It is not to make the couple “check the boxes” or “jump through hoops.” In her efforts of remote, proximate and immediate preparation, the Church is not trying to make it more difficult to get married, but rather provide the best opportunity for equipping the couple to live a shared life of love, compassion and nurturing grace.

The diocese therefore mandates the following process of formation for those preparing for the celebration of a wedding recognized by the Catholic Church, which also serves as a guide for those pastoral agents responsible for that preparation.

The Catholic Church teaches marriage is a covenant, a contract and a bond between a man and a woman that forms a partnership for life. The marriage bond is a unique and exclusive relationship between husband and wife for the sanctification of the couple and for the procreation and Christ-centered nurturing of children in a family.

The family, with its foundation in marriage, is a fundamental unit of the Church. Marriage is also a basic social institution of human society. Marital love is at the service of the couple, the children, the community, and of the world. Because of its timeless importance, the Church teaches marriage between two baptized Christians is a sacrament, a source of grace and a sign of God’s love for the world.

Every sacrament needs preparation for its fruitful celebration. The Church wants to ensure that those entering the life-long commitment of marriage are adequately prepared for the riches and the responsibilities intrinsic to it. This is why the Diocese of Jefferson City has a policy for marriage preparation.

Most Rev. W. Shawn McKnight
Bishop of Jefferson City
**COMPONENT I**  
**FIRST STEPS**  
Plan to begin preparation 6 to 12 months before wedding

Congratulations! As you prepare for marriage, your first step is to meet with your parish pastor or assigned deacon for your marriage preparation.

**AT YOUR FIRST MEETING:**

- Your pastor or deacon will have a conversation with you as a couple, discuss your tentative wedding date, go over the documents and forms you will need, and more.
- They will also give you an overview of the marriage preparation process.
- You’ll receive instructions to complete the Prepare/Enrich Premarital Couple Assessment.

**MEETING GOALS:**

- Talk about important topics based on the assessment results.
- With their guidance, explore which “Instructional and Communal Experience” option will be best suited for you.
- Discuss the Natural Family Planning requirement. It’s highly recommended to look into this early as you embark on your marriage preparation.

Next, they will refer you to a trained marriage preparation facilitator to meet with.

Your next step is to meet with your marriage preparation facilitator, in-person or virtually, two to four times.

**COMPONENT II**  
**INSTRUCTION**  
Your Instructional and Communal Experience

This component offers an educational opportunity to strengthen your relationship, faith, spirituality and understanding of the sacrament of matrimony as a couple.

In addition, the following programs provide an opportunity for you, as a couple, to interact with other engaged couples and married couples willing to share their experiences on topics critical to a healthy marriage.

**WITH THE HELP OF YOUR FACILITATOR, YOU’LL CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:**

- Option 1: An existing marriage preparation program offered in your parish.
- Option 2: One of the diocesan Engaged Encounter weekends.
- Option 3: One of the diocesan Pre-Cana conferences.
- Option 4: An approved online marriage preparation program.
- Option 5: Another approved retreat experience.

**COMPONENT III**  
**NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING**  
Catechesis and practical instruction for NFP methods

Natural Family Planning (NFP) methods allow faithful married couples the ability to honor the love-giving and life-giving nature of the conjugal act as designed by God.

In this part of marriage preparation, you will learn about the many benefits of practicing a reliable and scientifically-based NFP method, which can help you effectively and responsibly achieve or postpone pregnancies in accord with God’s will discerned by you.

**AS A COUPLE YOU WILL:**

- Watch the online NFP introductory video, then,
- Attend a live or online introductory session with one of the NFP providers of the diocese.

Attending a full course is highly encouraged. Completing a full course provides the opportunity to learn the ins-and-outs of your NFP method and ask qualified teachers specific questions.

**COMPONENT IV**  
**FINAL STEPS**  
Concluding formal marriage preparation

As your formal marriage preparation concludes your marriage preparation facilitator will inform your pastor, or the deacon, at your parish you met with about your progress. A final meeting with your pastor or deacon is then scheduled to conclude your preparation, and begin planning the wedding liturgy in accordance with diocesan policies.

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE PREPARATION**

**Who pays for marriage preparation?**

Couples can participate in marriage preparation at their parish at no cost to them. Occasionally, parts of the components may have an attendance fee associated with them (Engaged Encounter, Pre-Cana, etc.)

**Are priests and lay people trained to facilitate these marriage preparation process?**

The diocese provides trainings and resources for clergy and parish facilitators, including formal training for the Prepare/Enrich Assessment. If you have questions about the marriage preparation process or trainings, please contact the diocesan Faith Formation department.

**What if my parish doesn’t offer this marriage preparation?**

Every parish in our diocese understands the importance of marriage preparation and is positioned to help you. If your parish lacks a diocesan-trained marriage preparation facilitator, they may take care of you by referring you to a neighboring parish close by that can walk you through this marriage preparation process.

**SUPPORT AFTER MARRIAGE**

Provided 6 to 12 months after wedding

To care for and nourish your marriage, support is offered six to twelve months after your wedding. You will be contacted by your parish and offered support and a variety of marriage enrichment and family resources.