



Sacrament of Matrimony Policies and Procedures

1. FACULTIES

- a. Within the Diocese of Helena, priests and deacons enjoy the faculty to witness marriages only within the parish to which he is assigned. If a priest or deacon wishes to celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony outside of his assigned parish, he must obtain permission, also known as 'delegation,' from the pastor of the parish where the sacrament will occur, using Form C.
- b. A pastor may give a priest or deacon who is not assigned to his parish written permission to celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony in his parish for a specific period of time, such as one year.
- c. The chaplain of Carroll College holds the same faculties of a pastor for those in his care. Approval from the chaplain is necessary to schedule a wedding on campus grounds, and the selected venue must conform to diocesan policy. Additionally, the chaplain must grant formal permission for a priest or deacon to celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony at the college (using Form C). While priests or deacons assigned to the Cathedral of St. Helena are exempt from the formal permission requirement, they still require prior approval from the chaplain to schedule a wedding on Carroll's campus.
- d. Priests who are not currently assigned to a parish, including those with senior status, must obtain permission (using Form C) from the appropriate pastor to celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony.
- e. A priest or deacon who has received permission to celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony in a parish outside his own must adhere to the liturgical practices and policies of the parish from which permission is received. This includes, but is not limited to, rules surrounding décor, music selection, and photography/videography.
- f. If a priest or deacon who is not assigned to the Diocese of Helena requests to witness a marriage within the Diocese, all Diocese of Helena policies regarding outside priests or deacons must be followed. The incoming priest or deacon must request that his chancery send a Letter of Good Standing to the Helena Chancery, care of the Judicial Vicar. If all is in order, the Helena Chancery will send a letter of approval to the parish where the sacrament will take place, indicating that permission may be granted. Priests or deacons without a Letter of Good Standing or who have not been approved by the Judicial Vicar may not preside at Mass or witness the Sacrament of Matrimony in the Diocese of Helena under any circumstances.

2. MARRIAGE PREPARATION

- a. Couples have the right to and should receive marriage preparations at the parish where either party currently attends Mass and plans to continue attending indefinitely. This parish, also known as the 'parish of domicile,' is responsible for all marriage preparations and should make every effort to guide couples through the entirety of the marriage preparation process. Even if a couple plans to marry in a Catholic Church outside the parish of domicile, they should still undergo marriage preparations at their current parish. For instance, if a couple intends to marry in a Catholic Church outside the Diocese of Helena, possibly in one of their childhood hometowns, they should complete their marriage preparations at the parish where they currently attend Mass. *Note: In the Diocese of Helena, Catholics are permitted to*

receive the sacraments outside of their geographical area, also known as their 'territorial parish.' However, it is important for both the benefit of the couple and the parish, that engaged couples are registered at the parish where they currently attend Mass and intend to receive marriage preparations. If this is not already the case at the time of preparation, the priest, deacon, or administrator should work to facilitate registration at the parish.

- b. A couple with quasi-domicile, established when either party resides in a location with the intention of staying there for at least three months or has indeed lived there for three months, may undergo marriage preparations at the parish of quasi-domicile.
- c. When a couple requests a priest or deacon from another parish or diocese to officially witness their marriage, the parish of domicile or quasi-domicile, remains responsible for carrying out all marriage preparations.
- d. When a couple plans to marry at a parish within the Diocese of Helena but undergoes marriage preparation at a parish in another diocese, they should adhere to the standards and expectations set by that parish and diocese. The Diocese of Helena will recognize and honor these standards. Likewise, when marriage preparation occurs in the Diocese of Helena for a wedding celebrated in another diocese, the procedures of the Diocese of Helena are followed.
- e. If marriage preparations occur outside the parish where a wedding will take place, the pastor or administrator of the wedding location must ensure that the couple has undergone appropriate marriage preparations. This is usually done by obtaining a written statement and/or certificate(s) from the parish where the preparations were conducted.
- f. No person who has been previously married, and whose prior bond has not been declared null by the competent ecclesiastical tribunal, may be admitted to marriage preparation within the Diocese of Helena. The annulment process must be fully and definitively resolved, with a decree of nullity issued and all stipulations (including any vetitum or monitum) addressed, before a priest, deacon, or parish staff may begin formal marriage preparation with the party or couple.

3. MARRIAGE FILE & REGISTER

- a. A properly completed prenuptial file is necessary for a wedding to take place in the Diocese of Helena. The responsibility for conducting the prenuptial questionnaire and compiling appropriate documents lies with the parish of preparation. If the sacrament is to be celebrated at a parish or diocese different from the location of preparation, the pastor or administrator of the parish where the sacrament is scheduled must ensure that all required documents are received before the wedding day.
- b. When a couple receives marriage preparations in another diocese but intends to marry in the Diocese of Helena, their completed prenuptial file must be sent to the diocesan chancery where the marriage preparation took place. From there, it is forwarded to the Helena Chancery for review. Once approved by the Judicial Vicar for the Diocese of Helena, the prenuptial file is sent to the parish where the sacrament will take place and is permanently filed.
- c. When preparation occurs in the Diocese of Helena for a marriage that will be celebrated in another diocese, the completed prenuptial file must be sent to the Helena Chancery. It is then the responsibility of the Judicial Vicar to forward the prenuptial file to the other diocesan chancery, which subsequently sends it to the parish where the sacrament will take place and is permanently filed. To ensure sufficient time for processing, the completed prenuptial file should be sent to the Helena Chancery at least 30 days prior to the wedding date.

