

Dear friends,

Congratulations on your engagement! The mutual love of husband and wife bound together in the Sacrament of Marriage and the subsequent fruit of this love, children and family, are the basic building blocks of any society and are indispensable to its health and wellbeing.

This introductory letter and checklist is intended to help prepare you for your first meeting with the pastor. You will find below a basic outline of parish guidelines and requirements. After you have reviewed the checklist and find that you meet the requirements and are looking forward to engaging in the marriage preparation program, please contact the office to schedule your preliminary meeting.

Registration: In order to schedule the preliminary meeting and begin formation for the Sacrament of Marriage, the bride and/or groom must be a registered parishioner of at least 6 months at St. Mary's and attend holy Mass regularly on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. Consideration may be given to those who grew up at St. Mary's, but attend holy Mass elsewhere, and whose parents are still active in the parish. In such a case, a letter from the bride/groom's current pastor will be required attesting that the bride/groom are stable, active members of their parish.

Sacraments: Both bride and groom (or the Catholic party in the case of a mixed marriage) should have received the Sacrament of Confirmation. If the Catholic party (or parties) have not been confirmed, every reasonable effort must be made to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation before the wedding.

Please call the church where you were baptized and ask them for a copy of your baptism record with notations. You can drop the certificate off to the parish office during business hours or have it mailed directly to the office: 239 West Clay Ave., Muskegon, MI 49440. If you are a non-Catholic Christian, please contact the church where you were baptized and ask for a copy of your baptism record. If they do not normally process such a request, a photocopy of the original record will suffice. If there is no record of your baptism, please contact the parish office for instructions.

Marriage Preparation Requirements:

Preliminary Meeting: Both bride and groom must attend the preliminary meeting. No wedding date will be set until said meeting. Further, the date of the wedding will be no sooner than 6 months after the preliminary meeting and must allow for sufficient time to complete the pre-marriage preparation requirements.

Pre-Marriage Inventory: This is a pre-marital relationship assessment "test" that helps to identify potential strengths and weaknesses in the relationship. Couples will then meet with a married couple from the parish to discuss their responses. Please reach out to the office when you are ready and they will send you the necessary information for the assessment.

Pre-Cana Retreat: There are several pre-cana retreats offered throughout the year at various parishes throughout the Diocese. These retreats are designed to help facilitate discussion about topics important to marriage. [An updated list can be found here.](#)

Natural Family Planning: The use of artificial contraception in its many forms is a grave sin. If serious reasons for avoiding pregnancy present themselves at some point in a marriage, it is necessary for a married couple to know a method of Natural Family Planning. St. Mary's offers a course in Natural Family Planning each year—couples preparing for marriage here are

required to participate. After the initial class, couples will have three follow-up meetings with the parish NFP coordinator.

Meetings with priest or deacon: Couples preparing for marriage will meet with the priest or deacon several times during the months leading up to the wedding. Topics will include Catholic teaching on the Sacrament of Marriage, prayer, the rite of Marriage, and the Church's teaching on human sexuality. As part of this preparation couples will be asked to read the Church's exhortation to married couples ([found here](#)) as well as the Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs #1601-1658 and #2331-2400, on the Sacrament of Marriage and the 6th Commandment ([found here](#), or easily accessible on the internet).

*****Please note:** It is the couple's responsibility to ensure that all Marriage Preparation components are completed in a timely manner.

Fees: There are no fees for marriage preparation other than the fee paid directly to the Natural Family Planning instructor as well as a fee for the Pre-Cana retreat. There are no parish fees for the church building or the priest/deacon. However, should the couple desire a professional musician from amongst the approved list of parish musicians, the couple is responsible for a \$200 stipend, or the musician's regular wedding fee, paid directly to the musician. If the couple wishes to have one of the parish cantors sing they are responsible for a \$75 stipend paid directly to the cantor.

Music: Music for the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage may be chosen from the hymnals available at St. Mary's. No secular music is permitted with the possible exception of classical music (when and where appropriate). Please contact our music director regarding music for the wedding.

Wedding Attire: Wedding attire of both the bride and groom, as well as their wedding party and any potential readers and assistants at the wedding, must respect the virtue of modesty. The virtue of modesty is described by the Catechism of the Catholic Church #2521-2522:

Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden. It is ordered to chastity to whose sensitivity it bears witness. It guides how one looks at others and behaves toward them in conformity with the dignity of persons and their solidarity. Modesty protects the mystery of persons and their love. It encourages patience and moderation in loving relationships; it requires that the conditions for the definitive giving and commitment of man and woman to one another be fulfilled. Modesty is decency. It inspires one's choice of clothing.

Please Note: On the day of the wedding, consumption of alcohol or drugs by anyone in the wedding party before the wedding takes place will result in cancellation of the wedding. The bride and groom must be completely sober in order to have the freedom to validly exchange the marriage vows.

Readers: At the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage, readers of the Word of God and the Prayers of the Faithful must be Confirmed, practicing Catholics. You may want to check out the options for Scripture readings for the wedding liturgy here: [Nuptial Mass Readings - For Your Marriage](#)

Checklist

Marriage Preparation Requirements:

- Complete the Marriage Inquiry Form (found on the church website)
- Complete the Fully Engaged Inventory
- Meet with an assigned mentor couple
- Request copy of Baptism record with notations
- Read exhortation before marriage
- Read sections 1601-1658 & 2331-2400 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church
- Attend a Pre-Cana class/retreat
- Attend the group Intro to Natural Family Planning (NFP) class at the parish
- Attend three follow up NFP sessions
- Meet with Father or Deacon at least three times prior to the wedding
- Choose music for the Mass/ceremony
- Select readings for the wedding
- Confirm time of rehearsal
- Wedding rehearsal and Confession prior to wedding

Please Give the Office:

- Pre-Cana certificate (if applicable)
- NFP certificate of completion
- Copy of Groom's Baptism record with notations
- Copy of Bride's Baptism record with notations
- Selected readings (may be sent via email)
- Marriage License (the week of the wedding)

*Please note that while office staff will periodically check your wedding file and email reminders if necessary, it is ultimately **your** responsibility to fulfill all the requirements to be married at St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish.

FAQs

- Saturday weddings may take place no later than 1:00pm.
- Flowers may be placed in front of the ambo and on either side of the altar. Flowers must be real. There are vases and stands in the working sacristy, to the left of the altar. You may use any of them, but please return them when you are done. If you would like to donate your flowers to the church, you may leave them in place after your wedding. Please note that during Ordinary Time any flower arrangements left in the sanctuary will be moved and placed in front of one of the Marian statues in the church.
- If you wish to present flowers to Mary, you may do so at the end of Communion.
- Lasso and Arras are optional and may take place after the presentation of rings.
- No unity candles or other rituals that are not part of the Catholic wedding liturgy.
- Nothing may be thrown or scattered on the church aisle.
- Decorations may be placed on the pews, but no tape or other adhesive may be used. Be sure that the decorations are not abrasive in any way, so that they do not scratch the pews.
- You will most likely be able to decorate the church after your rehearsal, but please confirm this with the office prior to making plans.
- There is a \$200 fee paid directly to the organist/pianist as well as a \$75 fee paid directly to the cantor.
- Aside from fees related to marriage prep or music, there is no fee to get married at St. Mary's. If you would like to make a donation to the church you may. *If an outside priest is celebrating your Mass, you will need to give him a donation.