**Marriage Preparation: The Six Steps**

Step 1: Meet with the parish priest or deacon

 When: Six to twelve months prior to your wedding.

 As soon as possible after your engagement, contact your priest or deacon to assist you with your marriage preparation. Your first step is to inquire about the availability of your parish priest or deacon to preside over your wedding. Contact your local parish to obtain information on availability of the church sanctuary and/or the priest's availability.

 At the initial meeting your priest or deacon will determine if you and your fiancé(e) are free to marry in the Church; he will have you complete a Pre-Nuptial Investigation form. Your priest or deacon will provide you with information for completing Steps 2-6 of this process; and, he will set up a schedule for future meetings.

Step 2: Marriage Preparation Inventory

 When: As soon as possible after meeting with your priest or deacon.

 Complete a marriage preparation “inventory” (usually FOCCUS or Fully-Engaged), which is a set of questions to help you assess the strengths and weaknesses of your relationship and any areas that need further discussion or attention.

Step 3: Marriage Preparation Course

 When: Six to ten months before your wedding day.

 Select and attend a Marriage Preparation program found on the archdiocesan webpage <https://www.archstl.org/marriage-family-life/for-marriage/marriage-prep>. The Archdiocese offers an excellent marriage preparation program designed to introduce you to God’s loving plan for your marriage. The course also includes virtue-based instruction on communication, conflict resolution, financial decision-making and prayer. Some parishes offer marriage preparation programs within the parish with a mentor couple.

Step 4: Natural Family Planning Introductory Course

 When: Six to eight months before your wedding.

 Natural Family Planning (NFP) is not only highly effective for planning your family it is also very effective in overcoming obstacles that compromise your ability to become parents. You will need to attend an NFP Introductory course on one of the NFP methods of your choosing. You will find the list of NFP classes at: [www.archstl.org/natural-family-planning](http://www.archstl.org/natural-family-planning) .

Step 5: Sacrament of Reconciliation

 When: Before the wedding as necessary.

 The Church invites all Catholics to prepare themselves spiritually prior to their marriage by celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Even if you are not of the Catholic faith, you still would benefit from spiritual direction. The regular practice of the sacrament of reconciliation keeps marriages healthy and strong.

Step 6: Liturgy Planning

 When: Before the wedding.

 The priest or deacon will provide a booklet to help you plan your wedding ceremony. The USCCB video *Saying I Do…What Happens at a Catholic Wedding* is very helpful for this process. Find the link to the video here: <https://youtu.be/3uAHwtBRg5c>

For more information, contact your local parish or the Office of Marriage & Family Life at the Archdiocese of St. Louis at 314-792-7178 .