ST. FRANCIS XAVIER CHURCH
125 MAIN STREET
ACUSHNET, MASSACHUSETTS 02743

Saint Francis Xavier Parish, Acushnet
Guidelines for Marriage Preparation

Congratulations on your recent engagement! We rejoice with you and pledge to you our prayers and support. As Catholics, we believe that marriage is a sacred covenant of love in Christ between a man and a woman for the purpose of sustaining a community of life and love and to accept children lovingly from God. Marriage is a sacrament: a visible sign of Christ's presence which empowers us through His grace. In the living out of this sacrament, God's love is made present in our world.

Of all the many preparations which you will make over these months prior to your wedding day, none is more significant than your spiritual preparation. Please make the time to pray together by coming to Mass each week, and, for those who are Catholic, to avail yourselves to the sacramental life of the Church. During our time together, we will discuss not only the details of the wedding, but, more important, we will assist you to prepare for your life together as husband and wife in the sacred bond of marriage.

The steps for marriage preparation for those contemplating marriage are explained as follows.

Step 1: Initial appointment

At least 9 months before the wedding, please call the parish office to make an appointment with Fr. Ryan Healy. It will only be at this appointment that the determination will be made as to the date of the wedding. **No dates will be discussed or booked over the phone or with the parish administrative assistant**. The necessary paperwork will then be initiated for the wedding. **To schedule an appointment, fill out the Wedding Inquiry form found here.**

While most couples already have a particular date in mind, no firm commitments should be made until this first meeting. Because of the parish schedule of Masses and confessions, weddings are generally scheduled at the following times (all times are when the ceremony may begin):

- Friday: Noon - 7:00pm
- Saturday: 11:00am - 2:00pm; 5:30pm - 7:00pm
- Sunday: 12:30 pm - 4:00pm

A couple where both parties are of the Catholic faith generally will be married during a Mass. A marriage of a Catholic with someone of another faith tradition may be celebrated either at a Mass or at a wedding ceremony which is primarily a Liturgy of the Word and the Rite of Marriage.

After the initial appointment, the process of marriage preparation will involve several steps, including some at-home work, to deepen a couple's understanding of the Sacrament of Marriage and deepen their knowledge and love of each other.

At home work: *Beloved* series Parts 1 & 2

As part of your preparation, you will watch together at home an excellent video series entitled *Beloved: Finding Happiness in Marriage* found online at formed.org. Find the trailer here. After watching the series, please complete this google form.
To access these videos:

- Go to formed.org
- If you do not have an account, select "get an individual subscription." (There is a 7-day free trial. After that, the cost is $9.99/month.)
- The series can be found under "The Sacraments" section.

If you have been away from the practice of the Catholic faith, or would like to learn more about Catholicism, we highly recommend, before watching *Beloved*, that you watch the 7-episode series "The Search" found on formed.org as well. Find the trailer here.
Description: *The Search is an innovative video series that tackles the key questions of every human heart. In seven beautifully filmed episodes, Chris Stefanick and experts from multiple fields of science, medicine, psychology, art, and religion examine our place in the larger story of existence.*
Whether you're a practiced inquirer or a jaded skeptic, The Search will speak to you. You may be reassured by some parts, and challenged by others. Either way, you'll find a lot here to think about. And when all is said and done, life's questions demand to be answered.

Step 2: FOCCUS Process

FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study) is a self-diagnostic inventory designed to help couples learn more about themselves and their unique relationship, and better prepare for their marriage. An appointment is to be made with Deacon David Pepin (dbp@sfxparish.com) to set up the meeting. Please plan for this meeting to last about an hour.

Step 3: FOCCUS Follow-up

Several weeks after the completion of the FOCCUS Inventory, you will meet once again with Deacon David to discuss how the information from the FOCCUS process can be used for deepening the communication between a couple and strengthen their relationship.

Step 4: Marriage Preparation Program

Fall River Diocesan guidelines require that a couple preparing for marriage attend a marriage preparation program. The options include:

1. **Diocese of Fall River "At the Table" marriage preparation program**. Find the online registration form here or see updates at fallriverfaithformation.org under "Marriage", then to "Marriage Prep." Couples must attend a Session A followed by a Session B.
2. **Other Diocesan programs:** If the above dates do not fit your schedule, you may participate in a program in any local diocese:
    - **Archdiocese of Boston "Transformed in Love"**: See the schedule of upcoming sessions at evangelizeboston.com under the tab "For couples."
    - **Diocese of Providence, RI**: See the schedule of upcoming sessions at dioceseofprovidence.org/marriage

Step 5: Meeting with the Priest

An appointment is now made in order to briefly discuss the previous programs. In addition, plans for the Wedding Mass/Ceremony will be finalized. You can will find documents and forms on our website to plan all the details of the Mass/ceremony, including the readings and other details about the ceremony. Please fill out this google form with your choices. Your choices should be made prior to this meeting so that they can be finalized at this meeting. Father will also talk about the importance of celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) and give the couple an Examination of Conscience.

Step 6: Rehearsal

Generally, the rehearsal is scheduled an evening or two before the wedding. All involved in the wedding party are welcome to participate. The rehearsal will be led by Fr. Healy and our parish wedding coordinator, _____. It is important that all arrive at least ten minutes early so that the rehearsal will begin on time.

Step 7: Your Wedding Day!

PAPERWORK NEEDED

Each Catholic party is to bring a newly issued copy of their baptism and confirmation certificates dated no longer than six months prior to the wedding. A baptized person of another faith is to bring a copy of his/her baptismal certificate. An inter-faith marriage requires a few additional forms. The priest will explain this to you at your first meeting. If neither party is from our parish, you will be asked to provide a letter from your local parish priest granting permission for your marriage to take place here.

