

Church of Saint Mel

Parish Guide to Marriage Preparation



Cover image, Philippe de Champaigne. The Marriage of the Virgin. circa 1644. Oil on panel. Wallace Collection, London.

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on your engagement! Our whole parish shares your joy and excitement as you anticipate your married life together.

Your marriage and the celebration of your wedding day have incredible significance for you, your family, and your parish. Your vocation of marriage will be an expression of your love and commitment to one another as well as a sign of the love of God for His people, and your wedding will be a unique moment of receiving the grace of God to live the life you have been called to. Because of this, it is important that you give time and energy to prepare for the sacrament of marriage. We are pleased to share in this responsibility with you and to assist you in the months to come.

The following guidelines are meant to provide you with important information about our marriage preparation process. Please take time to read these guidelines carefully.

PREPARATION PROCESS

You will be guided through the preparation process by one of the priests or another staff member. Preparation must begin at least six months prior to the wedding, so please contact the parish between six and twelve months before your intended wedding date. Our parish staff can tell you the availability of a date, but they cannot reserve one until the preparing minister gives permission.

Please note that if either party has been previously married obtaining an annulment may be necessary; your preparing minister will guide you through this additional process, but be aware that depending upon the specifics of your situation, receiving a judgment may take as little as one month or more than sixteen months. Marriage preparation cannot begin and no wedding date can be reserved until an affirmative judgement is received. We strongly encourage you to contact the parish as soon as possible, even prior to your engagement, if this is your situation.

Initial Meetings

In the initial meetings, the preparing minister will gather basic details such as contact information, what faith each party practices, and the history of the relationship. There will also be an assessment in which the minister determines your freedom to marry within the Church. The rest of the preparation process will also be explained to you in greater detail. You do not need to prepare anything for these meetings or bring anything with you, apart from knowing your church of baptism and a deposit for the church fee. Ordinarily the preparing minister will be the presider of your wedding.

Wedding Dates and Times

During the initial meetings with your preparing minister, you can request a day and time for your wedding and for your wedding rehearsal. On Saturdays we have weddings at 11:00am and 1:30pm and

on Fridays we can schedule weddings for the evening. Availability is subject to other activities for which the church has been reserved as well as liturgical restrictions for certain holy days. Rehearsals are ordinarily the evening before at 5:00pm. While the minister might reserve a requested day and time immediately, no wedding date is final until the minister obtains all necessary dispensations and permissions.

PREPARE/ENRICH

Each couple will be asked to complete an online couple assessment tool called PREPARE/ENRICH (prepare-enrich.com). This tool was developed by sociologists and psychologists and is used to identify relationship dynamics and the strengths and growth areas of couples. The preparing minister will use the feedback from this assessment to shape your preparation. This is not a test that can be passed or failed, merely an assessment that helps both you and us to understand different areas of your relationship.

Your preparing minister will register you for the assessment and you will receive an email with your login credentials. While you are encouraged to discuss the results with one another once you have both completed the assessment, we ask that you please do not skew the results by taking it together. You will be provided with a summary of your results when you meet with your preparing minister.

Meetings with the Preparing Minister

You will meet several times with your preparing minister of the six or more months of marriage preparation. The minister will discuss with you things such as your relationship as a couple, your understanding of marriage, and your spiritual life, all with the goal of helping you have a strong, lifelong partnership of sharing your life and your love.

Pre-Cana Program

Each couple will also attend a pre-cana program that has been approved by the Diocese of Cleveland, ranging from single day retreats to weekend retreats. Your preparing minister will discuss the options available to you and give you further instructions.

Natural Family Planning

You will be asked to attend a course on natural family planning offered through the Couple to Couple League (ccli.org). Natural family planning is a moral way to either postpone or achieve pregnancy that is completely natural, and is as effective at postponing pregnancy as birth control or other modern methods that are not compatible with the Church's moral understanding of human sexuality.

Liturgy Planning

In the month prior to your wedding, you will meet with the presider to plan the wedding liturgy and with the music director to select music. Prior to those meetings we will provide you with additional resources to help you plan the liturgy.

Assessment of Readiness

Part of the preparing minister's responsibility in working with you is to ensure that you are capable, as a couple, of entering into the sacrament of marriage. For very serious reasons, the minister may decide to indefinitely delay the wedding until certain concerns have been addressed; these situations are rare, and normally apparent early in the initial meetings. For other reasons a wedding may be impossible, such as if a previous marriage is not granted an annulment.

In all cases the preparing minister will make you aware of any concerns as soon as possible.

Confession

If you are Catholic, sometime before the wedding you should receive the sacrament of reconciliation. This can be with any priest that you are comfortable with, and you do not need to report to the preparing minister that you went to confession. Likewise, encourage your family and wedding party to receive the sacrament if they are able. Your wedding will be, above all other things, a time of prayer and open hearts before God; it's beautiful to be in that moment hiding nothing from Him.

DOCUMENTS AND FEES

Baptismal Certificate

For Catholics, a baptismal certificate is needed from the church of your baptism. Because this record needs to be issued within the past six months, your original certificate or a copy thereof is not sufficient; however, if your church of baptism is outside of the diocese or especially if outside the country, providing us a copy of the original will help us to locate those records. At minimum, we will need to know what church you were baptized at and your best knowledge of the date of baptism.

For baptized non-Catholics, we require some proof of baptism such as an original certificate or something recently issued from the church of baptism. These documents will be returned to you after copies are made. If you have no documentation and have no way of obtaining a new record, the wedding will still be able to proceed after we obtain a simple permission from the bishop.

For non-baptized individuals, no proof is needed concerning their religious background.

Dispensations and Permissions

For many couples we are required to obtain either dispensations or permissions for various reasons. For example, unless both individuals are practicing Roman Catholics either a dispensation or a permission is required from the bishop, or if neither couple is living in the territory of our parish a permission is needed from the pastor where one of the couple lives. These are given in almost all cases with little difficulty. However, we will not be able to officially give you a wedding date until all needed dispensations and permissions have been obtained.

Stipends

No one must pay in order to receive the sacraments or the ministry of the Church. However, for weddings it is customary to offer a stipend to the priest and to the musician, and to defray other expenses incurred by the parish. If the requested stipends are in any way a financial burden, please do not be embarrassed to ask for them to be reduced or waived.

We request a stipend of \$600 for parishioners and \$750 for non-parishioners. A \$100 deposit is due during the initial meetings with the preparing minister, while the remainder of the church fee is due by the wedding rehearsal. Checks should be made out to "St. Mel Church". This fee is comprehensive and covers the cost of reserving and using the church as well as stipends for the presider, wedding coordinator, and musician.

Please also prepare two envelopes with \$10 cash in each for the altar servers on the day of the wedding.

Any other costs such as outside musicians, flowers, or programs are the responsibility of the couple to pay to their vendors.