

Family Feature

In Religion class, we're focusing on the Catholic vocations to marriage, priesthood, and religious life. In the marriage lesson, one of the sections addresses how to prepare for marriage, apply for marriage in the Church, and prepare for marriage during the engagement.

As you'll see, there is a lot of good information on preparing oneself to be a good spouse and faithful partner.

Preparing for Catholic Marriage

Discerning a vocation to marriage is like discerning any vocation – it takes a lot of time and education to do it correctly. Unfortunately, a lot of people jump into marriage assuming that they know everything they need to, or that things will just “work out,” and don't expend effort on understanding the important things and getting them right.

The following is a basic explanation of what goes into getting married, a sort of “how-to” from the Catholic perspective:



1. **Prepare Yourself.** Just as with other vocations, a good marriage is preceded by some discernment. People research, contact, and visit religious orders before they choose one. They pray and strive to be the kind of people worthy and ready for their vocations. Likewise, people considering marriage should follow a similar pattern of discernment:

1. *Pray.* Prayer is key to knowing God's will, both in your general vocation and in the particular context he wants you to live it (in other words, *whom* you should marry). If you do not pray, it will be impossible to know God's plan.
2. *Serve.* If you cannot serve others generously and selflessly, your marriage will be very difficult. Marriage is about getting your spouse and yourself to heaven, and this requires self-sacrifice. If your view of marriage is selfish ("all about me"), it will not be a good marriage.
3. *Examine your soul.* You should ask yourself the kind of questions found on the Checklist activity frequently and work on the areas with which you have difficulty.
4. *Cultivate great friendships.* You should interact purely, as a friend, with members of the opposite sex. If you can develop good friendships with members of the opposite sex which are completely chaste and maintain them over time, then you are well on your way to being able to live very happily in a marriage.
5. *Get advice* from trusted adults about what makes a good or bad spouse. Just as you would ask advice from trusted adults about joining a particular religious order, you will also ask advice about dating or continuing to date a particular man or woman. Consider their advice, even if it isn't what you want to hear.
6. *Look for the right person.* Someone discerning religious life looks for a community which seems likely to help him spiritually, one which provides real ways to live up to his talents, skills, and desires. Likewise, a person discerning marriage should look for similar things in a potential spouse: *does this person help me spiritually? Does this person influence me to be a better person, more creative, more virtuous, more thoughtful, more compassionate with or without him/her around? Or does this person influence me to be less than I should be?* Before dating someone, you should have a good idea of what the person is really like, and how he/she affects you, positively or negatively.
7. *Date with a purpose.* If you feel mature enough to pursue marriage more actively, and if, with the advice of others, and your own judgment, you find a suitable person, you can try to initiate a deeper friendship. It is good to keep this light at first—good marriages are built on plain old goodwill, charity, and friendship. If either of you move too quickly towards a very serious, exclusive relationship, it can push either partner into continuing a relationship that should be stopped. However, a good friendship can be the beginning of a great dating relationship which leads to a wonderful marriage.
8. *Continue a great friendship.* While dating, continue to pursue chastity. If you have developed healthy habits, they will help you now to be chaste and in control of your sexual desires according to your state-in-life. If you can show this tremendous level of respect to each other while dating, one of two things will likely happen: either you will determine that you are not called to marry each other, and

will be able to continue having a great friendship because you did not destroy it with unchastity; or you will go on to marry each other and have a great start to the rest of your married life.

2. **Applying for Marriage.** In the Church, a marriage must be applied for an approved.

1. *Contact your parish priest.* When you and another have made up your mind to marry, and made it formal with an engagement and plans to set a date in the near future, your priest who will guide you through the next steps. Church weddings must take place in the territorial parish church of bride or groom, unless you get special permission from the bishop. Most parishes require that one of the spouses be a registered member of the parish.
2. *Expect an interview with the priest or deacon,* whoever will preside over your exchange of vows, to receive approval for your marriage. He will ask whether there are any impediments to marriage, such as a previous marriage, or any special circumstances that would make it extremely difficult to marry. Usually, this is not a problem. However, if a serious issue is found (an unresolvable impediment), it is God letting you know that this marriage is not right for you. While this may be difficult to accept, remember that God knows best what is good for you and what will make you happy.
3. *Arrange a date.* Before you make any other plans, it is important to find out whether the date you have in mind works with the parish schedule and reserve that date. There may already be a wedding planned the same day you would like, so prepare several possible dates, and remain flexible. (Some parishes require that you are approved for marriage or complete marriage prep before reserving a date.)
4. *Complete marriage preparation* (see the next part).

3. **Marriage Preparation with your Future Spouse**

1. *Attend marriage preparation* required by the parish. This usually involves classes, testing, and counseling to make sure the couple knows all that is entailed in a Catholic marriage.
2. *Cover costs.* Some parishes have small fees to cover the expenses of the staff helping the couple prepare, usage and cleaning of the church, etc. Where there is no fee, it is customary to donate a small amount. This amount may vary by parish or diocese. If there is financial difficulty, most parishes will waive any fees. (In Christian justice, these should be paid before any other unnecessary expenses, such as a fancy reception, since this is the essential part of the wedding!)
3. *Submit documents.* Commonly required are: Baptismal Certificate, Certificate of Holy Communion and Confirmation, Affidavit of Freedom to Marry (usually filled out and signed by parents or other

witnesses that you are free to marry), Civil Marriage License (if applicable; obtained through state and local governments), Certification of Completing Marriage Preparation.

4. *Work with the priest* to choose the liturgy options and music. This includes specific prayers and readings. The parish often has a prepared list of music which the parish musicians can play/sing, which will have many choices. (Liturgy options will be different depending on the rite used. For two Catholics marrying, the marriage rite usually takes place within the context of the Mass; there are also rites for a Catholic marrying a baptized non-Catholic, or a Catholic marrying a non-baptized person.)
5. *Choose witnesses* – two people, besides the priest/deacon presiding, are required to witness the exchange of vows. (These are usually the “maid of honor” and the “best man”.) Ask for their consent to officially witness this exchange.
6. *Note rules and regulations of the diocese and parish concerning your wedding.* Since marriage demands the mature, full, well-thought out, free consent of both man and woman, many parishes have set up basic rules to be sure that this happens. For example, since exchanging vows while intoxicated can make a marriage invalid, some parishes forbid consumption of alcohol on parish property prior to the wedding. (In addition, these rules are usually just common sense!)
7. While most people will have a reception, remember that the most important thing is the wedding itself. Preparation for other things should not distract the bride and groom from preparing for the Sacrament, especially by prayer and the Sacraments. It is advisable to go to confession frequently in the months and weeks preceding the wedding so that both can approach the sacrament joyfully.

4. **The Wedding**

1. On the day of the wedding, the bride and groom exchange their vows before the witnesses, presider, and others. They are married; the beginning!

