

---

“I Promise To Be True To You . . . All The Days Of My Life”

PASTORAL POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

FOR

*Marriage Preparation*

FOR

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NEW JERSEY

---

Newark      Camden      The Bishops of the Dioceses of New Jersey      Paterson      Trenton      Passaic      Syriac  
Metuchen

# *Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation*

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Overview</b> .....	1
<b>Introduction for Pastoral Ministers</b> .....	3
<b>Section I: The Marriage Preparation Process</b> .....	7
Stage One:  Introductions and Orientations .....	8
Stage Two:  Marriage Catechesis and Formation .....	13
Stage Three:  Pastoral Sessions, Wedding Liturgy and Beyond .....	15
<b>Section II: Particular Ecclesial Situations in Marriage Preparation</b> .....	20
<b>Section III: Special Circumstances in Marriage Preparation</b> .....	32
<b>Bibliography and Reference Material</b> .....	56

# Overview

---

This revised handbook\* of *Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation* focuses on a three-stage marriage preparation process. The goal of these policies and guidelines is to provide assistance and support to engaged couples as well as to pastoral ministers\*\* and married couples working with them. Different authoritative levels of directions are found in this handbook: canonical norms, statements of policy, and guidelines for dealing with special circumstances.

Regarding canonical issues, everyone is to observe procedures that are established by the *Code of Canon Law* (1983) as well as by the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*\*\*\*. Establishing a couple's eligibility to marry is most critical, especially in cases of prior marriages, whether the ceremony was religious or civil. If one or the other party was married before, a wedding may not be scheduled until the freedom of each person to marry is established. This is to be done through a death certificate, or if the former spouse is still alive, through a legitimate determination that a prior marriage was invalid.

The Bishop's message addressed to engaged couples conveys the pastoral spirit of the policies and guidelines for marriage preparation.

The **Introduction** relates the revised *Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation* to the broader context of the Church's teaching about marriage and contemporary attitudes that may undermine the Christian vision of marriage. It considers the canonical norms for remote, proximate and immediate preparation as well as follow-up which will be supportive to newly married couples. Lastly, it stresses the Church's concern for ministerial sensitivity and prudence toward engaged couples in special circumstances.

---

\* A Couple's edition of the Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation is available.

\*\* In this document the term "pastoral minister" generally refers to a priest or deacon but may also include a lay person with theological and canonical competence and pastoral experience, who is responsible for the direction of the marriage preparation process.

\*\*\* **CIC** is often used for the 1983 Code of Canon Law. It stands for Codex Iuris Canonici. **CCEO** is often used for the 1990 Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches. It stands for Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium.

---

## ***SECTION I: The Marriage Preparation Process (Three Stages)***

### **Stage One: Introduction and Orientation**

Couples approach the Church desiring to make a commitment to one another before God and to have their union blessed. It is of paramount importance that from the outset they have a warm and welcoming experience regardless of the couple's active or inactive affiliation with the Church. The pastoral minister should assure the couple of the Church's desire to help them prepare for a lasting, life-giving and happy marriage. In this first stage the pastoral minister will address any special circumstances, inform the couple about the preparation process, encourage them to understand the value of their commitment to this preparation process and determine with them a course for activities and meetings beyond their wedding. The use of a pre-marital communications inventory such as F.O.C.C.U.S. (**F**acilitating, **O**pen, **C**ouple, **C**ommunication, **U**nderstanding and **S**tudy) may be helpful at this stage. A wedding date may be scheduled only after establishing the couple's freedom to marry. The "Engagement Blessing" is optional.

### **Stage Two: Marriage Catechesis and Formation**

A couple will participate in an approved marriage preparation program conducted either in an individual parish or at a diocesan level. Whatever the choice of program, *Engaged Encounter Weekend*, *Pre-Cana Sessions* or *Sponsor Couple formation*, the interaction of engaged couples with married couples during the marriage preparation is an invaluable dimension of the Church's preparation ministry. If personal circumstances make these options unfeasible, this "instructional" stage may be conducted by the pastoral minister, but it would be advisable to introduce the engaged couple to a sponsor couple (a married couple), trained in marriage preparation, who is able to share their own convictions and personal experiences about God and love, commitment and sacrifice, forgiveness and spiritual growth in marriage.

### **Stage Three: Pastoral Sessions, Wedding Liturgy and Beyond**

This stage allows time for a couple to reflect further with the pastoral minister on their experience in the preparation

process and to address their plans for their wedding liturgy. It also provides the opportunity for the pastoral minister to encourage the engaged couple to appreciate the value of their continuing, active involvement in worship and parish life. The hope is that in establishing their home they will also seek a spiritual home in a parish community. It is important that parish communities reach out to newly married couples with a warm welcome.

