



The Clustered Parishes of St. Felix and St. Agnes

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Congratulations on your engagement!

Marriage is one of the most important decisions of your life. The vocation of marriage is a calling where two people who love each other pledge to be permanently faithful to each other as long as they both shall live. The family has often been called a domestic church, a small community or home where persons nourish and strengthen each other in faith and all aspects of life. This kind of relationship is only possible if your relationship is built upon the person of Jesus Christ.

Our marriage preparation program is designed to help you further discern and prepare for the vocation of marriage and married life. This is best done by reflecting upon and cultivating the meaning of faith in your lives. Planning for your wedding also involves careful consideration of all the details that will make it a beautiful and memorable experience.

The following guidelines are intended to explain the content and expectations of our preparation program and to answer any questions which may arise.

Some Assumptions/Expectations

- A) That the couple enrolling in the marriage preparation program is a member of the parish in which the wedding will reside. If you are not a member (unless there are special circumstances) you must register before marriage preparation can begin. So that the rights of parishioners are respected, a date and time will not be confirmed for non-parishioners until six months prior to the desired date.
- B) The sacramental bond of marriage is a means of growing in holiness. For this reason it is assumed that the couple is actively seeking spiritual growth by:
 - 1) actively living their faith tradition, for Catholics this includes weekly celebration of the Sunday Eucharist;
 - 2) living and witnessing to a chaste lifestyle consistent with the Gospel values of a person living in the single state (living together being inconsistent with Gospel witness);
 - 3) giving of your time, talent and treasure as good stewards.
- C) If either or both parties have been previously married, he/she must be free to marry according to Church law.

The Marriage Preparation Program

Because each person and each couple is unique, the marriage program may vary in time and scope. Couples are expected to take the initiative to be sure that each portion of the program is completed in a timely manner. The program includes:

- A) An initial interview with the priest during which a tentative wedding date and time are discussed and the requirements of Christian marriage are reviewed.
- B) Forms will need to be filled out and documents collected.
 - 1) A copy of each party's baptismal certificate with notation of confirmation must be obtained from the Church they received the respective sacrament. For Catholics the certificate must be issued by the parish within six months,
 - 2) A marriage license must be obtained and given to the priest at least one week prior to the wedding date.
 - 3) An affidavit (Form II) is sometimes required.
 - 4) Non-parishioners must have written permission from their resident pastor to be married here.
- C) As a means of addressing important issues before marriage, all couples are asked to complete the FOCCUS, an inventory for marriage preparation. The FOCCUS is designed to facilitate discussion and further interpersonal preparation in those areas of life and daily living which commonly go unnoticed. This tool will be the basis of multiple discussions with a sponsor couple. Couples have found this tool very beneficial.
- D) Each couple must participate in an Engaged Encounter Weekend, a Catholic Charities Marriage Preparation Program or a similar program of pre-marriage enrichment. Information about local programs will be provided at the first meeting.
- E) Each couple will meet with the Pastor to discuss the theology of marriage. The mutual gift of sexuality is also central to a successful marriage. For this reason the spiritual and moral dimensions of sexuality is discussed and couples are asked to attend a course on Natural Family Planning. This highly effective and morally consistent method contains none of the health risks associated with artificial contraceptives. It has the additional benefit of strengthening relationships and deepening interpersonal intimacy via periodic abstinence.
- F) Circumstances may require additional time due to the particular situation (e.g. previous marriage, interfaith marriages, etc).
- G) The Sacrament of Reconciliation is fundamental to Christian living Catholic parties should avail themselves to this Sacrament before the wedding as a means of preparation for this sacred event.
- H) Finally, there should be ample time to discuss the liturgy for the wedding ceremony. This preparation includes careful selection of readings and music, as well as review of the order of the rite itself. The booklet, *Together for Life*, by Father Joseph Champlin will be offered as a guide. All details of the ceremony are arranged with the priest prior to the rehearsal.

Interfaith Marriages

- A) When one party is not Catholic, the general practice is that the wedding be celebrated outside of Mass. A Mass for the intention of the couple may be arranged for the following Sunday.

- B) The minister of the non-Catholic party is welcome to participate in the wedding ceremony if the couple so wishes. The invitation is extended by the couple after discussing it with the priest. The role which the minister will take is determined by the priest and the couple, while respecting as much as possible the wishes of the minister.

