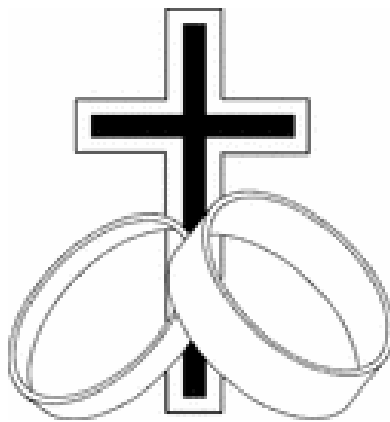


MARRIAGE PREPARATION GUIDELINES

PROVINCE OF NEW ORLEANS



**WITH
SPECIFIED NORMS
FOR THE
DIOCESE OF LAFAYETTE**

2008

MARRIAGE PREPARATION GUIDELINES

PROVINCE OF NEW ORLEANS



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MARRIAGE PREPARATION AND CELEBRATION

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage as Sacrament

Those engaged in the pastoral preparation of couples for marriage should be well grounded in the Church's teaching on sacramental marriage. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers a good overview of the meaning of sacramental marriage (CCC, 1601 to 1617). Those involved in marriage preparation should familiarize themselves with this section of the Catechism.

Marriage, instituted by Christ and thus raised to the dignity of sacrament, becomes an efficacious sign of the covenant of Christ and the Church. This means the spouses themselves, in sacramental marriage, are a sign. They make Christ present to each other and to the community in powerful and mysterious ways. In a sacramental marriage, a couple communicates the union of Christ and the Church to all. God calls each couple to witness specifically to each other, to be faithful to each other, to be fruitful together, and gives the couple everything needed to make their marriage permanent for their lifetime. By its very nature marriage is designed for the good of the couple, as well as to the procreation and education of children.

Despite our unfaithfulness, God is continually faithful. As signs of the union of Christ and the Church, both husband and wife in the Sacrament of Matrimony are called to be faithful to each other in marriage. Their witness to fidelity reminds people of Christ's fidelity to us, the Church.

God's love is constant. God will never leave us and is always there for us in this life. Thus, husband and wife are called to love each other with full and constant devotion. The unity of a man and woman in marriage is indissoluble. Sacramental marriages and natural marriages serve as prophetic examples of permanence, at a time when our society challenges any and all forms of commitment. Should couples think this ideal is an impossible task, they must realize Christ never gives them something that is beyond their reach. On the contrary, Christ shares the strength and grace to live sacramental marriage.

Marriage Preparation

As we begin these reflections on marriage preparation, we point out that the entire Church is involved in varying ways in the formation of the engaged couples. In a special way, the following groups are involved in marriage preparation:

- Parents and family who create the environment in which selfless love is modeled.
- Married couples whose love and commitment to each other is a living example of what married life is all about.
- Catechists in both our Catholic schools and in our parish religious education programs. They contribute to the understanding of the Christian commitment within the youth that becomes the basis of marital love.
- Priests, deacons and laity who work with the engaged couples as they prepare for their lives together.
- Sponsor couples and other catechetical leaders who assist in the formation programs for engaged couples.
- Christian communities that join in prayer for those entering into marriage.
- Individuals who work with family life ministry, Engaged Encounter, Marriage Encounter, Retrouvaille, and other programs that support families. These efforts reflect the desire of the Church to be of assistance to couples throughout their married life.
- Counselors who assist couples at times of difficulty.

The success of our efforts to support married couples is not simply a matter of solid marriage preparation programs, but a result of the entire faith community working in various ways to proclaim the values that are basic to our understanding of Christian marriage.

Married life is an esteemed vocation in the church and those working with engaged couples should use every opportunity to encourage them in the use of their courtship and engagement to reflect deeply on the sacred calling that they are now considering.

We urge those working with couples in the preparation of marriage to be familiar with the teachings of On Human Life (*Humanae Vitae*), as well as Pope John Paul II's The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (*Familiaris Consortio*), and more recently, Pope John Paul II's teaching on "The Theology of the Body." Pope John Paul II has touched on various aspects of marital love throughout his teachings on marriage. In his collection of addresses known as "The Theology of the Body," he refers back to the words of *Humanae Vitae*:

Marital love is fully human, it involves the entire person.

Marital love is total.

Marital love is exclusive.

Marital love is faithful "till death do us part."

Marital love is open to new life.

Theology of the Body

The Theology of the Body of Pope John Paul II became the first major project of his fruitful papacy. This was a collection of 129 talks that he gave as part of his general audiences in Rome between 1979 and 1984. This teaching related to marriage and human sexuality has been described consistently as a counter-revolution in sexual teaching. George Weigel, in his outstanding biography of Pope John Paul, “Witness to Hope,” describes the Theology of the Body as a theological time bomb set to go off after the Pope’s death with dramatic consequences. The beloved Pope John Paul has already passed away, and the dramatic consequences predicted in that biography have begun to be realized.

In his teaching Pope John Paul II focuses on the beauty of God’s plan for the union of the sexes. This has provided the possibility of a Copernican revolution in the way the Church teaches about sexual ethics by shifting the discussion from a kind of legalism (How far can I go before I break the law?) to an understanding of true freedom (What is the truth that sets me free to love?). In the Theology of the Body, this is what salvation in Christ is all about.

For John Paul II there are two universal questions that must be answered. The first one is “What does it mean to be human?” The second one is related to the first, “How do I live my life in a way that brings true happiness and fulfillment?” In the context of those two questions, John Paul II proceeds to apply a distinctive and seasoned Christian humanism to the vocations of celibacy and marriage.

In answer to the first question, the Pope writes about three stages: 1) Our origin before sin in which he uses the Gospel passage of the rich young man (Mt. 19: 3-8). 2) Our history darkened by sin, yet redeemed by Christ in which he discusses part of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5: 27-28). 3) Our destiny when God will raise our bodies in glory in which he discusses the resurrection of our bodies (Mt. 22: 23-33). In doing this, he incorporates an understanding of the human body which serves to manifest the Divine. This is precisely the connection between the body and theology, or saying it in a different way, this is precisely why we can speak of a “theology of the body.”

God created the human body as a sign of His own divine mystery. The human body, we have been given by God, makes visible the eternal mystery found in God. This is realized by the uniqueness of every human being as he or she is the pinnacle of God’s creation, and also through the beauty of the sexual differentiation and our call to union. For the late Pope the original experience of the body and sexual intimacy is a participation in God’s eternal love.

For most Catholic Christians if they would be told to fill in the blank after the word “original,” they would fill it in with the word “sin.” Yet, John Paul II gives us at least four words that we could use to fill in that blank other than sin and actually preceding the reality of sin! The following would be the Pope’s chronological sequence of the terms he would suggest to explain our original state as fully as possible: Original innocence is the state of communion with God prior to sin in which we communed with God’s original intent. We reach knowledge of this state by realizing how far we have fallen from it. We can understand what at one time would have been a sense of wholeness, by the brokenness we can experience today.

Original solitude would be the next notion to mention in which man recognizes his uniqueness in all of Creation and his need for another who would reveal this uniqueness as well. In the biblical quote from the book of Genesis “it is not good for the man to be alone,” (Gen 2:18) there is present a whole anthropology that shares the importance of the unique place of human beings in Creation. In Adam’s recognition of Eve as “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh,” there is recognition of the other, and also a call to original unity through the complementarity of the sexes. Also in Genesis it is seen that there is an original nakedness in man and woman that allows them to look at each other without shame (Gen 2:25). In this the Pope sees the blessing of seeing the other as a subject and never as an object.

In the deep understanding of these new four “original” words, the Pope sees the profound understanding of the human body in a different way. It is a way in which the body has the capacity to give love to the other and receive love from the other in a nuptial way, which means in a marital way, just as God gives of His love to us. This is called by the Pope the “nuptial meaning of the body.”

It is only after sin enters the scene that there is a kind of fear and shame that enter human relations. Shame and fear are based on the fact that lust has become a factor in our relationships. Lust is the erotic desire void of God’s love and the objectification of the other which betrays true love. Shame comes in through sin because from that moment on human beings can understand that we can search for the sensation of sexuality apart from the true gift of the self and apart from authentic love.

According to the Theology of the Body of Pope John Paul II, this life is a journey to rediscover our original self. We can look forward to this newness of life that will be finally consummated in the Resurrection of our bodies when we will discover the ultimate experience of the nuptial meaning of the body, now possible with God Himself. According to the Pope, this will be a new experience, beyond anything we can imagine, yet not totally disconnected from the way it was “in the beginning.”

This has tremendous impact in the way we live our lives since we can see marriage not as the place to placate lust or to justify lust but as the unifying experience of man and woman meant to be one in God, without shame, and respecting the language inscribed in their bodies by no other Being than God Himself. Celibacy for the Kingdom is no longer a rejection of marriage but an anticipation of the ultimate marriage in Heaven: a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb! This is the new and revolutionary context to understand the sexual morality taught by the Gospel and the Church!

There are tremendous implications related to sexual ethics coming from the Theology of the Body of Pope John Paul II. In line with the constant tradition of the Church, sexual intercourse within marriage is seen as only appropriate within a marriage covenant that reflects the original intent of the Creator. Only a man and woman who have committed their lives to each other in the sacred bond of matrimony are fit for sexual intercourse. In order to live this commitment openly and in a holy way, they must commit themselves to a life where chastity becomes a primordial virtue. By chastity is meant an understanding of sexuality in which the acts proper to the married life are

seen within the context of a higher call of personal integration and respect, as well as mutual understanding and quest for holiness of life.

The Theology of the Body teaches that there is a proper language of the body which in a way is different from what we call “body language.” The language of the body is not an external reality that manifests the way we feel or the way we react to others, but it is actually a language that has been inscribed in our bodies by none other than the Creator Himself. This language of the body reminds us that marital love and sexual relations should always communicate a love that is total, faithful, fruitful, and free. These qualities reflect the love of God for us since they come directly from God Himself. Anything that contradicts any of these conditions that relate to true love would be seen as a betrayal of the language of the body. That is how the Church can use the Theology of the Body to support her main teachings related to sexual morality.

Natural family planning is to be chosen as opposed to artificial contraception because the contracepted sexual act introduces a language that opposes the true language of the body which is meant to be fruitful and of the generative kind. It is impossible to justify an act of contracepted intercourse for the simple reason that it is impossible to justify the goodness of an act that intentionally goes directly against one of the primary goods of marriage, namely procreation.

Homosexual relations as well fail the test of the language of the body and the integrity of the sexual act since sexual intimacy by same sex people is a contradiction to the will of the Creator who saw marriage as a way of promoting the growth of love in the first created couple, and the way of cooperating with Him in the creative work begun by Him by the gift of fertility bringing about human procreation.

Extramarital relations become also a betrayal of the language of the body since they convey a lie. Namely the lie is related to the fact that during sexual intercourse the couple that is married manifests a total commitment to the spouse, which is impossible when there is no marriage covenant to celebrate. The act itself manifests something that is not present because there is no true commitment for life when sexual intimacy is celebrated outside of marriage. The only thing that an unmarried person who is willing to have sexual relations with another can know with certainty is that the person he or she loves is willing to have sexual relations with someone who is really not committed to any kind of love. This does not uphold the very dignity of the sexual act as created by God.

The richness of the Theology of the Body of John Paul II is a testimony unto itself in just the many applications that it can have as we consider the great gift of our sexuality not from the standpoint of the commandments given by God, but from the standpoint of the virtues and values that uphold such commandments. There lies the power of the time bomb that we have talked about.