## ***SECTION II: Particular Ecclesial Situations in Marriage Preparation***

Particular ecclesial situations may include: Catholics of different Churches *Sui Iuris*, a Catholic and a baptized Christian; a Catholic and a non-baptized person, and two Catholics of the same Church of whom one or both are no longer practicing the faith. For marriages between Latin rite Catholics and Catholics of other Churches *Sui Iuris*, the canonical preference in preparing for and celebrating the marriage is that the marriage will take place in the rite of the groom and be witnessed by his proper pastor. Deacons are able to witness marriages only for Latin Rite Catholics. In some circumstances a dispensation from the canonical form of marriage may be petitioned; or permission and/or delegation may be given to celebrate the Catholic Rite of Marriage outside of a Church.

## ***SECTION III: Special Circumstances in Marriage Preparation***

Guidelines are offered for various circumstances, including: abusive relationships, addictions, people choosing not to have children, cohabitation, communicable diseases, convalidations, unmarried couples who have had children together, couples with children from other relationships, instances of cultural, ethnic or racial diversity, HIV/AIDS and marriage, immaturity, infertility, long distance relationships in marriage preparation, marriages of minors, marriages of older persons, marriages of persons with disabilities, instances of pregnancy, pre-nuptial agreements, previous marriages and questions of sexual identity. These guidelines may assist a couple and the pastoral minister working with them to evaluate their situation in a realistic and responsible way.

# Introduction For Pastoral Ministers

---

**I. Marriage is a profoundly personal, deeply spiritual relationship affecting not only a couple but their children. “The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized”** (c. 1055, §1).

Marriage is, for Christians, a mystery and a mission.

*Marriage is a mystery* because a husband and a wife engage the depths of their personalities to work out their destiny together but also because their relationship is lived out in the presence of God and in response to the initiative of Christ’s grace in them.

*Marriage is a mission* insofar as they assume responsibility for each other and for the children who may be born to them and also insofar as they help sanctify one another by manifesting faith to each other, their children and the community in which they live.

Marriage is God’s creation and the work of husbands and wives.

**II. A marriage is created through a mutual, personal commitment. “Matrimonial consent is an act of the will by which a man and a woman mutually give and accept each other through an irrevocable covenant in order to establish marriage”** (c. 1057, §2).

Marital love is rooted in the complete and total self-gift of a man and woman to each other. By their consent to marriage, the spouses betroth and accept each other in such a way that a new relationship begins for them in the sight of God and in the eyes of society as well. Their relationship is an intimate union calling for total fidelity and permanent unity so long as they each shall live. Once a couple creates a marital relationship, the bond that they have forged no longer depends solely on their own will but has a social and ecclesial reality which endures.

“For as God of old made Himself present to His people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the Savior

of men and the Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the Sacrament of Matrimony. He abides with them thereafter so that, just as He loved the Church and handed himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal” (*Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 48, Second Vatican Council, 1965*).

**III. Attitudes a man or woman has about marriage may jeopardize their very ability to marry. Such an incapacity for marriage exists for “those who suffer a grave defect of discretion of judgment concerning the essential matrimonial rights and duties mutually to be handed over and accepted”** (c. 1095, 2°).

Much of contemporary society does not share Christ’s ideal for marriage. At a time when His own culture and the contemporary legal systems agreed that marriage was a relationship that could be dissolved at least at the initiative of a husband, Jesus Christ introduced a different vision for marriage. Jesus declared that God’s will is for a marriage relationship to be lived out in faithful commitment by a man and a woman as long as both live.

The pervasive experience of divorce, the prevalence of pre-nuptial agreements and experiments with live-in relationship as preparatory for marriage, affect the readiness of couples who approach the Church for marriage to grasp the practical implications of Jesus’ vision for them and to accept Jesus’ norm as their practical duty toward each other. Catholic couples preparing for marriage today will find themselves in what may be described as a counter-cultural experience. If a couple holds intentions about marriage contrary to the Church’s standards, they jeopardize their own ability to marry validly as well as their ability for a happy life together.\*

**IV. REMOTE PREPARATION. The Church has a duty to declare Christ’s vision for marriage to the whole community, young and old, and to assist couples to fulfill this vocation. “Pastors...are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the Christian faithful the assistance by which the matrimonial state is preserved in a Christian spirit and advances in perfection. This assistance must be offered especially by: preaching,**

---

\* Invalidity can arise from a number of defects of consent in addition to canon 1095.2. These defects are discussed in canons 1095-1107.

