

St. John Paul the Great Parish

Guidelines for Marriage Preparation

My Dear Friends,

Congratulations to you both as you begin this new part of your lives together. Truly, the blending of two lives in this commitment of faith is a time of great excitement and joy. You will promise each other lasting love and fidelity before the Church, the priest, and before God. Some of the guidelines, which we offer here, are general instructions of the Roman Catholic Church; some are specific ones of the Archdiocese of Hartford; others are particular directions for St. John Paul the Great Parish Family. These guidelines are to remind you of what is needed in the way of preparation and to help you plan your wedding so that it will be a happy and holy experience to be treasured for years to come.

Remember that, although the preparation and planning of a wedding can be hectic and stressful at times, it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience and is meant to be enjoyed. Try not to let the possible tension affect you, but rather focus your attention on the joy of having been called by God to begin a new life with the one you love.

May God bless you as you prepare for your wedding and may your marriage be filled with love and the peace of the Lord!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Father Emmanuel Ihemedu
Pastor

St. John Paul the Great Parish

Guidelines for Marriage Preparation

INTRODUCTION

The Roman Catholic Church and the Archdiocese of Hartford, aware of the richness and beauty of the sacrament of marriage, have written the regulations for marriage preparation. They have been developed with the hope of strengthening the stability of marriage. Through these guidelines, the Church demonstrates Her concern for the engaged couple by stressing the seriousness of Matrimony. Marriage preparation enables a couple to develop a beautiful and permanent marriage relationship.

The Church really loves and is concerned about the engaged couple. She makes her love practical by spending a great deal of time and energy with the engaged couple. The astounding rate of marriage problems is a concern of the Church. We want to do all we can do to help engaged couples develop those qualities that promote loving marriages.

Marriage preparation provides a concentrated tool and time for couples to deepen their commitment to fidelity and their proposed sacramental marriage “in the Lord.” Premarital instructions serve as a means for putting into focus the many aspects of marriage. Comments from divorced people add force to the necessity of pre-marriage instructions. Many have said that they had the “right feeling” for marriage but the wrong idea. Others have said quite pointedly that they weren’t ready or prepared. Still others said they really did not know each other.

INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM

PREPARATION TIME: The Archdiocese of Hartford requires arrangements to be made with a priest at least six months in advance of your wedding. This allows time for preparation, which involves several sessions with a priest and participation in one of the archdiocesan Pre-Cana programs. It provides time for spiritual preparation as well as ample time to prepare for the ceremony and assemble the appropriate paperwork.

As a couple, you must meet with the priest to fill out your prenuptial forms and FOCCUS survey, and to arrange attendance for Pre-Cana instructions and to gather required documentation for your Marriage file. You will need to attend at least one of the archdiocesan marriage preparation programs, the Catholic Engaged Encounter Weekend or the Conferences for the Engaged. Both the meetings with the parish priest and the archdiocesan preparation programs are informative, instructive, and help to bring you to a deeper awareness of self, sexuality, and the Sacrament of Matrimony. The meetings also provide practical information, which a newly married couple needs.

CONFERENCES FOR THE ENGAGED: This is a program designed to stimulate reflection and couple discussion on some of the many aspects of marriage and family life. Presented by married couples and a priest or deacon, topics such as covenant, love, sexuality and sacrament are covered. See your priest for dates, time and location of the conferences.

CATHOLIC ENGAGED ENCOUNTER: This program consists of a weekend away with other engaged couples with plenty of time alone together to plan your marriage. It is not a sensitivity course or an exercise in group dynamics. It is specifically designed for communication between the two of you. Through a series of ideas presented by a team of two married couples and a priest, the atmosphere is created to talk privately on all aspects of life as a married couple. It is always from the viewpoint of your relationship. See your priest for dates, time and location of the conferences.

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING: A certificate of completion is given to the couple when either conference has been completed. You are advised to register early for these conferences because space is limited, and they fill up about two months prior to the event.

FOCCUS Survey: Your priest will also administer a FOCCUS survey. This is an assessment of the couple's readiness for marriage and will help in identifying problems, if there are any. While the survey is not a pass or fail test, it might indicate readiness issues or problems that may cause a delay in the marriage.

