

# How to prepare for marriage

When you become engaged, and before making any other wedding plans, meet with the priest or deacon who will officiate at your wedding. Weddings normally take place at the parish church of the bride or groom, and it is the policy of the Archdiocese of Baltimore that you contact your priest or deacon a minimum of six months before the proposed wedding date.

At the initial interview, the priest determines a couple's freedom to marry, counsels them about their marriage, and helps them begin to plan their wedding. He will also schedule one or more future meetings with you.

After your first interview, you will register for a marriage preparation program, an important part of your personal preparation for the sacrament. In a marriage preparation program, you can expect to study, pray and discuss the following topics: the meaning of the sacrament of matrimony, the vocation of Christian marriage, communication, conflict resolution, decision making, natural family planning, marital intimacy and spirituality. Visit [www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/preparation](http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/preparation) for more information.

Below are the marriage preparation programs certified by the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Division of Evangelization and Catechesis. If your parish offers a program on site, this will be your best option. Ask your priest, deacon or parish office if your parish offers one of the programs listed below. Where noted, programs include the FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study) pre-marriage discussion instrument, [www.foccusinc.com](http://www.foccusinc.com).

**Sponsor Couple Program** – This couple-to-couple model is offered by many parishes. An experienced married couple will help you explore the meaning of Christian marriage and improve open communication and understanding using FOCCUS. You and your sponsor couple will set a schedule of meetings in their home, usually for five, two-hour sessions. Contact your parish office to register.

**Remarriage Preparation Program** – Some parishes offer a special sponsor couple program when one or both partners have been previously married. The Remarriage

Preparation Program is meant to help couples take an objective look at some of the issues that can arise in this new relationship and prepare them to avoid some of the pitfalls. Check with your parish for availability. The program consists of six, two-hour sessions and includes FOCCUS. Register through the parish office.

Remarriage Small Groups - To inquire about the availability of a small-group Remarriage Preparation program offered each year in Baltimore County, please contact Marriage and Family Enrichment at [lpzybysz@archbalt.org](mailto:lpzybysz@archbalt.org), 410-547-5417.

Archdiocesan Groups (Pre-Cana) - Some parishes partner with the archdiocese to offer pre-cana groups, led by a team of parish couples and open to any engaged couple. Class size is limited, usually to 15 couples. Enjoy time for personal sharing with your future spouse, and participate in small-group discussions. FOCCUS is included. Register through Marriage and Family Enrichment at <https://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/preparation> or call 410-547-5417. Register early, since classes fill seven to nine in advance.

Parish Marriage Pre-Cana - Many parishes offer group marriage preparation classes for their parish members only, similar in content and design to the archdiocesan group classes. Inquire about registration and fees at your parish office.

Catholic Engaged Encounter - The design of the Engaged Encounter encourages couples to explore mutual strengths and weaknesses, goals, aspirations and attitudes concerning family life, children, sexuality, finances, the church and society. The weekend begins at 7:30 p.m. Friday evening and ends at 4:30 p.m. Sunday afternoon with Mass. It utilizes a dynamic process based on listening, writing and dialogue. A team of two married couples and a priest facilitates and guides the weekend. Room accommodations and meals are included. Register online at [www.mdcee.org](http://www.mdcee.org), 410-439-4217.

Three to Get Married - Sponsored by the Legionaries of Christ Center for Family Development in Crownsville, Maryland, the program is held over a three-day period (7-9:30 p.m. on Thursday and 9 a.m.-5 p.m. both Saturday and Sunday). The program includes talks, questionnaires, discussions with marriage sponsors, and time for personal reflection. Meals are also included. To register, contact [info@springhillcfd.org](mailto:info@springhillcfd.org), 410-923-8900.

Special Circumstances - If you have difficulty scheduling a marriage preparation program that meets your needs, contact Lauri Przybysz, coordinator of Marriage and Family Enrichment, [lprzybysz@archbalt.org](mailto:lprzybysz@archbalt.org), 410-547-5420.

For additional resources for engaged couples, visit the new Catholic Web site [www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org).