MARRIAGE PREPARATION AND CELEBRATION

PARTICULAR LAW OF THE (ARCH)DIOCESES IN THE PROVINCE OF NEW ORLEANS

I. PREPARATION

A. Responsibilities of the Couple

1. It is normative for all couples to begin the marriage preparation process by contacting their appropriate pastor at least six (6) months before the proposed date of the wedding. The pastor will confirm the date of the wedding only upon completion of the initial preparation. [Refer to Specified Norms.]
2. Participate in the entire marriage preparation process determined by the pastor that is appropriate for their unique needs (e.g., canonical requirements or special circumstances). The basic process includes:
 - a. taking an objective, dialogical instrument (e.g., Prepare/Enrich/Mate, FOCCUS/REFOCCUS, or PMI) and participating in discussions of the data generated.
 - b. participating in a marriage preparation program including presentations by married couples/individuals approved by the diocese.
 - c. attending and participating in a course of Natural Family Planning if required by either the diocese and/or parish (based on availability).
3. Fulfill all the requirements of ecclesiastical laws for marriage.
4. Fulfill all the civil law requirements to contract marriage validly in the State of Louisiana.

B. Responsibilities of the Pastor (*Priests and deacons, with the assistance of others, trained in marriage preparation, working with engaged couples*)

1. Observe the requirements of all ecclesiastical laws and civil law.
2. Complete the diocesan-approved prenuptial investigation form; verify the couple's freedom to marry and obtain all necessary prenuptial documentation (e.g., certificates of baptism, rescripts, decrees of nullity, etc.).
3. Complete all other diocesan required forms providing for dispensations (for validity) and permissions (for liceity) and submit them to the appropriate diocesan office, or grant according to diocesan faculties.

4. Determine when any canonical requirements or special circumstances that may have delayed the marriage are no longer a factor.
5. Confirm the date and time of the wedding upon the couple's completion of the initial preparation.
6. Grant permission and the faculty to witness marriage to another officiant as necessary.
7. Preserve the prenuptial file in the parish archives.
8. Record the marriage in the appropriate register with proper notations; issue a certificate of the marriage as recorded to the couple; and inform both parties' Catholic churches of baptism concerning the marriage.

C. Responsibilities of Officiant

1. Must be registered in the State of Louisiana to witness marriages. Furthermore, if he comes from outside of the diocese, he must obtain a nihil obstat for ministry in this diocese in accord with ecclesiastical laws and be granted faculties by the pastor. [See SPECIFIED NORMS: Contact for State Registration.]
2. Alone receives the vows of both parties.
[See SPECIFIED NORMS: Process for clergy coming into the diocese from another diocese to perform a sacramental ritual.]
3. Gives one copy of the official State of Louisiana license to the couple and files the others at the issuing office within the time prescribed.

II. CELEBRATION

- A. All ecclesiastical laws as well as diocesan and parochial policies or customs concerning the celebration of marriage are to be followed under the direction of the pastor.
- B. There is no required announcement of banns of marriage prior to the celebration.
- C. A marriage intended to have merely civil effects is not permitted.
- D. A minister from another church or ecclesial communion takes part in any Catholic liturgy in accord with the norm of law. Episcopalian ministers and Catholic clergy participate with each other only in accord with the joint agreement approved for use in the State of Louisiana. [See Appendix for Guidelines for Marriages of Roman Catholics and Episcopalians for the Dioceses in Louisiana.]
- E. Those fulfilling liturgical roles are to meet the requirements of all ecclesiastical laws.

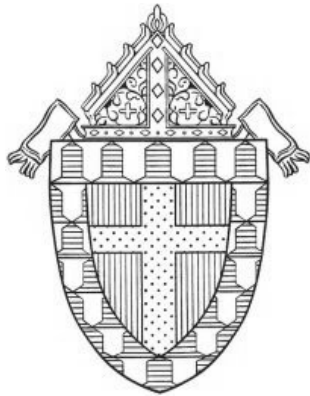
- F. Music meets the requirements of all ecclesiastical laws.
- G. Liturgical publications must not violate copyright laws and must be approved by the pastor.
- H. Marriage involving only one Catholic party should be celebrated outside of Mass in accord with the liturgical laws. [See SPECIFIED NORMS: Celebration outside Mass.]
- I. Holy Communion is to be distributed only during Mass (and only in accord with Canon 844).
- J. Marriage is only celebrated inside a Catholic church or oratory unless the proper dispensation from place has been obtained or unless one party is not baptized. (Canon 1118) For validity, the latter must take place inside a building habitually used for worship by the non-Catholic congregation since the rescript will require (dum modo) such a venue.
- K. The Rite of Matrimony can be celebrated at any time of the day and on any day of the week in accord with liturgical law. The Sacrament of Matrimony is allowed during Sunday liturgies but may not replace the Sunday Liturgy. [See particular diocese's SPECIFIED NORMS that govern ceremonies on Sundays, and the proper times for weddings.]

A pastor may establish a parochial policy concerning times and days when marriage cannot be celebrated, provided that it is equitably enforced (e.g., Most parishes do not allow weddings during Lent.).

Liturgical law states the Sacrament of Matrimony cannot occur on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, or Holy Saturday.

- L. There are no set fees for offerings on the occasion of marriage in the Province of New Orleans.
- M. The celebration of or the reception for an invalid marriage cannot take place on Church property.





SPECIFIED NORMS FOR THE DIOCESE OF LAFAYETTE

All questions regarding marriage preparation and premarital counseling should be directed to the Office of Family Life in the Diocese of Lafayette.

Petitions regarding waivers and/or exceptions are directed to the Regional Vicar. All petitions regarding ecclesiastical laws and exceptions, marriage validity, liturgical questions and canonical concerns should be directed to the Vicar for Judicial Affairs.

PROCESS FOR APPROVAL FOR OUT-OF-DIOCESE CLERGY

[SEE PAGE 43, NO. 22.]

No priest/deacon may officially witness a marriage outside his parish without the proper delegation from the resident pastor or the Bishop. It is the responsibility of the priest/deacon, who is witnessing the marriage, to obtain this delegation.

CLERGY FROM OUTSIDE THE STATE OF LOUISIANA

[SEE PAGE 43, NO. 22.]

The priest/deacon must contact the Clerk of Court's office of the civil parish where the wedding will take place to register for the marriage in this state.

MINISTER FROM ANOTHER CHURCH OR ECCLESIAL COMMUNION

[SEE PAGE 28, D.]

Couples seeking the Sacrament of Matrimony when one party is non-Catholic or unbaptized and requesting a non-Catholic clergy to witness their vows must request for dispensation from Canonical Form from the Office of the Judicial Vicar. [SEE ALSO PAGE 29, D]

PROPER PLACE FOR MARRIAGE CEREMONY

[SEE PAGE 8, J.]

Canon 1118

- §1. A marriage between Catholics or between a Catholic party and a non-Catholic baptized party is to be celebrated in a parish church. It can be celebrated in another church or oratory with the permission of the local ordinary or pastor.
- §2. The local ordinary can permit a marriage to be celebrated in another suitable place.
- §3. A marriage between a Catholic party and an unbaptized party can be celebrated in a church or in another suitable place.

Canon 1127

- §2. If grave difficulties hinder the observance of canonical form, the local ordinary of the Catholic party has the right of dispensing from the form in individual cases. Applications for dispensations are made through the office of the Judicial Vicar.

RITE OF MARRIAGE

[SEE PAGE 29, G.]

The priest/deacon is responsible for the liturgical rites of marriage. General procedures for the celebration of weddings should be developed by the pastor of the parish with careful reflection on the *Order for Celebrating Marriage*, and due regard for the specific preparation in each case. [SEE ALSO: PAGE 27, CELEBRATION]

**APPROVED FORMAL MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMS
FOR THE DIOCESE OF LAFAYETTE**

Approved Formal Marriage Preparation Programs for the Diocese of Lafayette include:

1. Engaged Couples' Conference
2. Remarried in Christ
3. Engaged Encounter
4. REFOCCUS through the Diocesan Office of Family Life

STEPS OF PREPARATION PROCESS

[SEE PAGES 13-18]

Participate in four-phase process of marriage preparation:

1. Meet with priest/deacon six months prior to marriage.
2. Participate in marriage preparation program. Pastors are urged to encourage couples to participate in a Natural Family Planning Program.
3. Fulfill all requirements of ecclesiastical law.
4. Fulfill all requirements of civil law.

MASS AT WEDDINGS BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND NON-CATHOLICS

[SEE PAGE 29]

Weddings between a Catholic and an unbaptized person may not be celebrated within the context of Mass, nor may the Eucharist be distributed to those present.

Weddings between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic normally are to be celebrated outside of Mass. The Eucharist is not distributed to those present at such weddings. If suitable, and at the request of both the officiant of the wedding and the pastor of the place of the wedding, permission from the Judicial Vicar may be granted for the wedding to be celebrated within the context of Mass.

TIME OF WEDDINGS IN THE DIOCESE OF LAFAYETTE

[SEE PAGE 8, K.]

Weddings may not be celebrated on Sundays or during the Easter Triduum.

The policy regarding weddings on Saturday evenings after 4:00 p.m. is determined by the pastor of each parish.

PASTORAL GUIDELINES

I. FORMATION: EDUCATION AND DISCERNMENT

Marriage formation and preparation occur in three substantive stages: remote, proximate and immediate. To further clarify the terms of remote, proximate and immediate, the terms education, discernment and preparation will be used. These terms will more clearly define the roles of each stage.

The first stage is called remote and involves education and development. It begins at birth and includes all family and environmental factors that influence and prepare the person in positive and negative ways for marriage. Regarding preparation for marriage, this will primarily occur through lived example as well as enlisting the resources within Church and community.

Preparing children for the Sacrament of Matrimony must be different in content and technique than preparation for merely civil marriage. Within the parameters of the sacrament, there are major tenets, responsibilities and privileges that must be conveyed to all children.

The second stage is the proximate preparation period. This stage flows out of and is a deepening of the remote stage. This stage usually begins at a suitable age, young adulthood, and with “adequate catechesis, as in a catechumenal process—involves a more specific preparation for the sacraments, as it were, a rediscovery of them.” (FC, # 66) It is expected that during this period there is an integration of the religious formation of the young with the preparation for life as a couple. Marriage should be presented as an interpersonal relationship that is in need of continual development.

This proximate stage will, for benefit of clarification, be called “period of discernment.” As the term implies, this period is intended to allow individuals, already equipped with strong religious values, to further discern whether or not the vocation of marriage is suitable for them. It is also that period when individuals enter the final selection process regarding the right individual as a mate. In full intensity, the proximate stage comes to fruition in the last year before marriage. At this stage, the couple is moving beyond “should I be married vs. single, religious or priest?” to “should I be married to this particular person?”

When a couple comes to the decision that they should deepen their discernment, the Church and community must be prepared with resources of people, materials and time to assist them through this process. This proximate period, which began in young adulthood, ends six months prior to the date of the wedding. Engagement takes place during the proximate stage and clearly includes a discernment process. The Church though involved in all stages--remote, proximate, and immediate--intensifies its relationship with the couple during the proximate and immediate stages. Waiting until the immediate stage to enter into such a relationship with the couple is not sufficient.

A. Individual Responsibility

It is the individual's responsibility within the discernment process to seek a particularly well disposed person with whom to share the vocation of a chaste marriage.

1. Individual and Communal Prayer
2. Forming the mind, heart, and soul through education and formation of one's conscience
3. Attending the Sacraments
4. The goals are to:
 - a. Build awareness of dating and interpersonal relationships.
 - b. Increase knowledge about love and marriage.
 - c. Learn and practice communication skills.
 - d. Develop relationship skills.
 - e. Explore family of origin influences and issues.
 - f. Learn to manage money effectively thus avoiding credit problems.
 - g. Create realistic expectations of marriage and family life.
 - h. Learn important aspects of healthy and happy relationships.

