament in a deeper sense. The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops’ pastoral, *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, says, “In marriage a man and a woman are united with each other, and the two become one flesh, so that they each love the other as they love themselves and cherish each other’s bodies as their own. This union is an image of the relationship between Christ and his Church...” In other words, Christian marriage is a sign or sacrament of the total self sacrificing, unbreakable love Christ has for the Church. Catholics are therefore called to enter into a marriage that is faithful, permanent and fruitful.

Pope Francis stated it very well in his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, saying, “The sacrament of matrimony is not a social convention, an empty ritual or merely the outward sign of a commitment. The sacrament is a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses, since ‘their mutual belonging is a real representation, through the sacramental sign, of the same relationship between Christ and the Church.’”

The seriousness of marriage has led the Catholic Church to do everything possible to ensure that couples achieve the sacramental marriage to which Christ calls them. Thus the Church has made formal marriage preparation a requirement before there can be a Catholic wedding.

Steps for Marrying in the Archdiocese of Louisville

During the preparation period of at least six months, the following steps will help you meet the requirements for celebrating the Sacrament of Matrimony in the Archdiocese of Louisville. Along with assistance from the priest or deacon, who will officiate your wedding, and the parish staff and program facilitators, the two of you will have opportunities to build a marriage that reflects God's love; to build an intimate partnership for the whole of life...

1. **If you have this booklet, you have already completed the first step in your marriage preparation.**

You've spent some time learning about parish guidelines, discussed questions and concerns as well as requirements, and you have begun completing some of the required paperwork.

2. **Premarital inventory**

To help both of you come to a deeper understanding of your relationship, you will take a premarital inventory, usually FOCCUS. In some cases, you may be asked to take a different inventory.

3. **Follow-up discussion**

At some point after you take the inventory, you will meet with a facilitator or companion couple from your parish to discuss the many areas of your relationship highlighted by the inventory, discussing together its strengths as well as areas that might need more attention.

4. **Participation in a marriage preparation program**

The decision about the best program for you was most probably discussed at your initial meeting. These programs are most helpful when attended *early* in your preparation time.

Don't delay registering as most dates fill quickly!

5. **Natural Family Planning class**

It is recommended that you attend an NFP class. This class will help you to better understand the Church's teaching regarding openness to life and the value of children. The practice of NFP will help strengthen your marriage. These scientific and natural methods can be used to effectively achieve, space, or postpone pregnancies.

6. **Consultation with priest, deacon or pastoral minister**

You will meet again to discuss any issues or concerns that arose from the preparation sessions, to review all details of the wedding ceremony, including the readings and music, and to complete any final paperwork.

7. **Wedding rehearsal**

A day or two before the wedding, the rehearsal will take place with all those who have an active role in the ceremony. Check with the priest, deacon, pastoral minister or the parish wedding coordinator to see who will need to be included.

8. **Wedding Day!**

Congratulations! Celebrate this day with family and friends as you begin your lifetime commitment to one another.

Marriage Preparation Programs

Along with the premarital inventories, several programs are offered that will make your preparation a time of continued learning in which you will gain greater insight into one another as well as into the Church's teachings on the Sacrament of Marriage. You should discuss which program is best suited for you with your priest / deacon.

Registration for the non-parish based programs is done online as indicated below and as all classes have a tendency to fill up fast, early registration is strongly recommended.

Should you have any issues or questions about any of these programs, please email family@archlou.org for assistance.

COUPLES ENTERING A FIRST MARRIAGE

“Joined By Grace” Companion Couple

This parish-based program consists of a series of six sessions before your wedding, and ideally three afterwards in a personalized and comfortable one-on-one environment. These meetings are held with a trained married couple in their home. A variety of topics essential to a healthy and lasting marriage are covered and discussed. More information about the materials used can be found at www.joinedbygrace.com.

If this program is available in your parish, the priest/deacon will provide further information.

Foundations for Marriage

This is a one-day, 8 hour, Saturday program. The process is one of input, personal reflection and couple sharing. Speakers address Church teachings regarding marriage as well as additional topics designed to help the engaged couple better understand the vocation of marriage, its joys, complexities and challenges. Some of the topics presented are: Marriage as a Sacrament, Intimacy, Children and Family Planning, Family of Origin, Financial Planning and Effective Communication.



Preregistration is required. Sessions tend to fill up quickly the closer it is to the actual date, so don't delay. For information including session dates, cost and contact information as well as to register online either follow the QR code or visit www.archlou.org/foundation-for-marriage.

Catholic Engaged Encounter

Catholic Engaged Encounter (CEE) is recognized, both nationally and internationally, as a quality, highly effective marriage preparation program designed to meet the needs of today's engaged couples.

CEE is an in-depth, private, personal, marriage preparation experience within the context of Catholic faith and values. It is a weekend retreat away with

other engaged couples with plenty of time alone together to dialogue honestly and intensively about their prospective lives together – their strengths and weaknesses, desires, ambitions, goals, their attitudes about money, sex, children, family, their role in the church and society – in a face-to-face way.

The weekend begins on Saturday morning and ends Sunday mid-afternoon with a required on-site overnight stay with all meals included. Pre-registration is required and weekends fill up very fast so don't delay getting registered!

For more information including retreat dates, cost and contact information, or to register online, either follow the QR code or visit <https://louisville.engagedencounter.com/>

The Marriage Group On-Line Preparation Program

For couples with challenging circumstances—and with the permission of the clergy they are working with—we are pleased to recommend the online Pre-Cana program provided by [The Marriage Group](#), a source trusted by Catholic dioceses across the country for authentic and comprehensive marriage preparation.