- d. The Sacrament of Matrimony must be officially recorded in the marriage register of the parish where the wedding took place. Additionally, the marriage file associated with the couple must be permanently retained at this parish.
- e. The pastor or administrator of the parish where a marriage was celebrated is obligated to notify the parish(es) where the Catholic spouses were baptized, and the Sacrament must be duly recorded in the baptismal register(s) of those parishes. To facilitate this notification process, Form G is to be utilized.
- f. If a marriage takes place at the parish where either party received the Sacrament of Baptism, the Sacrament of Matrimony must also be recorded in the parish's baptismal register and on the individual's baptismal certificate.
- g. A completed prenuptial file must include:
 - ☐ **Certificate of Baptism** for each party. If baptism took place at a Catholic Church, the certificate of baptism must be dated no more than six months prior to beginning the marriage preparation process and is obtainable from the parish where an individual was baptized. Notations for any sacraments received are to be included on the baptismal certificate of a Catholic party. *Note: If either party was baptized in a non-Catholic Church but later received into the Catholic Church, the marriage file must contain both the Certificate of Baptism and Certificate of Reception (notations on the newly issued baptismal certificate is sufficient).*
 - ☐ **Completed Prenuptial Questionnaire** (Form A)
 - ☐ **Canonical Witness Affidavit(s)** (Form B) – Requires one witness each, preferably a parent or relative, unless the preparer can personally vouch for the freedom of the bride and/or groom and is morally certain of his or her freedom to marry. In such cases, the preparer must complete Form A, Section 5.
 - ☐ **Death Certificate** of previous spouse or **Annulment Decree**
 - ☐ **Prior Bonds of Marriage** (Form E) – Additionally required if either the bride or groom has been previously married.
 - ☐ **Canonical Dispensations and/or Permissions** (if necessary; Forms C, D, E, or H)
 - ☐ **Letter or Certificate(s) of participation in Marriage Preparation Instruction** from the parish of preparation *or* indicate completion using Form A, section 4.
 - ☐ **Premarital Inventory** certificate of completion, report, or equivalent (e.g. FOCCUS, Prepare & Enrich or PMI etc.)
 - ☐ Signed copy of the **Marriage License**. The license is obtained from the Clerk of District Court. Once issued, the license can be used immediately or up to 180 days after the date of issue in the state of Montana.

4. PERMISSIONS AND DISPENSATIONS

- a. Permissions and dispensations aim to promote the spiritual good of the couple and the pastoral judgment of those who have received sacred orders must evaluate the appropriateness of a permission and dispensation in a given case. In the Diocese of Helena, only parish priests have the faculties to grant certain dispensations and permissions (using Form C).
- b. Petition to the Bishop or his delegate is required for the following permissions and dispensations:

Last updated: September 25, 2025

- From the Canonical Form of Marriage Ceremony (using Form D)
 - For a Wedding in a Suitable Place other than a Parish Church (using Form E)
 - Any of the circumstances as described in Form H
- c. In circumstances where permissions and dispensations are required but do not necessitate Bishop's approval, the priest who prepared the couple for marriage should grant any necessary permissions and dispensations using Form C. This applies even if the couple plans to be married in a different parish or diocese. However, priests can only grant permissions/dispensations within his parish jurisdiction. For instance, a priest cannot grant a permission/dispensation for a couple in which neither party belongs to his parish.
- d. All permissions and dispensations are valid for only six months from the date granted. If a marriage is delayed beyond this six-month timeframe, permissions/dispensations must be reevaluated and possibly re-granted.
- e. To celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony in a suitable place other than a parish church or mission, the priest or deacon must petition the Bishop or his delegate for permission, using Form E. The nature of the place must be consistent with a religious celebration. The Rite of Marriage must be followed, and Mass is not typically celebrated in these locations. Additionally, the Diocese of Helena has designated certain places for which permission for a wedding will not be granted. These include the Our Lady of the Rockies statue near Butte, a former Catholic Church that is no longer in use, the premises of Legendary Lodge, or any place where alcohol is served as a matter of course (such as nightclubs, bars, casinos, dining establishments, and similar venues).
- f. A priest or deacon may petition the Bishop or his delegate to grant permission for a wedding Mass to be celebrated outdoors making every provision that it is celebrated solemnly and according to the Order of the Mass and the Rite of Marriage.

5. PRENUPTIAL AGREEMENT & DANGER OF DEATH

- a. In cases involving a prenuptial agreement, a draft must be submitted in advance to the Helena Chancery for approval. The Judicial Vicar will then review the agreement to ensure that it does not impose any conditions on the marriage that could potentially lead to divorce. Subsequently, the Helena Chancery will issue a letter of approval or denial. To ensure sufficient time for review, the prenuptial agreement should be sent to the Helena Chancery at least 30 days prior to the wedding date.
- b. A marriage celebrated in a "danger of death" situation may occur at any location necessary under the circumstances.

6. CONVALIDATIONS

- a. A complete prenuptial file is required for every convalidation, containing all documents outlined in Section 3.g of these policies. In addition, Section 3 of Form A (page 6), "*To validate a civil marriage which currently exists,*" must be completed.
- b. Couples who have entered a civil union or attempted marriage outside canonical form may not seek convalidation until at least one year has elapsed from the date of the civil or non-Catholic ceremony. This waiting period ensures adequate time for the couple to demonstrate stability of life and seriousness of intention before entering into sacramental marriage. Any exception to this norm requires a petition to the Bishop or his delegate.