As part of the catechetical education, it is necessary to emphasize that our faith and social sciences inform us that there are certain basic values—learned from earliest years—which are needed for a covenant marriage. These are:

1. Trust that we can entrust ourselves to another and expect to be cared for and loved.
2. Intimacy—with another—spiritually, emotionally, physically.
3. Love—the ability to make a loving self gift and to receive the long sought self gift of a spouse.
4. Commitment—the ability to keep a sacred promise with the expectation that such a promise will be kept by others.
5. Communication—the openness and honesty of communication patterns.
6. Sexuality/chastity—A genuine commitment to appreciating and living chaste love.
7. Respect for other's ability to relate—a commitment to a profound unity which transcends and respects rightful diversity.

B. Pastor Responsibility: Environment for Education

1. The pastor should establish ways and means for marital formation within the community entrusted to him, including catechists, prenuptial preparation, liturgical celebration of marriage and continuing formation for married couples and families.
2. A pastor should create a hospitable atmosphere for all couples approaching the parish community and its staff, making certain that the right to marriage is not denied a couple accidentally or arbitrarily. A pastor may wish to create a community of competent pastoral ministers composed of lay couples or singles, religious, official lay witnesses for marriage and clergy formed in marriage preparation and outreach ministry at the diocesan, vicariate, deanery, cluster, or parish levels. They may be members of the parish staff or parish volunteers. Some may be professionals in allied fields.

3. In these matters, a parochial vicar/ deacon acts in the name of his proper pastor and according to his mandate unless special provisions are made in the parochial vicar's letter of appointment.
4. Parishes provide catechesis on the Sacrament of Matrimony and natural (non-sacramental) marriage at all levels according to their resources.
5. Religious education in Catholic schools and educational programs provide grade and age-appropriate instruction on morality and marriage from books and materials as approved by the diocesan office of religious education.
6. Youth, college and singles groups, programs and educational settings provide formation in accord with Catholic teaching that is age-appropriate.
7. Methods used by and taught to clergy and pastoral ministers should not violate diocesan child protection norms or standard educational praxis.
8. The vocation to chaste marriage should be presented in the context of the other vocations to the chaste single and celibate life styles.
9. Each parish should institute formation, preparation and outreach programs as its resources permit. Pastoral ministers also should support and encourage participation in those offered at the diocesan, vicariate, deanery or cluster levels.

C. Pastor Responsibility: Parish Formation

1. The Church bears a responsibility to the domestic Church (the family) to support it in its task of rearing children as healthy human beings.
2. Through the passing on of the faith, the Church must take a leading role in communicating to the family the basic values needed for a sacramental marriage.
3. During adolescence, the Church is to give even more support to parents and youth ministers, helping them learn how to strengthen the values of young people in regards to sexuality, chastity and proper attitudes toward marriage.
4. It is the responsibility of the Church to enable its educators and ministers to help young people mature and prepare for sacramental marriage.
5. The diocese, vicariate, deanery or cluster provides formation programs for clergy and pastoral ministers.
6. The Church's dioceses and parishes are to take active roles in helping young adults discern their vocation. Included in these are both a discernment to marriage as a vocation in general and, eventually, a discernment of marriage to a particular person.

7. It is the responsibility of the local Church to strive to elevate the faith of the couple. The Church is to present resources such as workshops, retreats, or other means of discernment so that at least a year before marriage a couple's relationship with the Church may intensify.
8. Throughout the last part of the proximate stage (beginning one year prior to the marriage through six months prior to the marriage), the couple is encouraged to begin to attend Mass and other Church functions together. (This practice should continue through the immediate stage.)
9. The parish community becomes the focus of the relationship between couple and community. This relationship includes both support and challenges to the couple to grow.
10. Married couples may be assigned or may volunteer to mentor the engaged or dating couple at this time.
11. At the end of this proximate stage, the couple is ready to approach the priest for entrance into the immediate stage.

II. STAGES OF PREPARATION

Attitudes, values and a person's basic stance toward both life and relationships are formed in the earliest years of life. Although we can change at any period of life, the early years are the most foundational and permanent in the formation of character and personality.

A. Remote Stage

1. The Early Years of Remote Preparation

Primary care givers, who normally are family members, are the ones from whom children learn about life, self, and God. Much marriage preparation is still done for one generation by the next older generation. However, today even among happily married couples there are more questions about the permanence of marriage, the respective roles of a couple in a marital relationship, etc. Therefore, the church focuses on and supports the domestic church in its task of rearing children as healthy human beings.

2. Adolescent Years of Remote Preparation

Adolescence is a second equally formative period for a person's orientation toward life, self, others and God. Because of the multiple changes occurring in the prepubescence and adolescent person, a critical opportunity to influence the young person in values and faith occurs. During this time of sexual awakening and new self-awareness, young people can be taught that sexual activity is not a form of recreation, but an important part of commitment and fidelity. On the verge of young adulthood, these young people can be influenced more by peers and media than by family relationships. Therefore, this is

a time of trying out ideas, styles, dreams, and values. It is a most important time for the Church to support parents and youth ministers in an attitude of presence, of “being there for” the young person.

Human virtues necessary for sacramental marriage which are learned as one begins to mature and broaden one’s world are:

- a. Ability to make decisions and to live with the consequences of these decisions;
- b. Communication style which respects self, others, and relationships;
- c. Ability to compromise, adjust, be flexible and deal with change as long as moral truth is not at stake.

These are qualities that educators and ministers of the church would do well to observe in couples.

B. Proximate Stage

1. The second stage is the proximate preparation period. This stage flows out of and is a deepening of the remote stage. This stage usually begins at a suitable age, young adulthood and with “adequate catechesis, as in a catechumenal process—involves a more specific preparation for the sacraments, as it were, a rediscovery of them.” (FC, #66) It is expected that during this period there is an integration of the religious formation of the young with the preparation for life as a couple. Marriage should be presented as an interpersonal relationship that is in need of continual development.
2. The proximate stage begins with young adulthood, usually around age 18, as people struggle more consistently with the questions of vocation, career choice, and other life decisions. For some people, the proximate stage is very short, as they move into marriage at a relatively early age. For other people, the stage continues for some time, as they remain single, yet still open to the possibility of marriage into their 30’s, 40’s or even beyond.

Regardless of the age of the individuals, the Church needs to involve itself in ministry to these people who are continuing to discern throughout this period.

Certainly the message of the Gospel serves a critical role in helping any person address the following questions. We do not present them as if all responses are equal. Rather, we present these questions because the decision to live as a disciple of Christ implies that we have seriously considered its implications.

At the same time, we also ask our parishes and dioceses to offer whatever assistance they can in assisting young adults with this reflection.

- a. Do I experience God in loving self-gift as close to me; accessible; the Lord of my life? How important are faith, prayer, church involvement and service to others?
- b. To what life vocation do I sense that God is calling me? Do I experience myself as called to married life, single life, religious life or ordained?

- c. If I were to marry, how important would it be that my future spouse and I would agree on these issues?
- d. What impact would agreement or disagreement make for a decision to marry and have children?
- e. How important are success and material possessions to me? Am I willing to HAVE less in order to proclaim other values? What will come first, career or family?
- f. How committed am I to raising a family? Do I envision myself as a parent? What kind of parent do I expect my spouse to be? What kinds of personal sacrifices do I anticipate?

The young person who clearly knows what his or her commitments are is better prepared to determine whether or not a particular relationship with someone is headed in the right direction. The danger is that someone who has not reflected seriously on these issues will “fall in love” and decide to marry that person without thinking through all the ramifications of that decision. Sadly, we must report that we have met too many couples who have struggled in their marriages because they acted too quickly or too impulsively and only much later did they come to realize they should have acted more deliberately.

At some point, the discernment moves from “Should I be married or be a part of some other vocation such as the single life, priesthood, or religious life?” to “Should I be married to this particular person?” This time, which begins even before engagement, as members of the opposite sex, becomes an opportunity for the Church to present resources, offer workshops or retreats, and make other means of discernment available for its members. At least a year before the marriage, a couple’s relationship with the Church as a couple, not simply as individuals, should intensify. During this period, couples can use this opportunity to attend Mass and other religious functions together. This identifies their relationship to the Christian community, which can then affirm them or challenge them in areas in which they need to grow as a couple.

Married couples can become mentors to the engaged couples (or couples considering engagement). The couple begins to experience how the Christian community reacts to them as a couple and can learn from the internal feelings they experience as this occurs.

The Church has a rich treasury of tools for discernment, such as those in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola or Franciscan spirituality that can be utilized to help the individuals continue their discernment process.

Each of the stages of marriage preparation is meant to add to the overall development of the baptized Catholic individual. As each person progresses through each stage, they will find themselves better prepared to embrace, not just marriage as a societal phenomenon, but marriage in the Lord. They will have the opportunity to discover more about themselves in order to be better disposed to give themselves to each other in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

After the couple has sufficiently discerned, and has formalized their relationship in terms of an official engagement, then they are prepared to approach the Church with a request to enter into the immediate stage of preparation for the Sacrament of Matrimony.

C. Immediate Stage

The final stage is the immediate stage of preparation. It is within this time that elements of married skills and techniques and Catholic religious values are summarized. This stage will put the practical aspects of married life together with the theology and spirituality of marriage. It will also be the time-frame of connecting the couple closer to the Church community. It begins at least six months prior to the marriage when the couple begins making formal contact with the Church to prepare actively for their marriage.

This preparation stage will also include the collaboration on the nuptial liturgy with the officiant of the marriage. Music, cultural traditions, and detailed insight of the Rite of Matrimony will be covered during this time so that deeper appreciation for the wedding liturgy will be developed within the couple.

1. Process and Steps

During the immediate preparation for the Sacrament of Matrimony the following steps should be met, beginning with at least six months and ending no later than at least two months prior to the celebration of the marriage. [Refer to SPECIFIED NORMS for regulations in a particular diocese.]

Step 1 An initial meeting with priest, deacon or designated person.

Step 2 Prenuptial Inquiry is begun.

Step 3 The couple completes a premarital inventory (Prepare/Enrich/Mate, FOCCUS/REFOCCUS, or PMI) as soon as possible after meeting with clergy, no later than one month after the initial meeting.

Step 4 The formal educational process is completed by participating in approved parish or diocesan marriage preparation programs. [See SPECIFIED NORMS: Process for Clergy.] Reservations for these programs should be made within one month of the couple's first interview with the priest. Formal marriage preparation programs must be completed two months before the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony if at all possible to give the couple time to integrate the teachings into their marriage preparation. Less than two months prior to the wedding, the couple often finds it hard to concentrate on anything other than the details of the ceremony. It is important to keep the long term perspective on the sacramental nature of marriage, not the ceremony.

Step 5 Completion of all documents required by the diocese including prenuptial inquiry if not already completed. (Couples should be reminded that the civil license is governed by laws that impose time limits and they should check with the appropriate office in the city or civil parish.)