Their proven program consists of eight hours of program content which is both online and on-demand 24-7. Couples can start and stop as they need to, and are kept accountable with quizzes and other means to assure attention and completion. The cost is \$195, payable at registration, and a certificate is provided upon completion. (The program is also available in Spanish.)

For more information, follow the QR Code or visit: www.themarriagegroup.com/courses/pre-cana/.



Marriage Preparation for Special Circumstances

PERSONS MARRYING AFTER THE DEATH OF A SPOUSE OR A DIVORCE

In the case of divorce, a declaration of nullity is presumed.

These marriages are viewed with special concern owing to differing circumstances and past experience with marriage.

If a parish or diocesan companion program is not available, it is recommended that a couple take the Prepare/Enrich inventory.

COUPLES WHERE ONE OR BOTH PARTIES ARE 50 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER

The Prepare/Enrich inventory offered through Family Ministries Counseling is recommended. This process helps couples address issues particular to later-life marriages such as illness, wills, adult children, to name only a few.

CIVILLY MARRIED COUPLES PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE IN THE CHURCH

Preparation will vary. In the case of a recently civilly married couple, a full preparation period is usually suggested. For couples civilly married for many years, conversation around previous and current involvement in the Church as well as use of the REFOCCUS instrument or Prepare/Enrich inventory will help the couple address their relationship.

Refer to www.archlou.org/family for information concerning:

Religiously Mixed Marriages

Weddings Outside of a Church

Cohabitation

Marriage of Minors

Pregnancy before Marriage

Church Marriage following a Civil Union

Subsequent Marriages

Pre-marriage Counseling

Delay of Marriage

Exceptions to the Policy

Inventories

These premarital inventories help target discussion on topics important to marital success. These are not tests, but rather tools that help the two of you celebrate your relationship strengths and talk to each other about topics warranting further attention.

Your pastor or deacon will direct you to the appropriate inventory.

FOCCUS (*Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding & Study*) is the inventory most commonly used in parishes in this Archdiocese. This comprehensive, user-friendly tool, facilitates couple conversation around topics important for a lifelong marriage. It also includes sections addressing interfaith couples, cohabiting couples and couples entering marriage where one or both have children.

Further information about the inventory and how it works can be found at www.foccusinc.com, click on “FOCCUS Pre-Marriage Inventory.”

REFOCCUS (*Relationship Enrichment Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding & Study*) has been found to be especially helpful when couples have cohabitated for two or more years and when civilly married couples come to the Church for marriage.

Further information about the inventory and how it works can be found at www.foccusinc.com, click on “REFOCCUS Marriage Enrichment.”

Prepare/Enrich

is used for premarital counseling and marriage preparation. Prepare/Enrich is a comprehensive tool that helps a couple explore and strengthen their relationship.

Couples take the inventory online followed by two to four follow-up sessions with a counselor.

This inventory is appropriate for all marriage preparation, but is especially useful when either person is age 50 or older, one or both have children or when a civilly married couple seeks marriage in the church. It can also be used when special circumstances exist, i.e. pregnancy prior to engagement, or when either person is under the age of 19.

Upon recommendation of the pastor, couples should contact Family Ministries 502-636-0296 for a referral.

Further information about the inventory and how it works can be found at www.prepare-enrich.com

Natural Family Planning (NFP)

NFP education helps couples to fully understand their combined fertility, in a completely eco-friendly, organic and non-pharmacological manner. Through reciprocal respect for the male and female's fertility, shared responsibility and mutual self control on the part of both spouses, NFP promotes the understanding of intercourse as both a physical and spiritual act, emphasizing complete openness and dialogue in a couple's family planning.

NFP reflects the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life, promotes openness to life, and recognizes the value of the child. Ask any couples who practice NFP and they will all agree – by respecting the intertwined love-giving and life-giving natures of marriage, NFP enriches and strengthens the unique bond between a husband and wife.

There are several different “methods” for practicing NFP, but all of them involve training and accompaniment by either certified and experienced couples or medical practitioners, as follows:

OVULATION METHODS

- **CREIGHTON MODEL**

Locally taught classes with certified instructor.

Contact **Katie Parris** at fertilityappreciation@yahoo.com
or 502-890-9370.

SYMPTO-THERMAL METHODS

- **MARQUETTE METHOD**

Locally taught classes with certified instructor.

Angela Hobbs, BSN, RN, MMCP

Marquette Method Certified Professional

270-735-3883

angela@giftofyourfertility.com

- **COUPLE TO COUPLE LEAGUE**

Locally taught classes with certified instructor couples.

Contact instructors **Tom & Teresa Knight** at stylite60@hotmail.com
or 502-366-0938.

For a comprehensive and list of over 90 published and peer-reviewed studies from multiple unbiased sources from 2000 through 2012 which can speak to the scientific nature and effectiveness of NFP methods, please check out www.archlou.org/nfp-studies.

An Invitation from

SERVING THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN CENTRAL KENTUCKY



THE RECORD

If you will be celebrating a marriage within the Roman Catholic Church, you are invited to announce your engagement in the Bridal issue of the Record Newspaper. Normally published twice a year, each full-color issue celebrates marriages that will occur during the next six months. If you miss the deadline, you can submit a marriage announcement. You may register online, in person, or by mail. There is no charge.

For more information go to:

Therecordnewspaper.org/submissions/bridal-announcements

or call **502-471-2125**.



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Family Ministries 502-471-2129
Hispanic Ministries 502-290-4247
Tribunal 502-585-3291

Websites: www.archlou.org
www.archlou.org/family
www.archlou.org/marriage-preparation-programs