DOCUMENTS REQUIRED:

1. A current baptismal certificate for Catholics, with notations, complete with the return address of the church of baptism and issued within the past six months; for non-Catholics, a photocopy of the original baptismal certificate is sufficient.
2. Two "Affidavits of Freedom to Marry" for each person to be married (total of four), signed and sealed (witnessed) by a local priest, minister, rabbi or notary public.
3. A copy of the declaration of nullity for any party who may have been married before.
4. If you are planning to marry in Connecticut, you must obtain a marriage license from the vital records office of the town where the marriage will take place.

For more detailed information about these documents, please discuss with your priest at your first meeting.

THE WEDDING

MASS OR CEREMONY: This is a question, which should be discussed with your priest or deacon. If the non-Catholic agrees, Mixed Marriages may take place within Mass. It should be understood, however, that Church law does not allow Holy Communion to be given to non-Catholics, even at a Nuptial Mass.

THE MINISTER: The parish priest or deacon will witness your marriage in the Church. A relative or friend who is a priest or deacon may be delegated to witness a marriage instead, but he must have civil authorization in Connecticut. In case of a mixed marriage, the minister of the non-Catholic party is welcome to participate in the ceremony. Please speak with the priest assisting you if this is a possibility for your ceremony.

WEDDING COORDINATOR: All weddings are assigned a wedding coordinator. She is a parishioner familiar with weddings at St. John Paul the Great and will coordinate the many details of your special day with your priest, musicians, altar boys, photographer and florist. She will attend the rehearsal and be

available for setup before your wedding. The wedding coordinator's fee is \$100.00 and is due one week before your wedding. You will be given the name of your coordinator when you meet with your priest. Outside consultants are allowed to help St. John Paul the Great coordinator but may not be used in place of her.

TIMES FOR WEDDINGS: All parish weddings are scheduled on Fridays at either 12:00 Noon, 2:00 p.m., 4:00 p.m., or on Saturdays at 12:00 Noon. Due to Feast Days and other functions, not all Saturdays may be available. The wedding party may use the Church from 11:15 a.m.-1:30 p.m. for a Noon wedding, from 1:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m. for a 2:00 p.m. wedding and 3:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. for a 4:00 p.m. wedding.

REHEARSAL: Rehearsals are scheduled on Thursday or Friday evenings at 5:30 p.m. The rehearsal is scheduled with the priest responsible for the ceremony. Please remind your wedding party to be prompt. Tell the wedding party and others who will be attending the rehearsal to allow extra time when traveling to the church. In addition, it is very important that small children who are in the wedding party attend the rehearsal. This is their opportunity to "practice" walking down the aisle in the processional. See the section "Children in the Wedding Party."

CHILDREN IN THE WEDDING PARTY: Children are allowed to be in the wedding party for weddings at St. John Paul the Great, with some conditions. They must attend the rehearsal and be old enough to understand what they are being asked to do. At the start of the attendant procession, if a child does not wish to walk down the aisle, we will not force him/her to do so. The wedding coordinator will encourage and make last minute adjustments (have him/her walk with a bridesmaid) to help a child who is suddenly not sure about going down the aisle. However, if a child decides that he is not going, we allow him to sit with a parent or grandparent and continue without a fuss.

OFFERING AND FEES: It is customary for the couple to make an offering to the Church. For families who are members of the parish, the customary offering is \$600.00. Organist and Cantor fees are an additional \$350.00. The couple should keep in mind the importance of the ceremony to them, as well as what they will be spending on the rest of the wedding. If they are not registered parishioners, the fee is \$800.00. For the priest who prepared and performed the ceremony, it is customary to give a gift in addition to the Church offering. It is also customary to offer a small gift to the Altar Servers, and this is generally \$10.00 each. Please check with the Wedding Coordinator to determine if there will be Servers present for your ceremony. In addition, there is a fee for the wedding coordinator (\$100.00) See the section "Wedding Coordinator" and "Music." All offerings and fees are due one week before your wedding. Please bring them to the church office.

FACILITIES: Members in the bridal party should arrive about a half hour before the wedding. When they arrive, they should remember that this is a church and that proper decorum must be observed.