2. Couple Responsibility

- a. The couple is required to meet with the priest or deacon (or designated person charged with responsibility for marriage preparation in the diocese) a minimum of six months prior to marriage. Pastoral discretion in reducing this amount of time should lean heavily toward giving the couple ample time and opportunity to prepare themselves adequately for the proper reception of the sacrament. [Refer to SPECIFIED NORMS.]
- b. The couple has responsibility to actively participate in the Sacramental life of the Church. Frequent celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Penance and of the Sacrament of Eucharist during the marriage preparation process is to be encouraged for Catholic individuals and couples preparing for the Sacrament of Matrimony.
- c. The following items need to be completed at least two months prior to the wedding:
 - (1) Prenuptial inquiry.
 - (2) Premarital inventory (e.g., Prepare/Enrich/Mate, FOCCUS/REFOCCUS, or PMI).
 - (3) Formal education process (e.g., Pre-Cana, Engaged Encounter).
 - (4) Completion of all documents required by the diocese.
- d. The civil license needs to be obtained in the time frame governed by the appropriate city or civil parish.
- e. The couple themselves should participate actively in the processes not merely for the wedding day and celebration, but for the ability to live out the Sacrament.
- f. The couple should begin preparation by reflecting on their present and future relationship with the Church as well as their union reflecting the union of Christ and His Church and His universal love for the unbaptized or nonbeliever.

3. Pastor/Parish Responsibility

- a. The pastor is responsible for all marriages for individuals within his parish, whether or not he personally prepares the couples or witnesses their vows.
- b. The pastor must see that the marriage directives of the diocese are carried out for the individuals in his parish. [See Canonical Requirements.]
- c. Pastors cannot create impediments to marriages of their own initiative, although they may delay a marriage.
- d. Parish policies for marriage preparation should be in accord with all ecclesiastical laws.
- e. Any couple, even if a party has only one (1) month's residence, has a right to be married in their territorial parish.
- f. No marriage should be delayed over the phone; personal contact is vital to pastoral care.
- g. Children who grew up in the parish should also be welcomed to celebrate their weddings in the parish church.
- h. A cordial response to any young adult who has had no parish affiliation can significantly determine future association with the Church.

4. Pastor Responsibility: Parish Outreach

- a. All staff warmly welcomes any couple, recognizing that this first contact is an opportunity to have the couple develop a closer relationship with the parish and bring about a richer understanding of sacramental marriage.
- b. Preparation can be provided to each couple separately and in group settings by a pastoral minister according to the couple's particular circumstances and cultural heritage.
- c. Marriage preparation rightly enlists the effective Christian witness of married couples who speak from the heart with those preparing for sacramental and natural marriage.
- e. Careful preparation is essential to the well-being of the couple, especially in the first five (5) to ten (10) years of marriage. Relationships established during preparation may be the lifeline to assistance if marital problems develop in this critical time period.
- e. A pastoral minister who is the couple's primary contact conducts the first meeting and oversees the entire process with the couple.
- f. Establishes a rapport and relationship with the engaged couple and shows concern for them.
- g. Creates an atmosphere in which the couple can be motivated to sense the value of preparation and thus can commit themselves to it.
- h. Assists the couple in beginning to assess their strengths and weaknesses.
- i. Helps the couple examine their views and attitudes toward the Catholic Church.
- j. Gives an overview of what the entire marriage preparation process will involve.
- k. Explains to the engaged couple the canonical requirements to celebrate a marriage. [See Canonical Requirements.]
- l. Completes all forms for the necessary dispensations (for validity) and permission (for liceity) and submits or grants them as provided in the diocesan faculties and required in the directions for the various forms.
- m. Conducts the prenuptial investigation of each party individually in accord with the directions given in the diocesan approved form.
- n. Having informally assessed the needs of a couple, explains the options available for marriage preparation and comes to an agreement with them as to what they will do.
- o. If there are no canonical impediments to marrying in the Church, arranges a date for the wedding and places it on the parish calendar, bulletin calendar and all personal calendars.
- p. Determines the frequency and schedule of subsequent meetings, with whom the couple will meet, and the programs the couple is expected to attend in accord with their situation.
- q. The pastoral minister administers to the couple an objective, dialogical instrument (e.g., Prepare/Enrich/Mate, FOCCUS/REFOCCUS, or PMI).
- r. The pastoral minister conducts the follow-up sessions for the premarital inventory in accord with the appropriate Leader's Feedback Guide.
- s. If the officiant is not the primary contact, time is also scheduled for the couple to begin to establish a relationship with the person who will officiate.

5. Officiant/Pastoral Minister

- a. The priest or deacon who will witness the marriage is responsible for determining the readiness of the couple to marry.
- b. The priest or deacon who will witness the marriage normally oversees the preparation.
- c. Marriage preparation is conducted in accord with Canons 1063–1072 and the following norms for marriage preparation in the USA that were effective December 1, 2000.
- d. The couple should receive appropriate education and pastoral preparation through participation in a marriage preparation program approved by the diocesan bishop.
 - (1) Parties should be questioned as to their freedom to marry.
 - (2) Baptized Catholics should present a recently issued, annotated baptismal certificate.
 - (3) Where necessary, additional documentation (such as affidavits of parents) attesting to a Catholic party's freedom to marry should be presented.
 - (4) Baptized non-Catholics should present satisfactory proof of baptism and freedom to marry.
 - (5) Unbaptized persons should present satisfactory proof of freedom to marry;
 - (6) Preparation for marriage should be in conformity with the prescriptions of Canon 1063 (regarding what must precede marriage) and Canons 1064, 1071, 1072, 1086, §2 and 1125, which entrust certain situations to the special care of local ordinaries.
 - (7) Preparation for marriage should be in compliance with appropriate civil laws.
 - (8) The announcement of the banns of marriage is not required in the USA.
 - (9) A pastoral minister conducts a final meeting with the couple.
 - (10) If possible, the actual officiant should participate in this meeting.
 - (11) The couple reviews their strengths and growth areas noting the progress made and making concrete plans for post-wedding follow-up with the pastoral minister.
 - (12) The wedding details, liturgy-planning sheet, and all other matters related to the actual ceremony are reviewed and determined in final form.
 - (13) The times of the rehearsal and of the wedding are reviewed on the appropriate calendars.

III. PASTORAL CONNECTIONS

Couples coming to the Church requesting the Sacrament of Matrimony originate from a diversity of backgrounds and experience. Parish ministers and personnel, as a result of diversity, may be called upon to give special attention to the particular situations of the couples. It is within this section that policies will be discussed. Particular concerns may be addressed directly to the appropriate diocesan office.

The pastor is responsible for all marriage for individuals within his parish, whether or not he personally prepares the couple or witnesses their vows. The pastor must see that the marriage

directives of the diocese are carried out for the individual in his parish. Normally, the priest or deacon who will witness the marriage will do the preparation. It is his responsibility to determine the couple's readiness for the Sacrament. The priest doing the marriage preparation does well to make use of the liturgical preparation and celebration as teachable and experiential moments, a part of the evangelizing ministry of the Church. Couples have a right to marry when rightly prepared and properly disposed. Pastors cannot create impediments to marriage of their own initiative, although they may delay a marriage. The delay cannot be a refusal unless the marriage is impeded for canonical reasons in the universal law of the Church. (If there is a concern, review the "Canonical Requirements" beg. page 32 and consult a canonist.)

IV. THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE OF THE COUPLE

This section covers elements affecting the couple's predisposition to entering the Sacrament of Matrimony.

The Sacrament of Matrimony is part of the sacramental life of Catholic individuals. There is a deep connection between the Sacrament of Matrimony and other sacraments, including Eucharist. In addition to the Sacrament of Eucharist, celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Penance during the marriage preparation process is to be encouraged, as well as throughout the married life of the couple.

A. Cohabitation

Definition: Cohabitation, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, is the status of unmarried couples living together as sexual partners and sharing a household. The Church states this is gravely contrary to the dignity of the persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of the spouses and the generation and education of the children.

It is important to address the issue of cohabitation early in the marriage preparation process. The educational (remote stage) period should instill within each Catholic individual the directives of Church teaching regarding abstinence from premarital sex and/or cohabitation and help internalize the virtue of chastity.

This emphasis on Church teaching continues throughout both the proximate and immediate stages of marriage preparation. In particular, the Church offers its teachings on the meaning of marriage as Sacrament and the Theology of the Body as part of the wealth of information shared in these stages. To reiterate what the Church teaches, the preparing minister is to:

1. Challenge the couple to separate or, at least, to stay chaste until their marriage. (When children are involved the latter is preferable.)
2. Encourage the couple to reflect on this challenge over the months of immediate marriage preparation and to discuss with one another their feelings and thoughts.

3. Ask the couple to make a prayerful discernment regarding what is best for their relationship in terms of a sacramental marriage within the Catholic Church.
4. Reassure the couple that advice is given lovingly to strengthen their relationship and to help them achieve the best possible marriage.
5. Provide the couple with the resources* to avoid becoming one of the statistics that can be borne through cohabitation, which itself creates bad habits and certain risk factors that can be detrimental to the future marriage.
6. Help the couple to identify areas of bad habits and begin working through them long before they take on the total commitment required of each other in marriage.

In addition, the Church has a responsibility to provide the latest research studies concerning cohabitation and to consistently emphasize that premarital sex/cohabitation in any form is detrimental to subsequent marriages in the majority of cases. Despite the message of the media and other cultural pressures, neither premarital sex nor cohabitation is helpful to the involved individuals as a type of marriage preparation. Various sociological studies* support the Church teaching that cohabitation is not a training ground for marriage. Marriage must be permanent.

During the proximate and immediate stages, the teachings of the Church are to be reinforced. It is recommended by the Holy Father that each situation be examined on a case by case basis. Each couple is to be “tactfully and respectfully contacted” in order to “enlighten them patiently, correct them charitably, and show them the witness of Christian family life in such a way as to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation.” (*Faithful to Each Other*, p. 77)

Although cohabitation or premarital sex are not in themselves canonical impediments to matrimony, there is a need on the part of sexually active couples to be challenged to grow and a serious obligation on the part of the minister preparing them for matrimony to challenge them out of love for all concerned. Downplaying the damaging effects of premarital sex does a service to no one. What is needed is full appreciation for the merciful, healing love of Christ.

Preparation for couples cohabiting more than two years must take a different form than for couples not living together. It is important to recognize the different dynamics within the cohabiting relationship. It is recommended the REFOCCUS, Prepare for Cohabiting Couples, or an equivalent inventory be utilized to determine the quality of the relationship.

**The video study guide for Preparing Cohabiting Couples for Marriage by Sr. Barbara Markey quotes the following statistics: 1. About 50% higher risk of divorce for cohabiting couples—reference: a. Larry Bumpass and James Sweet, “Cohabitation, Marriage and Union Stability: Preliminary Findings,” Center for Demography and Ecology: University of Wisconsin, 1995; and b. David Hall and John Z. Zhao, “Cohabitation and Divorce in Canada: Testing the Selectivity Hypothesis,” Journal of Marriage and Family 57 (1995), pp421-427.*

B. Convalidation

If a couple has not been married according to the laws of the Church (e.g., lack of canonical form), a validation (i.e., marriage in the Church) is permitted only after the couple has satisfactorily completed the marriage preparation process appropriately modified to their condition and the expiration of one year. This preparation process may utilize Prepare/Enrich/Mate, FOCCUS/REFOCCUS, or PMI.

Couples, who have been civilly married, are required to complete the marriage preparation process according to the diocese. The years together should give an indication of stability, commitment and fidelity characteristic of a matrimonial covenant in which case the pastor may adjust the duration of the preparation period accordingly.

C. Marriage of Non-Practicing Catholics

In the case of non-practicing Catholics presenting themselves for the Sacrament of Matrimony, ministers should ask the couples to articulate their reasons for marrying in the Church. Should the expressed reasons include social convention, parental pressure or preference for setting, the minister should explain to couples that these alone are not adequate justifications for marrying in the Church. This opportunity should be taken as a “teachable moment” following the words of Pope John Paul II.

The faith of the person asking the Church for marriage can exist in different degrees, and it is the primary duty of the pastors to bring about a rediscovery of this faith and to nourish it and bring it to maturity. But pastors must also understand the reasons that lead the Church also to admit to the celebration of marriage those who are imperfectly disposed.

