

MARRIAGE PREPARATION STEPS AND DOCUMENT MASTER CHECKLIST

For AMS Priest-Chaplains

Groom's First and Last Name	Groom's Religion	Date of Wedding	Time of Wedding
Bride's First and Last Name	Bride's Religion	Place of Wedding	Presider of Wedding

STEP 1: First Meeting with the couple (at least **six [6] months** before wedding date).

- Give overview of AMS marriage preparation process.
- Explain the six (6) month preparation requirement prior to proposed wedding date.¹
- Fill out the "Pre-Nuptial Questionnaire" in the physical presence of the bride and groom, interviewed separately – obtain wet signatures from each and your own (<https://files.milarch.org/forms/pre-nuptial-questionnaire.pdf>).
NB: If the bride or groom have a prior marriage bond(s): Stop here. No one should set or presume a definite wedding date until the tribunal informs the parties of their freedom to marry, keeping the possibility of a stipulation in mind. There is also the possibility that the tribunal might not be able to grant a declaration of invalidity for various reasons. Begin assisting the person(s) with the petition for nullity.
NB: If one party is an Eastern Catholic, the assisting minister must be a priest (i.e., not a deacon).
- Give the bride and groom two (2) "Witness Concerning Freedom to Marry" forms each. Explain these forms must be filled out completely by a local Catholic pastoral minister (does not have to be you) in the physical presence of the witness. Tell the couple to mail or email these forms to their witnesses stat, and to have the witnesses mail the originals with all required wet signatures to you, the priest-chaplain preparing the couple (<https://files.milarch.org/forms/witness-concerning-freedom-to-marry.pdf>). Do not wait to consider or collect these documents.
- Explain the requirement and process for taking the pre-marriage FOCCUS inventory. You are responsible for assigning the inventory to the couple via email. For all FOCCUS questions, contact FOCCUS (<https://www.foccusinc.com/contact.aspx>).
- Explain the options for the Pre-Marital catechetical formation (a.k.a. Pre-Cana) for marriage, either in-person, through the local diocese, or online (<https://www.foryourmarriage.org/marriage-prep-resources/>).
- Explain the NFP requirement and assist the couple in selecting an introductory NFP session provided for on the AMS website (<https://www.milarch.org/natural-family-planning/>). NB: An NFP module within a Pre-Cana course, while a bonus, does not fulfill the AMS requirement of a "stand-alone, one-hour session facilitated by a certified NFP instructor."² The priest preparing the couple may not dispense from this requirement.
- Explain that you must have an authentic baptismal record of any Catholic party(ies) issued within the last six (6) months of the proposed wedding date with all annotations on the front and back of the record. The record with its complete set of marginal annotations is extremely important because they are proof of the canonical status of the faithful, for example, to determine the marital status of a believer, whether concerning his or her marriage or a declaration of nullity. Assist them in obtaining these. Do not wait to consider or collect them. Contact the Tribunal with questions/concerns if the certificate is unattainable after exhausting all options.
- Explain that you must have proof of baptism for a non-Catholic baptized party (obtained at their church of baptism).
- Schedule the Second Meeting (no more than **one [1] month** from the first) as a follow-up to the above.
- Collaborate on the date and place of the marriage. NB: Be mindful of paperwork timelines in STEP 4.

¹ General Decree, *Norms Concerning the Immediate Preparation for Marriage* (December 17, 2014) of The Most Reverend Timothy P. Broglio; and *Commentary on Norms Concerning the Immediate Preparation for Marriage*. NB: "For a just and reasonable cause, the local ordinary or AMS priest preparing the parties for marriage may dispense from this norm."

² Ibid.

STEP 2: Second Meeting (no more than **one [1] month** after the first meeting)

- Discuss the results of the FOCCUS inventory with the couple. Access results via your FOCCUS login.
- Schedule follow-up meetings (1-4 suggested) to discuss FOCCUS results. You may wish to request the assistance of a local FOCCUS facilitator to assist with follow-up meetings. FOCCUS is separate from Pre-Marital Catechesis (do not submit FOCCUS meetings as Pre-Cana meetings).
- Arrange Pre-Marital Catechesis (Pre-Cana) with the couple (with yourself, local diocesan options, or online).
- Assist the couple in signing up for NFP if they have not done so already (either in-person or online).
- Tell the couple to wait no longer, if they have not yet mailed or emailed the “Witness Concerning Freedom to Marry” forms to their witnesses. If you do not assist them with this now, it will be a distraction a few weeks before the wedding.
- Assist the couple if they are having trouble acquiring a recently issued baptismal certificate from their parish (especially if they are from another country). Do not leave this responsibility to their relatives. Contact the parish or chancery directly. If the baptismal record sent by the parish is insufficient (e.g., no annotations, no signature, etc.), contact the parish yourself to explain the requirements and request a new complete record immediately.

STEP 3: After STEPS 1 and 2, begin preparing the liturgical celebration (<https://www.foryourmarriage.org/rite-of-marriage/>).

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS YOU MUST COLLECT

within **two (2) months** before the date of the wedding

- Pre-Nuptial Questionnaire with wet signatures for the bride (original).
- Pre-Nuptial Questionnaire with wet signatures for the groom (original).
- Original (not a photocopy or electronic) Baptismal records for the Catholic party(ies), issued within the past six (6) months, with all annotations front and back (originals). Bride and/or Groom
- Proof of baptism of non-Catholic Christian (original). Bride or Groom
- 2x Witness Concerning Freedom to Marry forms for the bride with wet signatures (originals).
- 2x Witness Concerning Freedom to Marry forms for the groom with wet signatures (originals).
- FOCCUS Inventory certificate (original or electronic).
- NFP certificate of completion (original or electronic).
- Pre-Cana certificate of completion. NB: If the priest preparing the couple personally oversees Pre-Marital Catechesis, then he is to indicate the topics/sessions covered in a cover letter (original or electronic).