A priest/deacon who is a friend of the family is welcome to celebrate the wedding. In this case, they must obtain a letter of suitability from their bishop or superior which is to be presented to the priest/deacon before he is allowed to perform the ceremony.

If you are not from the area, paperwork may also be completed by one's local parish priest.

A marriage license, issued from a city or town in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts must be obtained approximately one month from the date of the wedding. Please contact the city/town for further information. This license is to be given to the office as soon as you receive it and certainly by the week of the wedding so that it may be included with your necessary paperwork.

FEES

Church: We are pleased to support you in the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony. The general donation in support of the parish is **$300**. If this is a hardship, please feel free to discuss with the priest or deacon. Your donation is certainly appreciated and goes directly to the parish. The check should be made out to "**St. Francis Xavier Parish**."

Music: The fee for the musicians (Cantor and Organist) is in addition to the church donation and is **$500** in total. Please contact our Organist, Jonathan Babbitt (jfb@sfxparish.com) or Cantor, Allison Messier (ajm@sfxparish.com) to discuss the specific details of your wedding. Jonathan and Allison will provide you with details about the process for choosing liturgical music for your wedding as well as the various options that are available. They will send you the musical options for use in church. A couple should not make arrangements with any soloist or other musician without first consulting with the Music Ministry of our parish. In the event that alternate musicians are desired, those musicians must be vetted and approved by the parish Music Ministry, and will incur the payment of a $500 bench fee to the Music Ministry. All fees concerning music are separate from the Church donation and are the responsibility of the couple.

Altar Boys: The parish generally provides two servers for the wedding. Please place $10 in two envelopes as a thank you to each server.

Wedding Coordinator: The wedding coordinator, _____, will assist you at both the rehearsal and on the day of your wedding. The coordinator will contact you prior to the wedding to introduce herself and to ascertain information from you regarding the ceremony. Our coordinator is compensated for her service and the normal donation for her services is **$50**. If writing a check, it should be made out to "_____."

Gift for the Celebrant: The free-will offering to the Church does not go to the Celebrant. If you wish to give him something, please do so in a separate envelope. This is completely optional.

Envelopes: The envelopes for the Church, musicians, servers, and coordinator, as well as the marriage license should be brought to the office the week before the wedding (please do not bring to the rehearsal).

OTHER ITEMS

Flowers and Decorations

It is customary for the wedding couple to provide flowers for the sanctuary. We recommend providing two floral arrangements for the high altar, which help to beautifully frame the sanctuary during the celebration. As a gift to the parish, it is customary to leave these arrangements in the church after the wedding for use at the weekend Masses. If you would prefer to take the arrangements with you after the ceremony, please let Father know in advance. No flowers are to be placed directly on the altar.

If you are planning to attach flowers or bows to the ends of the benches, please use wire, clips, or elastic cords. Please do not use adhesives or thumb tacks, which can damage the finish on the benches. If you are not planning to leave the flowers after the ceremony, someone should be assigned to remove them promptly following the wedding.

Runner (white carpet)

Because of the potential danger of tripping on the white runner by guests at the wedding, please do not plan on using a runner at the wedding.

Wedding favors/rice throwing

Please discourage the throwing of rice at the wedding since this can create a hazard on the walks. No wedding favors, such as bubbles, rose petals, butterflies, birdfeed, bells, etc., should be given out in church prior to the ceremony to uphold the sacredness of the Marriage Liturgy.

Alcoholic Beverages
Any alcoholic beverages, both inside and outside of the church, are not appropriate and therefore prohibited. If you are hiring a limousine, please instruct the company that alcoholic drinks are not permitted on the grounds of the church.

Record of Marriage
Your marriage will be recorded in the Sacramental register in the parish office. The priest or deacon performing the ceremony will fill in the marriage license and send it to the City/Town Hall from where you obtained a marriage license, where it will be recorded.

Parish Registration
After your wedding, you become a new family, united in Christ. It is important for you to register as a family in the parish in which you will be residing.

Cancellation/Postponement of Wedding
At any time, if you decide to postpone or cancel your plans to get married in our parish, please contact the parish office.

Photographer/Videographer
The photographer/videographer is to consult with Fr. Ryan on the day of the wedding to ascertain the proper procedure during the Mass or service.

Completion of the Sacraments of Initiation
If you are a baptized Catholic and have not yet received First Communion or Confirmation, we encourage you to complete your Sacraments of Initiation before your wedding. These sacraments strengthen us with God's grace to live our Christian life and are especially important for spouses who seek to faithfully live out the beauty and challenge of their marriage vows in today's world.

If you still need to receive these sacraments, you are welcome to join the parish OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation for Adults) class, which meets weekly from fall through early spring. You may also choose to register for the Diocese of Fall River's Adult Confirmation program, offered at various times and locations throughout the year. Click here to learn more and sign up.

If you belong to another faith tradition and are interested in becoming Roman Catholic, we warmly welcome you to join our parish OCIA class. This process offers an opportunity to explore the Catholic faith, ask questions, and prepare to receive the sacraments of initiation at Easter.

Thinking Ahead: Choosing Godparents
As you look to starting a family in the future and begin thinking about Godparents for your future children, we encourage you to review the Church's requirements now to avoid potential frustration later on. A Godparent must:

- Be at least 16 years old
- Have received the sacraments of Baptism, First Communion, and Confirmation
- Be actively practicing the Catholic faith, including attending Mass every Sunday and holy day of obligation
- If married, be married in the Catholic Church or have had their marriage convalidated (blessed) by a priest or deacon

If a family member or friend you're considering as a Godparent needs to complete any of these requirements—such as receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation or having their marriage blessed in the Church—it's best to begin that process sooner rather than later. We're happy to help them take those next steps.