The Sacrament of Matrimony has this specific element that distinguishes it from all the other sacraments: It is the sacrament of something that was part of the very economy of creation; it is the very conjugal covenant instituted by the Creator “in the beginning.” Therefore, the decision of a man and woman to marry in accordance with this divine plan, that is to say, the decision to commit by their irrevocable conjugal consent their whole lives in indissoluble love and unconditional fidelity, really involves, even if not in a fully conscious way, an attitude which cannot exist without God’s grace. They have thus already begun what is in a true and proper sense a journey toward salvation, a journey which the celebration of the sacrament and the immediate preparation for it can complement and bring to completion, given the uprightness of their intentions.

It must not be forgotten that those engaged couples, by virtue of their Baptism, are already sharers in Christ’s marriage Covenant with the Church, and that, by their right intention, they have accepted God’s plan regarding marriage and therefore at least implicitly consent to what the Church intends to do when she celebrates marriage. Thus, the fact that motives of a social nature also enter into the request, it is not enough to justify the refusal on the part of pastors.

Despite the level of the imperfect faith exhibited, it is good to encourage and proper to expect that Catholic parties attend Mass regularly and strive to remain in the state of grace, particularly at the time of the celebration of the Sacrament. Instruction in the life of faith beyond what is required by the policies should also be made available and offered them. Whether and how couples are approached in this regard can mean the difference between continued alienation from the Church or renewed involvement. As Pope John Paul II stated above, pastors must understand the reasons that lead the Church to admit to the celebration of marriage those who are imperfectly disposed. The role of the ministers is to advance a spirit of love and understanding which will foster a renewed interest in the faith and sacraments.

However, when in spite of all efforts, engaged couples show that they reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls cannot admit them to the Sacrament of Matrimony (FC, # 68).

In all cases, a delay, but not a refusal to marry them, is within the right of the pastor. More catechetical work is required and it is highly recommended that a canonist is consulted to insure that the rights of the couple to marry are protected.

D. Marriage of Minors

The Code of Canon Law states that without special permission of the local ordinary, no one is to assist at a marriage of a minor (a person under the age of 18) when the parents are unaware of the marriage or are opposed to it for reasonable cause without permission of the local ordinary. Parents of minors must always be notified prior to the celebration of marriage. The Canons state that “A man before he has completed his sixteenth year of age and a woman before she has completed her fourteenth year of age cannot enter into a valid marriage.” Delay of marriage and not refusal is within the right of the pastor unless they cannot marry in accord with universal Church law.

When discussing this situation with the “minor(s),” great care should be taken to demonstrate utmost respect and sensitivity. Once a decision has been made by the pastor to proceed with the marriage preparation, the process should take place as usual.

E. Pregnancy

Although it understandably creates a sense of urgency in the minds of the couple or someone else, premarital pregnancy of itself does not constitute adequate justification for marriage or for abbreviation of the marriage preparation process. Factors that must be considered include the couple’s readiness for marriage, their freedom from parental and social pressure, capacity to manage the financial responsibilities of a family, and the possibility of adoption. Regardless of the age of the couple, marriage is never an acceptable option for a couple without the degree of personal readiness to accept freely and live the responsibilities of marriage. Experience teaches that many marriages entered after premarital pregnancy when there has not been an engagement prior to pregnancy fail. No clergyman is permitted to suggest a couple attempt a merely civil marriage as a “solution.”

Pregnancy must be considered equally as grave a reason for not contracting marriage as for contracting marriage. A couple needs the time and opportunity to assess their reasons and readiness for marriage exclusive of the pregnancy. Therefore, pregnancy of itself shall constitute no exception to these diocesan regulations concerning the setting of the date of the wedding. The following norms are to be followed:

1. Eighteen Years of Age and Older

If the couple made the decision to marry and were engaged prior to the pregnancy, the decision to proceed with the marriage preparation process may be given by the priest/deacon if he assesses the couple to be sufficiently prepared for marriage.

If the couple had not made the decision to marry before the pregnancy, they must enter into a diocesan approved evaluation process before they proceed deeper into the marriage preparation process. Consult your local diocesan office for the correct process to follow.

2. Either Party if Under 18 Years of Age

If the couple made the decision to marry and were engaged prior to the pregnancy, they must enter into a diocesan approved evaluation process. The priest/deacon, in consultation with the parents of both parties, will assess the couples' readiness for marriage before they proceed further in the marriage preparation process. If the couple did not make the decision to marry prior to the pregnancy, the priest/deacon, besides adhering to the above, must seek additional input from an approved diocesan consultant. In this case, the priest/deacon should strongly encourage the consideration of delaying the wedding until after the birth of the child. This is in order to help the couple build a proper foundation for their marriage.

After the birth of the child, the parents should be supported in all their duties for childcare, especially those assumed at the baptism of the child. Even if they have attempted a merely civil marriage, they should be encouraged to participate in the life of the parish insofar as they are able. [See section on Convalidation.]

F. Marriages (Mixed)

1. Catholic and Validly Baptized Christian

The difficulties of living in a mixed faith marriage should not be underestimated. For this reason, Catholics should strongly be encouraged to marry other Catholics. Despite the fact that some tensions may exist between the parties, there is also the hope that "all may be one" as Christ himself prayed (Jn 17:21). Pope John Paul II has noted, when both parties are faithful in their religious duties, "their common baptism and the dynamism of grace provide the spouses in their marriages with the basis and motivation for expressing their unity in the sphere of moral and spiritual values" (FC, #78).

Both parties should become acquainted with the religious traditions of the future spouse. The Catholic party has the duty of preserving his or her faith. It is never permitted to expose oneself to a proximate danger of losing it. Furthermore, the Catholic party in a mixed marriage is obliged—as far as possible—to see that the children are baptized and brought up in the faith. The other party is to be aware of the promises the Catholic party is to make.

When Catholics marry other validly baptized Christians not of the Roman Catholic faith, the aim for both parties is to:

- a. Continue to live devoutly within the tradition and discipline of their respective churches.
- b. Live and teach the apostolic faith with their marriage and their family.
- c. Work for closer relations between their churches.
- d. Be living witnesses to a sinful and broken world, and active instruments in that world, of Christ's redemptive power.

Premarital conferences should be arranged in both Churches, if the other Church has premarital conferences. All instructions required by the Catholic Church are to be fulfilled for the marriage to be recognized by the Catholic Church.

The relevant sections of the Code of Canon Law regarding mixed marriages should be carefully followed during marriage preparation.

Eucharist is not to be celebrated in cases where the Churches of the parties involved do not yet reach the point of full sacramental sharing, without the permission of the ordinary. The preparing pastor or deacon must seek this permission of the local ordinary if Eucharist is being considered.

2. Marriages Between Catholics and Unbaptized Persons

The number of marriages between Catholics and unbaptized persons continues to grow. They are not sacramental unions, even though they are to be respected as good and natural marriages.

“Unbaptized” refers to persons never baptized in any Christian faith tradition as well as persons affiliated with communities whereby “baptism” lacks the matter (water), the verbal formula (Trinitarian form), the intention of the one baptized and/or the intention of the minister of baptism. Sufficient investigation should take place if doubt exists concerning the validity of a person's baptism.

In some cases the unbaptized person professes another religion and in other cases, no religion is professed. In both situations, particular pastoral safeguards must be in place to ensure the Catholic spouse's free and uninhibited practice of the faith, including the raising of children in the faith. The non-Catholic party assents to understanding the promise that the Catholic party has made to baptize and rear the children Catholic.

The preparing pastor or deacon must contact the local ordinary or delegated office pertaining to the particular dispensations or permissions necessary to marry someone who is not baptized.

G. Marriages (Remarriage)

A thorough preparation is even more important in subsequent marriages since research concludes that marriages after previous unions fail at a higher rate than first marriages.

Particular pastoral concern is required to meet the special needs of couples requesting sacramental marriage in the Church following a previous union. It must be the responsibility of the priest/deacon/minister to ascertain carefully that both parties are canonically free to marry before proceeding with the marriage preparation, and that all responsibilities toward children of the previous union have been addressed. Immediate marriage preparation may not begin, nor may a date be set for a future marriage, until after these obligations have been satisfactorily discharged. In the case of a proposed marriage following the death of a spouse, care should be taken that the widowed person has recovered from the grief of separation. (It would be prudent to refer the couple to professional counseling for assistance in handling grief. Such counseling cannot be required.)

It is the desire of the Church to strengthen the faith and devotion of divorced and remarried Catholics, particularly when they have endured painful personal experiences that increase their desire for unity with the Church community. On the parochial level, pastors should welcome the opportunity to assist their brothers and sisters in the preparation of the documentation necessary for canonical review of a previous bond by the diocesan tribunal. On the diocesan level, a program should be developed to give special attention to couples in a remarriage situation.

H. Marriage of Persons with Disabilities

The local ordinary should make the necessary provisions to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in marriage preparation programs. Through this preparation, all couples may become predisposed toward holiness and to the duties of their new state. In developing diocesan policies, the local ordinary should consult with men and women of proven experience and skill in understanding the emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological needs of persons with disabilities. The inclusion of persons with disabilities in sponsoring couple programs is an especially effective way of supporting both the needs and the gifts of couples preparing for marriage.

For matrimonial consent to be valid, it is necessary that the contracting parties possess a sufficient use of reason; that they be free of any grave lack of discretion affecting their judgment about the rights and duties to which they are committing themselves; and that they be capable of assuming the essential obligations of the married state. It is also necessary that the parties understand that marriage is a permanent union and is ordered to the good of the spouses, and the procreation and education of children.

It should be noted, however, that paraplegia in itself does not always imply impotence, nor the permanence of such a condition, and it is not in itself an impediment. In case of doubt with regard to impotence, marriage may not be impeded.

(It may be necessary to consult the appropriate office of the diocese regarding the canonical aspects of the situation, particularly when professional experts and civil authorities consider the parties incapable of assuming responsibility for their own lives.)

I. Alcoholism, Chemical Dependency, Other Addictions

Special care and concern should be taken to assess the effects of personal alcohol and/or chemical abuse on the capacity of persons to enter sacramental marriage. Likewise, the impact of parental alcoholism and chemical abuse on the emotional and psychological stability of engaged men and women must be carefully evaluated. In some circumstances, a professional evaluation may be required. In the case of a chronically chemically-dependent person, the marriage may be delayed until a professional evaluation confirms that sufficient use of reason and discretion is present.

All addictions are systemic in effect and can wreak havoc on a marriage. Alcoholism and other forms of chemical dependency will require professional evaluation. It is crucial that both parties understand the devastating effects that can be brought into the marriage. Other things besides chemical dependency can be equally addictive, such as addictions to gambling, sex, pornography, or the internet. Sometimes the addicted individual abstains from addictive behaviors during the period of courtship and then once married, resumes the previous activities. This can perpetuate a kind of fraud in the relationship. Pastors are urged to take special care if the possibility of addictions are present in either or both parties.

V. CELEBRATION

A. Preparing for Liturgical Celebration

Preparation of the marriage liturgy is one aspect of the marriage preparation process in which every couple is interested. It provides the Church with a uniquely teachable moment.

In addition to its sanctifying role, the liturgy serves as a valuable teaching tool not only for the spouses but also for the whole community. The couple to be married should be actively involved in the preparation of the liturgy.

The priest/deacon is responsible for preparing for the liturgical rites of marriage with the couple, in conjunction with other parish staff according to local circumstances. General procedures for the celebration of weddings should be developed by the appropriate liturgical leaders of the parish (e.g., clergy, pastoral musician, parish liturgical committee) with careful reflection on the Order for Celebrating Marriage, and due regard for the need for specific preparation in each case.

