



**Marriage Preparation at  
Saint Luke Catholic Church  
McLean, Virginia**

Revised September 2020

## **Preparing For Your Wedding**

Congratulations on your upcoming marriage! Marriage is a sacrament, between two baptized persons, and an indissoluble union. During the six-month preparation period you will work with a clergy member who will help the engaged couple to enter whole-heartedly into this sacrament through a free choice of the will. While the couple will be working on the preparations for the day of the wedding, the clergy member assists the couple in entering into an intimate union of life and love for the lifetime of the couple.

Many couples do not live in the city in which they will be married. Saint Luke priests will work with a couple to complete the required Marriage Preparation steps and forward the paperwork to the church where the ceremony will take place. The Marriage Preparation process takes approximately six months to complete.

## **Marriage Preparation Procedure and Timeline**

Step 1: Contact the parish office to speak with the pastor and to schedule a first meeting. Please be clear that you would like to complete marriage preparation at Saint Luke but will be married elsewhere. The Arlington Diocese stipulates you must allow 6 months for marriage preparation.

Step 2: Your first meeting will take place during normal business hours, Monday – Friday, 9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.. At this meeting bride and groom will complete the Marriage Preparation Questionnaire, discern with the priest the correct Rite of Marriage for your ceremony and the priest will discuss additional requirements such as baptismal certificates, Pre-Cana instruction, the FOCCUS profile and Dispensation requests, if applicable.

Step 3: Gather required documents (See Appendix A for more details):

- Newly issued baptismal certificates (copies will not suffice)
- Affidavits of Free Status (Two for the Bride and Two for the Groom)
- If one of the parties is not Catholic, review the Promised of Mixed Marriage and apply for a dispensation with the clergy member.

Step 5: Register for Natural Family Planning (NFP) Classes and Pre-Cana classes

<http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/familylife/marriage.aspx>

Step 6: Complete the FOCCUS Profile online – your clergy member will give you registration instructions.

Step 7: Once the FOCCUS Profile is completed, you have registered for the classes and conference, and you have your paperwork in hand, then schedule your second meeting with the clergy member.

Step 8: Before the third meeting with the clergy member, both the NFP classes and the Pre-Cana conference should be completed. Once the couple has completed both, contact the clergy member to schedule the third meeting.

Step 9: You will need to be in discussion with out-of-town church regarding the actual ceremony including notes on guests, rehearsals, music, and the liturgy.

Step 10: Don't forget to obtain a Civil Marriage License from the state where the ceremony will take place!

## **Consolidated Timeline for Marriage Preparation at Saint Luke**

6 months prior:

- Arrange the first meeting with the clergy member
- Complete the Prenuptial Investigation

After first Meeting:

- Gather required documents
- Register for NFP classes
- Register for Pre-Cana Conference
- Complete FOCCUS Profile

### **Marriage Preparation Notes**

\*The couple will meet at least four times with the clergy member to discuss the future marriage union. These sessions will cover not only the teachings of the Church and the theology of marriage, but also address issues of a more practical nature, like communication and finance.

\*Marriage preparation meetings take place during normal business hours, Monday – Friday, 9:30AM – 4:00PM. The couple will need to coordinate their work or school obligations in order to attend the meetings. The clergy member will be willing to provide a letter if necessary.

\*Couples who are cohabiting will be asked to separate prior to marriage.

\*For couples married civilly and seeking a validation, or for couples not married, but still living in the same domicile, the Rite of Marriage Outside of Mass is conducted.

\*For couples already married civilly, our priests are happy to discuss Marriage Convalidation.

\*The couple will need to work directly with the church where the ceremony will be held regarding music, readings and their church policy on decorations.

\*The marriage license must be procured from the state where the wedding will take place.

## **Appendix A: Required Church Documents**

1. **A Baptismal Certificate** For Catholics, the Baptismal Certificate must be issued from the Church of Baptism no earlier than the date of the initial meeting with the priest. Baptized non-Catholics should request a letter from the church in which they were baptized.
  2. **A Confirmation Certificate** For Catholics: A copy of the original certificate is acceptable. A copy will be made and the original returned to you.
  3. **The Prenuptial Investigation:** The priest will complete with the couple a short questionnaire, entitled The Prenuptial Investigation. This questionnaire elicits basic background information from the couple, but also asks questions to make sure there is no impediment to enter into marriage. This will be completed during one of your meetings.
  4. **The Certificate of Attendance from a Pre-Cana Conference:** Arlington Diocese offers multiple *Conferences for Engaged* throughout the year. A complete listing and registration information can be found at <https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/family-life/marriage/conferences-for-the-engaged/>
- Our Lady of Bethesda Retreat Center offers the *Three to Get Married* program for engaged couples. They offer both virtual and in-person weekend retreats. Information can be found at <https://ourladyofbethesda.org/programs/marriage/virtual-marriage-prep>.
5. **FOCCUS:** The couple will answer a 156 (or more) question survey entitled, “Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study.” This survey instrument is not a compatibility test; rather, it raises issues concerning a broad range of areas, like religion, finance, communication, sexuality, and parenting. Information will be provided so that the couple may register online and take the Inventory separately. Results of the Inventory will be sent to the priest who will meet to review the results of the survey during your subsequent meeting.
  6. **Affidavits of Free Status:** The bride and the groom must each submit two Affidavits of Free Status. These forms should be completed preferably by relatives (especially parents) or others who have known the bride or groom for a long period of time. These affidavits attest that no impediment exists that would prevent the marriage from taking place. The Church requires these affidavits for the couple’s own protection. The witnesses must sign the affidavits in the presence of a priest, deacon, or notary public. The Affidavits may be downloaded or printed from our website: [www.saintlukemclean.org](http://www.saintlukemclean.org).
  7. If either party has been previously married, proof of a **Declaration of Nullity** or a certified death certificate must be supplied.
  8. If either party is not Catholic, a **Dispensation for Mixed Marriage** will be required from the Arlington Diocese Office of Canonical Affairs. **The priest working with you on marriage preparation will submit the application for a Dispensation.**