



PADRE SERRA PARISH
"Siempre Adelante"

Sacrament of Marriage Preparation Requirements

Purpose of Marriage Preparation

A man and woman make a very serious and sacred commitment when they decide to marry each other in the Catholic Church. Through the Sacrament of Matrimony, Jesus calls them to draw closer to each other, to God and to the faith community of the Church. Marriage is a permanent commitment to a partnership of life, one which requires careful thought, much prayer, and intense preparation.

Requirements

The universal Church has established a number of requirements for the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles has established additional policies to assure the sacredness of the Sacrament and to facilitate marriage preparation.

1. Couples must contact the parish and initiate the preparation process no later than six months prior to the date they hope to celebrate their wedding. Couples are encouraged to contact the parish at the beginning of their engagement.
2. Weddings are to be celebrated in the parish of the Catholic party. If both are Catholics of the Latin Rite, they may approach the parish of either the bride or groom (canon 1115).
3. To witness to the sacred nature of marriage and the communal dimension of the sacramental commitment being made, weddings are to be celebrated in the place of worship of the Church community. Thus, permission is not granted for weddings in any outdoor setting. Nor is permission granted for a wedding in a restaurant, hotel, wedding chapel, community center, or other similar setting.
4. No priest, deacon, or other parish official is authorized to schedule or promise a date for a wedding over the telephone. No date can be scheduled until a priest or deacon has met with the couple to determine that nothing stands in the way of the valid and licit celebration of the proposed wedding (canon 1066), and to begin the preparation process. In particular, if either party has ever been married, even by common law, no date can be established or promised until the question of freedom to marry has been settled either by presentation of a certificate of death of the former spouse or of an ecclesiastical declaration of nullity issued by a Tribunal of the Catholic Church.
5. Participation in a formal marriage preparation program sponsored by the Office of Family is required. This can be the Engaged Encounter Weekend or a one day program. Other steps to enhance marriage preparation are strongly encouraged such as the use of a marriage communication survey i.e. FOCCUS.

6. Certain documents are required as part of the marriage preparation process.
 - a. A certificate of Baptism should be submitted for each baptized party; in the case of Catholics, the certificates must be issued by the parish of Baptism within the last six months. Certificates of First Communion and Confirmation are requested, but not strictly required.
 - b. Sworn affidavits of at least two competent witnesses verifying the freedom of the parties to marry are to be provided on the forms supplied by our parish.
 - c. The priest or deacon preparing the couple will also interview each party and complete the prenuptial questionnaire concerning freedom to marry and attitudes toward marriage.
 - d. Other documents such as dispensations, certificates of death, or reports from counselors may be required under certain circumstances.

7. No priest or deacon is authorized to witness an exchange of vows unless it is also authorized by the civil law of the State of California. This is verified by presentation of a marriage license. Unless such a license is presented, no wedding can occur because a priest or deacon who conducts a service without civil authorization commits a misdemeanor and is subject to civil penalties. In cases of the convalidation in the Church of a pre-existing civil union, proof that a civil marriage has already occurred takes the place of the marriage license.

8. When a Catholic chooses to marry someone baptized in another Christian church, or one who follows a religious tradition other than Christianity, special care is taken to assure that the union does not pose dangers to the faith practice of the Catholic party and that the non-Catholic party understand the obligations of the Catholic do all possible to have any children born of the union baptized and raised as Catholics. To avoid having religious differences create stress that undermined or tear apart a marriage, the Church requires those issues be addressed in the marriage preparation process. Special permission (for a Catholic-Christian union) or a dispensation (for the union of Catholic with a person who is not baptized Christian) authorizing the union is granted after those issues have been appropriately addressed.

9. If a priest or deacon other than one assigned to the parish where the wedding is held is to witness the exchange of vows, he must receive specific delegation from a priest of that parish in order to officiate at the ceremony.

10. The wedding ceremony is celebrated in accord with the Rite of Marriage. The ritual provides options for the Scripture readings and wedding prayers. The priest, deacon or other parish minister assists the couple in choosing the most appropriate selections to enhance the prayer. Music for weddings must meet Archdiocesan Guidelines. Parish policies concerning music, wedding times, photography, rehearsals and other such matters are to be respected.

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