B. Couple Responsibility

1. Couples that marry civilly may not use parish property for their reception or any other celebration of their civil marriage (pre- or post-). Allowing such usage may cause guests to erroneously assume that it is a valid Catholic marriage or at least condoned by the Church.
2. Ethnic and regional customs associated with celebration of marriage are to be incorporated into the liturgy in such a way that they respect the integrity of the liturgy.
3. Not all customs that have arisen in recent years are a part of the official rite of the Church. Final approval of such custom rests with the pastor of the Church in which the celebration of the marriage occurs unless the Bishop has established a regulation.
4. Times appropriate for celebrating the Sacrament of Matrimony are to be observed in accord with the local diocesan policy.
5. The readings of the day must be used on Sundays (if diocesan policy allows marriages on Sundays) in Advent, Lent, or on special solemnities, including Christmas and Easter. Otherwise, the couple may make selections in approved ritual books.
[See SPECIFIED NORMS.]

C. Pastor / Parish Responsibility

1. Each pastor is responsible for formulating guidelines in writing for his parish.
 - a. He is responsible for the enforcement or exceptions to those guidelines.
 - b. The written guidelines are available for couples preparing for marriage.
 - c. These parish guidelines shall be in accord with diocesan policies and clearly express in a positive way what the parish's regulations are regarding:
 - (1) Saturday evening weddings (Saturday evening and Sunday weddings are not prohibited by universal law. See SPECIFIED NORMS.)
 - (2) Marriages celebrated by outside clergy.
 - (3) Particular recommendations regarding sanctuary usage, flowers, photographers, music, or attendants.
 - (4) Instructions for interfaith marriages regarding Communion and participation of ministers of other denominations or faiths.
2. Marriages are to take place inside a church building.

D. Officiant

1. Couples that marry civilly may not use parish property for their reception or any other celebration of their civil marriage (pre- or post-).
2. Ethnic and regional customs associated with celebration of marriage are to be incorporated into the liturgy in such a way that they respect the integrity of the liturgy.
3. Not all customs that have arisen in recent years are a part of the official rites of the Church. Final approval of such custom rests with the pastor of the Church in which the celebration of marriage occurs.

4. Times appropriate for celebrating the Sacrament of Matrimony are to be observed in accord with the local diocesan policy.
5. The readings of the day must be used on Sundays (if diocesan policy allows marriages on Sunday) in Advent, Lent, or on special solemnities, including Christmas and Easter. Otherwise, the couple may make selections in approved ritual books.
6. Marriages are to be celebrated in a parish where either of the contracting parties has a domicile, quasi-domicile, or month-long residence or, if it concerns transients, in the parish where they actually reside. With the permission of the proper ordinary or proper pastor, marriages can be celebrated elsewhere.
7. A marriage between Catholics or between a Catholic party and a non-Catholic baptized party is to be celebrated in a parish Church. It can be celebrated in another Church or oratory with the permission of the local ordinary or pastor.
8. A marriage between a Catholic party and an unbaptized party can be celebrated in a church or in another suitable place. A Catholic Church remains the preferred place for the celebration. The selection is left to the discretion of the assisting minister.

E. Episcopal/Roman Catholic Marriages

1. The joint Episcopal-Roman Catholic Statement is published separately and is available from the appropriate Diocesan Office. It has the force of particular law in this diocese.
2. Catholics ordinarily are to marry Episcopalians outside of the Eucharistic Celebration.
3. Holy Communion is NOT ordinarily administered either within Eucharistic Celebration or outside of Mass by Catholic clergy or Episcopalian ministers.

F. Marriage with Members of Other Churches and the Unbaptized

1. The norm is that the Rite of Matrimony is not celebrated within Mass when Catholics marry validly baptized non-Catholics.
2. Mass is not permitted at all on the occasion of a natural (non-sacramental) marriage between a Catholic and an invalidly baptized or unbaptized person.
3. Validly baptized non-Catholics and/or members of the Orthodox Churches may not receive the Eucharist in accord with Canon 844.
4. When Mass is not celebrated, Holy Communion is not to be distributed to anyone.
5. Unions between Catholics and unbaptized persons are not capable of being sacramental.

G. Mass Texts and Times

The Order of Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours and Celebration of the Eucharist for the Province of New Orleans of the year and date in question governs the texts that may be employed in the Mass during which the Rite of Matrimony is celebrated. It is the responsibility of the priest to celebrate the proper Mass according to the liturgical norms.

H. State Licenses

When a Catholic couple participates in the Sacrament of Matrimony, they also receive a legal marriage license issued by the State. The State of Louisiana offers two types of marriage licenses: Standard and Covenant. Couples are free to choose either license when they participate in the Sacrament of Matrimony. The Church's understanding of "covenant" marriage is that of sacramental marriage, which holds to a much higher standard and has the best interest of a couple in mind. Unlike a civil marriage, a sacramental marriage is indissoluble (cannot be broken). While Catholics recognize the good intentions of the state in seeking to strengthen marriages through a covenant license, they must recognize the calling to a sacramental marriage is well beyond the pledge the state asks couples to make in either type of civil marriage. Marriage, as instituted by God in the Sacrament of Matrimony, is a faithful, fruitful, exclusive and lifelong union of a man and woman.

I. Liturgy and Reception

Couples that marry civilly are not to be allowed to use parish facilities for receptions, or any celebration of post or future attempted civil marriage. Allowing such usage may cause guests to erroneously assume that it is a valid Catholic marriage or at least condoned by the Church.

1. Culture and Custom

Ethnic and regional customs associated with the celebration of marriage in the Catholic Church are to be respected and may be incorporated into the liturgy. The manner in which these or any other customs are incorporated into the liturgy must always respect the integrity of the liturgy and the universal principles articulated in the Rite of Matrimony. Care should be taken that the details of the marriage celebrations are characterized by a restrained, simple and authentic style. The true festive tone should not be disturbed by excessive display.

Some customs have arisen in more recent years and are not part of the official rites of the Church. Examples of such customs include: the "Unity Candle," delivering a rose to the parents of the bride and groom, or the tradition of saying a prayer before the statue of Mary. While such traditions are generally acceptable, they are not a part of the actual Rite of Matrimony and are not appropriate for every circumstance. Final approval of such customs rests with the pastor of the Church in which the celebration of the marriage occurs.

2. Liturgical Readings and Prayers

The readings and prayers of the day must be used on Sundays in Advent, Lent, or on special solemnities, including Christmas and Easter. Otherwise, the couple may make selections in approved ritual books.

3. Appropriate Place for Celebrating the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Marriages are to be celebrated in a parish where either of the contracting parties lives, lives part of the time, or has at least a month-long residence.

Transients should use the parish in which they actually reside. Either the Bishop or his delegate may give permission for the marriage to be celebrated elsewhere.

J. Continuing Outreach to Married Couples

1. At the diocesan, vicariate, deanery, cluster and parish levels, various programs, processes and counseling opportunities should be offered for the enrichment of couples.
2. Homilies and other means of communication in the parish should be used to encourage wholesome relationships between spouses and participation in events held to celebrate marriage anniversaries or promote good relationships.
3. Petitions in the prayer of the faithful for couples who are celebrating or who are suffering are mentioned frequently.
4. Recognizing that couples who are in serious trouble will often come to organized group events on marriage enrichment, inventories and questionnaires should be utilized on these occasions to help them personally to confront rather than deny the depth of their problems.
5. Programs such as Retrouvaille and marriage counseling should be publicized and offered to suffering couples regularly at the diocesan, vicariate, deanery, cluster and parish levels.



CANONICAL REQUIREMENTS AND SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES REGARDING MARRIAGE PREPARATION

CANONICAL REQUIREMENTS

The following norms take precedence over the usual route of preparation of a couple when any of the following “Canonical Requirements” is encountered. The preparation process may be radically changed according to these requirements and the needs of the couple.

1. Right to Marriage

A couple’s right to marriage and diriment impediments cannot be denied unless:

- 1.1 There exists a diriment impediment to marriage due to a prior marital bond (c. 1085);
or
- 1.2 There exists another diriment impediment to marriage:
 - a. Age: 16 for Males, 14 for Females (c. 1083);
 - b. Impotence: Antecedent or (and) Perpetual (Impotence) (c. 1084 note that sterility from any cause does not impede marriage);
 - c. Disparity of Worship (c. 1086);
 - d. Sacred Orders (c. 1087);
 - e. Perpetual Vows of Chastity in a Religious Community (c. 1088);
 - f. Abduction (c. 1089);
 - g. Murder of (One’s) Spouse (crimen, c. 1090; two forms);
 - h. Consanguinity (c. 1091; any degree in the direct line, to the fourth degree inclusive in the collateral line);

[Explanation adapted from Commentary of Canon Law: The relationship of consanguinity means the blood relationship between persons who descend, either legitimately or illegitimately, from a common ancestor. In the direct line are grandparents, parents and children. The collateral line includes aunts, uncles and cousins. First cousins are in the “fourth degree of the collateral line” and cannot marry without dispensation.]

- i. Relationship of Affinity (c. 1092);

[Explanation adapted from Commentary of Canon Law: The relationship of affinity is similar to consanguinity except it is a relationship as the result of marriage. It arises only from a valid marriage and prohibits marriage only in the direct line. Therefore, a husband cannot marry his mother-in-law validly.]

- j. Relationship of Public Propriety (c. 1093);

[Explanation adapted from Commentary of Canon Law: The relationship of public propriety is the same as affinity with the exception that it arises from an invalid marriage or even cohabitation. It prohibits the marriage of the parties to each other's relatives in the direct line.]

- k. Adoptive Relationship (c. 1094).

- 1.3 No one except the Supreme Legislator may establish diriment impediments.

2. Freedom to Marry

The parish pastor and officiant are bound to determine if a party is free from a previous bond or another diriment impediment.

- 2.1 If a previous, putative marriage(s) for either party exists, the proposed marriage cannot be scheduled until either of only two (2) possible solutions is completed:
 - a. A declaration of an ecclesiastical annulment of each previous, putative marriage has been executed and any conditions attached to a future marriage are fulfilled; or
 - b. The freedom to marry is established during the prenuptial investigation because any previous attempted marriage by one or both parties is invalid due to a lack of canonical form.
 - c. The pastor conducts the investigation of the possible freedom of a party to contract marriage when a previous marriage lacked canonical form. (Please note: Canonical form only applies to members of the Catholic or the Orthodox churches.)
 - d. For the marriage(s) of Catholics or the Orthodox that have taken place outside their respective churches proceed with approved diocesan process.
 - e. The accompanying instructions and those printed on the form itself are to be followed.
 - f. The pastor himself makes the determination of freedom to marry, calling on the assistance of the office of tribunal.
 - g. Non-Catholics who were married to a Catholic outside the Catholic Church (and where no dispensation from canonical form had been issued) can also use this form. They must be able to prove the Catholic baptism of their former spouse, however, either through a baptismal certificate or the affidavits of people who know for certain about the Catholic baptism. The same holds true for marriages involving the Orthodox that took place outside the Orthodox party's church.

3. Restriction, Prohibition, Rider or Vetitum

If a party(ies) has obtained previous annulment(s), the decree(s) of the execution of each sentence is reviewed during the first interview. When a local ordinary has placed a restriction (sometimes called a prohibition, a rider, or a vetitum) on a person, it is stated in the decree and sent to the person. It should also appear on the person's baptismal record.