FLOWERS: Arrangements for the flowers are to be made by the couple. Artificial flowers are not permitted. A simple arrangement of two bouquets of fresh flowers is sufficient. They may be placed against the back wall of the sanctuary or in front of the altar. If there is more than one wedding on the same day, couples may share the flowers. Please ask the wedding coordinator to assist with coordinating this option. It is very important for the couple to realize that the flowers are their gift to God to beautify His house in celebration of their wedding day. For this reason, we ask that you leave your flowers in the church for

Masses that weekend. During the seasons of Advent and Lent, however, flowers must be removed from the church following the Mass or ceremony.

OTHER DECORATIONS: If decorations for the pews are to be used, please **do not use** tape or wire, as this takes the finish off the pews. Please ask the florist to use plastic clips, elastic, or unwired ribbon. Flower girls are not to throw flowers, or anything else, on the floor. The use of unity candles should be discussed with the priest before you purchase one.

PHOTOGRAPHS: Your photographer may take pictures during the ceremony from the rear or sides of the Church. We ask, however, that the photographer not interfere with the ceremony or come into the sanctuary. The photographer may use flash during the ceremony, as long as the use of flash is discreet. The photographer should check in with the priest and wedding coordinator before the ceremony begins to receive any last-minute instructions or have any questions answered. If the wedding is to be videotaped, the camera is to be located in the rear or along one of the sidewalls of the Church. The camera is to be mounted and not moved around during the ceremony, and movie lights are not to be used. The photographer must be unobtrusive. Please remind your guests to be respectful of the tabernacle, sanctuary and parishioners who are praying while photos are being taken. Please feel free to use other parts of the church property, i.e., Mary's Garden, for pictures.

MISCELLANEOUS: No rice, bird seed, confetti, or anything else is to be thrown inside or outside the Church, or anywhere on the parish grounds. This does not clean up well and has proven to be a safety hazard in the past, as some of our elderly parishioners have slipped and fallen.

HOME PARISH: Be sure to notify the Parish Center Office if you will be registering with the parish after the wedding.

MUSIC: Music for your wedding is coordinated through the Music Director. Initially, please contact our Director of Sacred Music to discuss music selection.

Musicians: See guest musicians section below for requirements of using musicians not from St. John Paul the Great Parish.

Guest Musicians: If you choose to bring in an outside organist or pianist. There is a bench fee of \$150.00 paid to the St. John Paul the Great Parish organist. Guest singer/instrumentalists are allowed with the following provisions:

- a. Must be able to read music.
- b. Must be familiar with the Catholic liturgy.
- c. Must rehearse with the organist prior to wedding day. There is an extra \$50.00/hour fee for this rehearsal.
- d. Must be able to warm-up with the organist 1 HOUR before the wedding.
- e. Must bring their own music and provide a copy to organist at least 2 weeks before the wedding.
- f. The organist reserves the right to not allow a soloist to perform if he/she does not show up for rehearsal or is unprepared.

Document Check List:

- Current Baptismal Certificate (with notations) for Catholics
- Copy of Baptismal Certificate for non-Catholics
- Confirmation Certificate – if necessary
- 2 Affidavits of Freedom to Marry for each party (total of 4)
- Copy of Declaration of nullity – if necessary
- State Marriage license

Fees Check List:

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|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • Priest | Gift amount decided by couple |
| • Church for Parishioner | \$600.00 |
| • Church for non-Parishioner | \$800.00 |
| • Organist and Cantor | \$350.00 * |
| • Wedding Coordinator | \$100.00 |
| • Altar Server | \$ 10.00 |

All fees are due in the parish center office one week before your Wedding and paid in separate checks. Again, we congratulate you both and warmly welcome you to be married here at St. John Paul the Great Parish. There are several preliminary steps you should take if you are considering marriage at St. John Paul the Great Parish. First, Parish Registration is required if you live within the St. John Paul the Great Parish boundary, or written permission from the pastor of the parish where you are registered.

Please call the Parish Office at 860-482-4433 to schedule an appointment with a priest. Reservations for wedding dates are made by the priest based on the availability of the church at the time of your meeting.

Congratulations!

*** Please see page 5 for information regarding Guest Musicians**