

STEPS TOWARD *Sacramental Marriage* IN THE DIOCESE OF AUSTIN

Marriage is more than a wedding day—it is a lifelong vocation that requires careful discernment, adequate preparation, and support from the Christian community. For couples preparing for sacramental marriage in the Diocese of Austin, there are particular requirements designed to assist them in building happy, lifelong relationships. This guide helps couples know what to expect and to plan accordingly.



Initial Meeting with Priest/Deacon:

Dating/engaged/civily married couples investigating the marriage preparation process should contact their local parishes first — preferably a year in advance of the wedding. This is when the priest or deacon welcomes them, provides pastoral guidance, and introduces the couple to the sacramental and communal life of the parish. At this time, the priest might suggest choosing a mentor couple from the parish to help “accompany” the engaged couple both before and after the wedding.

Pre-marital Assessment:

At least six months prior to the wedding date, the couple participates in a premarital inventory (Fully Engaged, PREPARE-ENRICH, FOCCUS) with a trained facilitator. The goal is to help the couple evaluate the strengths and areas for growth in their relationship and to discern their readiness to enter into the vocation of marriage.

Natural Family Planning (NFP):

Couples must minimally participate in a diocesan-approved introduction to NFP entitled “Discover NFP” (full course preferred), in which certified instructors present the teachings of the Catholic Church on NFP and explain how NFP can strengthen marriages. The introduction also clarifies what NFP is (and is not) and offers a helpful overview of three approved and effective methods (Billings, Creighton, and Couple To Couple League).

Marriage Discernment Retreat:

The couple is strongly encouraged to participate in a marriage discernment retreat at their parish, which serves to prepare them both for their wedding and their life-long vocation of marriage. With approval from their pastor, they may attend a similar retreat offered by the diocesan Office of Family Life, but only if their parish does not offer one. (Couples should attend such a retreat several months prior to their wedding date). After the retreat, a follow-up meeting with the priest/deacon is highly recommended to answer further questions and continue the couple’s formation.

Wedding Mass:

Since the Sacrament of Marriage consists not of a single ceremony but rather a continual lived reality by which spouses help one another become holy, the couple should understand the Rite of Marriage as an act of worship. Whether they witness their vows during a Mass or in a simpler liturgy, they are doing so in the presence of Christ and his Church. The priest/deacon who has prepared the couple can assist them in choosing the prayers, the readings from Scripture, and other elements of the celebration.

Follow up:

Each married couple is a vitally important building block for healthy parish and community life, but they also need ongoing support. As they continue to nurture the marriage bond with each other, they also need to strengthen the relationship with their parish community—whether by continuing to meet with their mentor couple, developing Catholic friendships, attending Mass regularly, growing in understanding of their faith, or engaging in acts of Christian service.

NEED MORE INFORMATION? PLEASE VISIT:
WWW.AUSTINDIOCESE.ORG/MARRIAGE-PREPARATION



**OFFICE OF
EVANGELIZATION,
CATECHESIS AND
FAMILY LIFE**