- 3.1 To lift the restriction the pastoral minister must contact the office of tribunal in a timely manner when the restriction is noted. Some sort of counseling is usually necessary in order for the prohibition to be lifted. This counseling may be either psychological or pastoral. A prohibition attached to a decree of nullity should always be taken seriously.
- 3.2 The office of tribunal lifts the restriction with a nihil obstat in writing when the requirements are met.

[*Explanation:* Nihil obstat is a statement to the effect that "nothing stands in the way" of proceeding with the marriage.]

- 3.3 No one is to schedule a wedding date, even tentatively until the nihil obstat is obtained.

4. Previous Union (e.g., Death, Annulment, Lack of Form)

- 4.1 Not all issues arising from the previous marriage are addressed even by the tribunal.
- 4.2 The requirements to obtain permission for a marriage when a party has obligations from a previous union in accord with Canon 1071, §1, 3^o (using the diocesan-approved form) also does not address all the issues that should be a part of marriage preparation in such cases.
- 4.3 A thorough preparation is even more important in subsequent marriages since such marriages are statistically more likely to end in divorce.

5. Diriment Impediments

Diriment impediments must be dispensed for validity before any wedding.

- 5.1 Impediments that are of ecclesiastical law (and that only affect Catholics) can be dispensed.
- 5.2 Dispensations requiring that a promise(s) be made by the Catholic party in accord with Canon 1125, cannot be processed without the promise(s) having been sincerely made and duly signed.
- 5.3 Dispensations are never granted from the impediments of impotence, prior bond or consanguinity in the direct line or in the second degree of the collateral line.

[Explanation adapted from Commentary of Canon Law: These impediments, when they truly exist, are considered prohibitions not merely by ecclesiastical law, but Divine law.]

- 5.4 Dispensations are granted only by the Holy See from the impediments of Holy Orders, public perpetual vows in a religious community of pontifical rite or crimen.
- 5.5 Application for dispensation for each impediment is made through the office of the tribunal utilizing the appropriately approved form and following the directions accompanying it.
- 5.6 The diocesan tribunal will issue a dispensation in writing if all is in order or will communicate a dispensation granted by the Holy See.
- 5.7 No one is to schedule a wedding date, even tentatively until the dispensation is obtained.
- 5.8 In accord with the clergy faculties, dispensations, normally granted by the diocesan tribunal, may be granted as an exception when all has been prepared and harm would arise from the delay of the wedding. The fact and reason that this faculty has been used must be reported to the diocesan tribunal.
- 5.9 Marriage preparation is delayed when a dispensation is required and the issues arising from the need for dispensation must be addressed during preparation.

6. Permissions for Liceity

Some permissions before marriage for liceity are required by Canon Law.

Marriage preparation can be delayed when permission is required and the issues arising from the need for permission must be addressed during the preparation process.

- 6.1 The following permissions require that a promise be made by the Catholic party in accord with Canon 1125, and cannot be processed without the promise having been sincerely made and duly signed:
 - a. For the marriage of a Catholic with a validly baptized member of another Christian communion (c. 1124).
 - b. For the marriage of a non-Catholic party, though baptized in the Catholic Church, who has become a member of another Church (c. 1071, §1, 4^o; §2).
 - c. When a Catholic wishes to marry a person who was baptized a Catholic but is commonly known to have abandoned the Church (c. 1071, §1, 4^o; §2).
- 6.2 For a marriage of a person who is bound by natural obligations toward another party or toward children, arising from a prior union (c. 1071, §1, 3^o).
- 6.3 The diocesan-approved form(s) is utilized following the directions accompanying it.
- 6.4 In accord with their faculties, clergy may grant the above-mentioned permissions for marriage anytime.

7. Conditions for Permissions

No clergyman or official witness is to assist at the following marriages without the permission of the diocesan bishop:

- 7.1 The marriage of transients (c. 1071, §1, 1^o).

[Explanation adapted from Commentary of Canon Law: Transients are those who completely lack a place of residence even for three months (cc. 100; 102).]

- 7.2 A marriage which cannot be recognized or celebrated in accord with the norm of civil law or one not recognized by Canon Law (c. 1071, §1, 2^o).
- 7.3 A marriage of a person who is bound by a censure (c. 1071, §1, 5^o).
- 7.4 A marriage of a minor (not yet 18) when the parents are unaware of it or are reasonably opposed to it (c. 1071, §1, 6^o).
- 7.5 A marriage to be entered by means of a proxy, mentioned in Canon 1105 (c. 1071, §1, 7^o).
- 7.6 A marriage based on a condition concerning the past or the present (c.1102, §§2-3).
A marriage based on a condition concerning the future, however, cannot be validly contracted and no one can grant such a dispensation or permission (c.1102, §1).

[Explanation adapted from Commentary of Canon Law: Conditional consent to marriage can invalidate it. If the consent to marriage is based on a future achievement or circumstance or even that something will not be the case, it always invalidates marriage and permission cannot be granted. In such a case, the person positing the condition wants the validity of the marriage to depend on something that is uncertain—no one can predict the future. It is possible to contract a marriage with a condition about the past or the present. The issue would arise because the party conditioning consent may harbor some doubt about the existence of some achievement or circumstance or even that something is not the case. Since facts about the present or the past can be verified, the marriage is delayed until the matter is investigated. Then, permission can be granted for the marriage if it is still desired by both parties.]

- 7.7 No one is to schedule a wedding date, even tentatively, until the requisite permission is obtained.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

8. Possible Reasons to Delay Marriage

The following special circumstances are the only other reasons that a marriage can be delayed for a time.

8.1 The following special circumstances are not diriment:

[Explanation adapted from Commentary of Canon Law: Diriment (is a circumstance affecting a party to the marriage that would automatically make proposed marriage invalid in the eyes of the Church. This is a list of circumstances that are not diriment impediments, but sometimes erroneously are treated as though they are. Some may even invalidate a marriage or support such a conclusion, but that would have to be proven in an ecclesiastical tribunal after the marriage failed. The marriage MUST BE DELAYED until the situation can be addressed but these are never reasons to deny the couple the right to marriage. None of them can be dispensed. Delay is a pastoral approach in which the circumstance is addressed so that the marriage will not be invalid. The pastoral approach in this situation must be chosen with great care and understanding.)]

- a. Exclusion of the “Goods of Marriage”
- b. Cohabitation
- c. Persons with Mental Disabilities
- d. Catholic Weddings Not Taking Place in the Parish of Bride or Groom
- e. Convalidation
- f. Couples Not Registered in a Parish
- g. Cross-Cultural / Interracial Marriages
- h. Immigration Issues
- i. Personal Issues
- j. Marriage of Minors above the Canonical Age and Not Yet 18 Years of Age
- k. Premarital Pregnancy
- l. Extended Separation Before the Wedding
- m. Older Couples

8.2 The special procedures below are to be followed according to the literal meaning of the words employed and not expanded to cover other circumstances or impose restrictions not mentioned.

- a. No one is to establish other reasons for delaying a marriage or to extend the preparation time beyond the exact requirements set forth below.
- b. A delay of the wedding is only a postponement of the marriage until such time as all difficulties may be rectified, and must not be tantamount to a denial of the right to marry.
- c. No one below the diocesan bishop has the capacity to establish particular laws delaying a marriage.
- d. Only a local ordinary can prohibit the marriage of his own subjects wherever they are staying and of all persons actually present in his own territory, but only for a time, for a serious cause and for as long as that cause exists; but it is not invalidating (c. 1077).
- e. No one is to schedule a wedding date, even tentatively until a special circumstance is adequately addressed during preparation.

- f. Unless another provision is made in diocesan law, the pastor is to decide whether:
 1. The special circumstance is not of a serious enough nature to impede a couple's ability to enter into a successful marriage;
 2. Additional information is needed; or
 3. The special circumstance is of such a serious nature the wedding must be delayed for a time. To assist in making this determination the pastor may consult the tribunal. In such instances, the couple will be offered assistance to help them overcome the reason for the delay. No date for a wedding can be set until the circumstance has been removed and the pastor has decided to allow the marriage preparation to proceed. Informed of their right to appeal the decision to delay their wedding date to the Office of the Chancellor.

9. Conditions Against the “Goods of Marriage”

- 9.1 The three traditional goods of marriage are children, fidelity and permanence. More recently a fourth “good of the other spouse” is in ecclesiastical law. In jurisprudence, the exclusion of any one of these goods is a type of partial simulation.

[*Explanation adapted from Commentary of Canon Law: The exclusion of the “Goods of Marriage”* 1) can mean that neither party nor the couple intends to exclude children permanently from their marriage. 2) It also may mean that both parties intend to have a sexual partnership with each other to the exclusion of all others. 3) It can also mean that neither party intends to end the marriage with the option of marrying someone else; only physical death can end a marriage. 4) Finally, parties must marry each other with the intention always to work for the good of the other.]

- 9.2 Total simulation of the marriage is also a possibility.
- 9.3 A party's premarital intentions concerning these issues are investigated by questions in the diocesan-approved prenuptial investigation form. The issues may also be raised in the context of discussion.
- 9.4 The local diocesan tribunal should be contacted immediately if it is suspected that a couple intends to exclude even one of these goods of marriage itself by a positive act of the will.
- 9.5 Note that sterility for any reason whatsoever does not itself constitute an intention against children.
- 9.6 Pastoral counseling or catechesis may be required and may delay the marriage.

10. Cohabitation

- 10.1 The following teaching in *Familiaris Consortio* #82 should be observed:
There are ... Catholics who ... prefer to contract a merely civil marriage, and who reject or at least defer religious marriage. Their situation cannot of course be likened to that of people simply living together without any bond at all, because in the present case there is at least a certain commitment to a properly-defined and probably stable state of life, even though the possibility of a future divorce is often present in the minds of those entering a civil marriage. By seeking public recognition of their bond on the part of the State, such couples show that they are ready to accept not only its advantages but also its obligations. Nevertheless, not even this situation is acceptable to the Church.

The aim of pastoral action will be to make these people understand the need for consistency between their choice of life and the faith that they profess, and to try to do

everything possible to induce them to regularize their situation in the light of Christian principle.

- 10.2 Various possibilities describe cohabitation:
 - a. A couple lives only as housemates, perhaps with his or her family or with others in a shared dwelling (such a couple is not necessarily excluded from the sacraments of Reconciliation/Penance or Eucharist);
 - b. A couple lives together as though married for much less than two (2) years;
 - c. A couple lives together as though married for nearly two (2) years or longer (in this situation, psychologically the couple resembles those who have attempted marriage);
 - d. A couple lives together because they have attempted a civil marriage [also convalidation below].
- 10.3 In addition, a couple may already have a child(ren) who is their progeny or a child(ren) from a previous relationship(s).
- 10.4 Cohabitation may require more intensive marriage preparation and, perhaps, an extended period of time for the preparation.
- 10.5 It is not always advisable to suggest that a couple live separate and apart, especially when a child(ren) is involved. In *Familiaris Consortio*, the impetus is toward convalidation, not separation.

11. Mental Disabilities

- 11.1 Those who completely lack the sufficient use of reason are incapable of contracting marriage (c. 1095, 1°).
 - a. Causes may be
 - Severe to profound mental retardation
 - Severe autism
 - Organic brain syndromes that truly deprive a party of the use of reason
 - Accidental brain injuries that truly deprive a party of the use of reason.
 - b. When discovered, the local diocesan tribunal is to be contacted immediately. An appropriate expert is employed to offer a professional opinion. The marriage is not to be scheduled until a nihil obstat is granted. Parish ministers also remain involved to support the couple in a discernment process that may lead to marriage.
- 11.2 Those who suffer from or have a history of mental illness(es) or addiction(s) may be incapable of contracting marriage (cc. 1095, 2° - 3°).
 - a. Such difficulties admit of a whole range of variations that may or may not be canonically incapacitating depending on severity.
 - b. When discovered, the local diocesan tribunal is to be contacted immediately. An appropriate expert is employed to offer a professional opinion. The marriage is not to be scheduled until a nihil obstat is granted. The pastoral minister also remains involved to support the couple in a discernment process that may lead to marriage.