- C) A Catholic may be married in a non-Catholic church if there is good reason and the Catholic party obtains proper permission. All of the preparations required by the Catholic Church must be completed by the couple in addition to those expected by the other church.

The Wedding Ceremony

The wedding ceremony should be seen as a liturgical celebration and a public expression of the couples love for each other. Hence, it is a sacred event. It is the joyful celebration of a sacrament – one of the seven ways in which God’s special grace is manifest in the Church. For this reason, it is essential that all aspects of the ceremony occur in a church, be in good taste and follow sound liturgical principles. Once again, you should work closely with the priest and /or minister who is to preside at the liturgy.

Here are some points to guide you:

- A) Christian liturgy is always noble and simple. Attendants are to be limited to 5 couples, including the best man and maid (matron) of honor.
- B) No furniture is to be moved in the sanctuary when decorating. All decorations must be removed and the facility cleaned immediately after the ceremony in preparation for the next function.
- C) No flash pictures should be taken during the wedding ceremony. Individuals videotaping the wedding should consult with the priest beforehand. The photographer may contact the parish with any questions.
- D) Rehearsals may need to be scheduled around other events. Arrangements for decorating the church may also require adjusting should an unforeseeable circumstance such as a funeral occur. Consult with the parish priest for a date and time. The couple must complete details of the ceremony with the priest before the rehearsal.
- E) The Sacrament of Reconciliation is scheduled to begin at 4 p.m. every Saturday, the wedding party and decorations must be out of the church before 3:30.

Music

- A) Music is required at all liturgies unless there are special circumstances.
- B) The music must include all responses when Mass is being celebrated. Plan to use music that honors god and is appropriate for a church wedding. The music must be theologically sound and religious in nature.
- C) All music should be planned / prepared in such a way that it does not draw attention to itself. Church music is meant to contribute to the beauty and sacred nature of the liturgy.
- D) Outside musicians are welcome to do the music provided they are sufficiently familiar with Catholic liturgy.
- E) Musical arrangements should be pre-approved by the priest at least six weeks prior to the wedding. Musicians using the church's equipment the day of the wedding or wishing to practice in the church prior to the wedding should contact the priest.

Photography

- A) Given the professionalism of the photographer and the cooperation of all involved, the procedure and process for taking photos should be a simple undertaking – no more than about 2 hours. Candles on the altar may be lit for formal pictures before the service. Please be sure to extinguish them immediately afterwards to preserve them.
- B) All group and individual pictures taken by the photographer must be completed at least one-half hour before the wedding ceremony begins. Please remember that you are in a church and the sacred nature of the space needs to be respected. No food or beverage is allowed in the church proper at any time.
- C) Flash pictures are permitted during the entrance procession and during the exiting procession. Flash pictures are not permitted during the liturgy itself.
- D) Both still and video photographers are free to walk the side isles so long as they do not interfere with the liturgy in any way.

Church Facilities

- A) There is a charge of \$125 for use of the church. This fee includes the FOCCUS Inventory and scoring, church utilities, custodial, etc. Checks can be made out to the parish where the wedding is celebrated. An additional offering to the priest is not necessary. However, if one is given it is received as a personal gift.
- B) A designated portion of the church may be used to dress and prepare for the wedding. We cannot be responsible for your valuables, so do not leave them unattended. You are expected to leave the areas used for dressing and the church proper in the condition in which you found them. Flowers, baskets, cloths hangers, etc. are to be taken with you or thrown in the garbage. We recommend that you have your ushers do this for you.
- C) Items such as rice, birdseed, flower petals and confetti are also not to be used. Bows and flower decorations for the pews, if used, are to be constructed so that they are **not** taped or nailed to the pews. Some people prefer clamps which may be obtained at flower shops and others prefer to use string or other materials.
- D) You are not required to have floral arrangements for the church. However, if you chose to do so, they may be placed around but not on the altar. Please consult the pastor if you have any questions.
- E) Food and beverages are not to be brought into the church proper, however they may be consumed in designated areas. No gum chewing in the church proper.
- F) Alcoholic beverages are strictly prohibited from the church property at all times. Discovery of alcohol or intoxication (at the discretion of the priest) will result in the dismissal of all parties involved from the premises. Smoking is not permitted in the church building.