12. Catholic Weddings Not Taking Place in the Proper Parish (of the Bride or Groom)

- 12.1 Couples are to marry in either the parish of the bride or the parish of the groom. If they are going to marry elsewhere, their proper pastors are to be asked to give permission (c. 1115).
- 12.2 Marriage preparation takes place in consultation between the proper pastor(s) of the parties and the pastor of the place where the couple will wed.
- 12.3 When the couple is to wed outside of their local diocese, they cannot demand that other dioceses conform to their local diocese's policies; the couple must conform to the other diocese. All the requirements for marriage preparation in the diocese where the marriage is to take place must be met. The fact that such preparation is not required in one's diocese does not mean that it is not required elsewhere.
- 12.4 The proper office in the diocese of the Catholic party must grant any dispensations.
- 12.5 The proper office in the diocese of the Catholic party can always assist and grant the nihil obstat that may be required by another diocese.
- 12.6 Always make copies of all the papers before mailing them anywhere. Retain one copy and give the couple the other copy marked "Authentic Copy," signed, dated and sealed by the pastor. When dispensations or permissions have been received, the same copying procedure is to be followed.

13. Convalidation

There is no such thing as "Blessing a Marriage" to make it "right" with the Church.

- 13.1 When the Church does not recognize a prior exchange of consent because it was impeded or it lacked canonical form, there are only two (2) possibilities for rectifying the situation:
 - a. Simple Convalidation. The couple must intend truly to exchange new consent to marriage (and not simply renew consent that was previously given). They must have the proper knowledge, intention, and capacity for doing so. The following statement should be willingly signed after it is carefully explained and understood by both parties:

"We fully acknowledge the fact that probably our union until now has been null and void. We intend to give new and fresh marital consent at the time our marriage is celebrated in the Catholic Church as though we were never married."
 - b. Sanatio in radice. When one or both parties cannot or will not give the new consent required for simple convalidation, application for a sanation is made to the local diocesan tribunal utilizing the diocesan-approved form and following the appropriate directions. (When an impediment ceases such as in the death of a previous spouse, a sanation is reserved to the Holy See.)
- 13.2 A convalidation cannot be used as a condition for baptizing the child of a couple not married in the Church. Marital consent has to have both internal and external freedom in order to be valid. The baptism of a child can only be postponed in the event that there is no hope that the child will be raised in the Catholic Church. There is no provision in Church law for refusal of baptism.

- 13.3 A couple seeking to have their invalid marriage convalidated or sanated must participate in a complete program of prenuptial preparation tailored by the pastoral minister to their own circumstances. Convalidation or sanation is never to be used as a means to circumvent the usual duration or program of prenuptial preparation. The couple must have the proper capacity, knowledge, and intention for entering into marriage. They also must be giving their consent freely. The fact that they have been living together for a long period of time does not necessarily mean that they understand what Christian marriage is or that they are freely choosing it.
- 13.4 All canonical dispensations (for validity) and permissions (for liceity) are required in either type of convalidation.
- 13.5 The preparation of such a couple is also treated as though they have been cohabiting [see Cohabitation above].

14. Couples Not Registered in a Parish

- 14.1 Canon 1115 states that a marriage is to take place in a parish where either of the parties "has domicile, quasi-domicile, or merely a month-long residence." A person acquires a proper pastor (and hence a right to pastoral care) in two ways: by living in a place (or intending to do so) for five years (i.e., by domicile) or by living in a place (or intending to do so) for three months (i.e., by quasi-domicile).
- 14.2 No other requirements (e.g., registration or other membership) can be established by parish policy.
- 14.3 Rights in a territorial parish are not lost by registration in a personal, national or another territorial parish.
- 14.4 The presumption of the Church is that people have a natural right to marry. Therefore, the proper parish of either party is to provide a welcoming presence to a couple regardless of their circumstances.
- 14.5 The directives of the Rite of Matrimony itself should always be kept in mind: "Priests should first of all strengthen and nourish the faith of those about to be married."

15. Cross-Cultural / Interracial Marriages

- 15.1 When individuals from different cultures enter marriage, they may find married life even more complicated than might people of the same ethnic or racial background.

16. Immigration Issues

- 16.1 There are several situations that can occur:
 - a. A person is marrying in order to remain in the United States;
 - b. A couple wants to marry, while either or both of them is in the process of gaining permanent residency;
 - c. A couple wants to marry, but either or both are not here legally ("Out of Status").
- 16.2 It is important in all these situations to understand the laws of the United States and the consequences of violating these laws. The parties, the officiant and others may be viewed as accomplices in violation of civil law even if there is no violation of ecclesiastical doctrine or law.
- 16.3 Contact the Chancellor's office for assistance. A nihil obstat to proceed with the marriage may be granted only after legal counsel has been obtained.

17. Personal Issues

- 17.1 Personal issues include, but are not limited to:
- a. A previous abortion
 - b. Sexual abuse
 - c. Health concerns
- 17.2 Such issues may require the delay of a wedding as the individual or couple receives professional and/or pastoral counseling
- 17.3 The issue of a previous abortion may be raised by an individual or couple.
- a. The reaction of the pastoral minister will likely determine whether a positive relationship with the Church is restored and maintained.
 - b. For Catholics, the person may have incurred an automatic excommunication (see c. 1398; for mitigating circumstances see cc. 1321, 1323 and 1324). This difficulty should be examined in the context of the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Penance if possible. It is to be resolved in accord with the faculties of priests of the diocese.
 - c. Project Rachel or appropriate counselors should be recommended to the individual or couple.
[Explanation of term: Project Rachel is a kind of retreat program for those who are suffering because of their participation in an abortion.]
- 17.4 The issue of sexual abuse as perpetrator or victim / survivor may arise and may involve one or both parties.
- a. The Child Protection Policy of the diocese must be followed when the situation requires it.
 - b. These deep scars will very likely be a factor in a future marriage.
- 17.5 A debilitating disease or genetic anomaly (Muscular Dystrophy, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, ALS, STD, HIV/AIDS etc.) or a family history of any such disease may also arise.
- 17.6 As a precondition for marriage, a party to the marriage who is aware of a special issue cannot be required to reveal this fact to the other party. On the other hand, one party must tell the other, if that other party is known principally and directly to intend to marry only someone who has never experienced such a special issue.
- 17.7 Never is the clergyman or pastoral minister to reveal such special issues in the life of one party to the other party. The marriage must be scheduled if failure to do so would be tantamount to a revelation breaking the seal of confession or the confidentiality of a party.

18. Marriage of Minors above the Canonical Age and Not Yet 18 Years of Age

- 18.1 The laws of the State of Louisiana may prohibit such marriages. There may be consequences for violating these laws. It is important in all these situations to understand the laws of the State and the consequences of violating these laws. The parties, the officiant and others may be viewed as accomplices in violation of civil law even if there is no violation of ecclesiastical doctrine or law.
- 18.2 If one of the parents of a minor (not yet 18) is against the marriage, contact the diocesan tribunal immediately.
- 18.3 Due to the alarming failure rate of youthful marriages, a primary task of the pastoral minister becomes challenging their decision to marry. During prenuptial preparation, the pastoral minister is to raise all the significant issues about their relationship that will encourage the young couple to reconsider their decision to marry.

19. Premarital Pregnancy

- 19.1 The reception of the couple is to be respectful. It should be borne in mind that they have already made a decision in favor of the life of the unborn child when they could have chosen an abortion.
- 19.2 The pregnancy may or may not be the motivating cause of a marriage. If it causes the marriage or changes the wedding date, a couple is very likely marrying for inappropriate reasons. Otherwise, it may not be such a significant issue.
 - a. If the couple is engaged and has already had the initial appointment for marriage preparation prior to the pregnancy, then preparations for marriage typically would proceed under the usual conditions.
 - b. If one of the parents of a minor (not yet 18) is against the marriage, see the procedure for the marriage of minors above and contact the diocesan tribunal immediately.
- 19.3 The more pressure for the marriage at any age by one party or a parent of either party, the more necessary usually is the delay of the wedding. Such pressure does not usually amount to external force and grave fear, but is a cause for great caution. The desire for the marriage should be equal for both parties at the time of consent.
- 19.4 The pastoral minister must make every effort to relieve the sense of urgency by centering attention on the good of the couple and encouraging them to look at alternatives to marriage for the sake of the child. Marriage is not a solution to extraneous difficulties including those arising from a premarital pregnancy.
- 19.5 Finally, the pastoral minister should stress that there are positive and morally acceptable alternatives to marriage when a premarital pregnancy occurs. The couple needs to make as free and informed a choice as possible in resolving their difficulties.
- 19.6 A pastoral minister must never encourage a merely civil marriage or cohabitation as a “solution” to an unplanned pregnancy. It should be mentioned also that the baptism of the child does not require marriage by the parents. It is also inappropriate, therefore, to speak of future convalidation at this point.
- 19.7 After the birth of the child, the parents should be supported in all their duties for childcare, especially those assumed at the baptism of the child. Even if they have attempted a merely civil marriage, they should be encouraged to participate in the life of the parish insofar as they are able (see section on Convalidation).

20. Extended Separation Before the Wedding

- 20.1 Some couples requesting marriage in the Catholic Church are separated from their parish or from each other by long distances due to military placement, college attendance, employment, etc. Adequate prenuptial preparation cannot be overlooked even in these cases. Efforts should be made, insofar as possible, to provide such preparation to them when both are present together.
- 20.2 The pastoral minister at the parish where the marriage is to be celebrated determines the specifics of the preparation on a case-by-case basis.
- 20.3 The preparation may be done through referral and follow-up. Military chaplains, campus ministers, the parish where the couple now worships and the local diocesan office of family ministry are resources to the pastoral minister. Through collaboration, the necessary preparation should be provided without creating unnecessary difficulties for the couple.

21. Older Couples

- 21.1 Age or a previous marriage experience does not necessarily equate with readiness for a marriage. When one party is 50 years of age or more, couples have different marriage preparation needs. Some of the different elements to be addressed when older couples present themselves for marriage include a review of former marriages or alliances; the financial situation of each person; the attitudes of any children toward the future spouse; and health.
- 21.2 A marriage of a person who is bound by natural obligations toward another party or toward children, arising from a prior union, permission is required (c. 1071, §1, 3^o). [See Canonical Requirements above.]

22. Delegation

- 22.1 All priests are reminded that, if they are witnessing a marriage in any parish other than that in which they are assigned, delegation must be obtained if the wedding is to be celebrated validly. Thus, delegation to witness a given marriage between the given persons on a given day in a given church must be obtained in writing from the pastor of the parish in which the wedding is to occur.
- 22.2 All deacons are reminded that, if they are witnessing a marriage in any parish other than that in which they are assigned necessary delegation must be obtained from the pastor of the parish in which the wedding is to occur.

23. Verification of Status of Visiting Clergy

Any priest who is not assigned to ministry within a particular diocese and who is to witness a marriage within the confines of that diocese must present to the pastor of the parish where the wedding is to occur, at least one month prior to the scheduled wedding, the form utilized by that diocese determining his status in the diocese of incardination/service which is to be notarized by the Chancellor of that diocese. (If need be, such form can be prepared from a copy from existing forms of the diocese.)



Marriage Preparation Guidelines
Approved by the Archbishop and Bishops
of the Province of New Orleans, September 11, 2007
Promulgated February 10, 2008