---

catechesis adapted to minors, youth, and adults ...by which the Christian faithful are instructed about the meaning of Christian marriage ...”(c. 1063, §1).

Communicating the truth and the beauty of Christian marriage to all, young and old, is crucial. Informing people about the sacrament is a duty of the whole Christian community. The seeds of this message are planted in the deeds of daily life as boys and girls, young men and women, witness how their parents work to live out their commitment of married love. In Catholic schools and religious education programs, instruction appropriate to various grade levels should gradually introduce youngsters to a formal appreciation of the sacrament of marriage. In marriage preparation programs married couples proclaim the joys and loving struggles of faithfully lived married life and share their own Christian wisdom about marriage with those who are preparing to begin their own lives together.

At Sunday worship, periodic explanations about what marriage entails should highlight why the Church treasures the marriage preparation process as an opportunity to work with couples. Beyond the home, the classroom and pre-marital instructions, Catholic people need to hear about marriage from the pulpit. Priests and deacons should call to their congregations' attention Christian marriage successes, for instance, in celebrations for significant marriage anniversaries. At times the Scriptures lend themselves to the themes of married life. Priests and deacons should take such opportunities to affirm the Christian vision of married life. When the Scriptures speak of brokenness, the plight of widows or the uncertainties of the dispossessed, preachers may be able to uplift hearts bruised in families separated by failed marriages, by the tensions of living with spouses or parents who are no longer lovers and by the isolation of outliving a beloved spouse. In all situations, faith in the Good News about marriage needs to be announced with conviction.

Today's mass media exerts a strong influence on young people. Much of what is broadcast runs counter to time-honored and sound values. The Church must speak out and highlight the ideals and qualities of Christian marriage. The young especially need to hear the voices of those who know all that marriage can be.

**V. PROXIMATE PREPARATION.** *The opportunity for individual, personal marriage preparation is a responsibility not only of priests and deacons but also of a*

*parish community.* “Pastors...are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the Christian faithful...personal preparation to enter marriage, which disposes the spouses to the holiness and duties of their new state...”

Marriage is an intimate partnership. Every marriage is the union of two unique persons. Every family is composed of never-to-be-duplicated individual personalities. Each marriage and each family is a creative effort on God's part as well as for a husband and wife. To prepare adequately for such an undertaking, engaged partners must come to know one another realistically. The conjugal covenant involves two imperfect individuals making a genuine commitment to give themselves to and to accept one another. Premarital communication inventories such as F.O.C.C.U.S. may help to achieve better mutual self-understanding. In every case the Church's ministers work with each couple individually.

Every couple must challenge any secular ideologies or personal misconceptions that undermine their appreciation of Christian marital commitment. The pastoral ministers and various marriage preparation programs will provide opportunities for engaged partners to explore their own assumptions, share their expectations and claim for one another a truly Christian view of what marriage is.

Key to the marriage preparation process is a couple's willingness to take the time and to do the work that will enrich them spiritually and humanly. Marriage is a life-long process of growth and commitment to a continuing and a supportive relationship in which the partners help each other to develop themselves as fully as possible. “Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill conjugal and family obligations, they are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ...Thus they increasingly advance their own perfection, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God.” (*Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 48, Second Vatican Council, 1965).

It is for this very reason that the **Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation** mandates that engaged couples receive a preparation which both instructs them regarding marriage and their role as ministers of marriage, and also contributes to their human and spiritual for-

---

mation as marriage partners. To adequately fulfill these goals, a year's preparation is directed by the **Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation**. This represents a significant commitment to be made by the couple, the pastoral minister who will be working with them and the married couples in marriage preparation programs.

"Before a marriage is celebrated, it must be evident that nothing stands in the way of its valid and licit celebration" (c. 1066). Pastoral ministers must see that the spirit of this canon is observed. It is important to note that much more is involved in the marriage preparation process itself than simply meeting minimal canonical requirements.

Pastoral ministers who work with the engaged couples exercise a major influence in the lives of these men and women. Their interest in them and willingness to give of themselves are crucial in carrying out their pastoral role in marriage preparation. Pastoral ministers should never underestimate the skills and knowledge that they have acquired through their own experiences in human relationships as well as their personal spiritual formation. The authenticity of their faith can shine out in their efforts to share prayer and ideals with couples whom they prepare for marriage.

**VI. Procedures are established to assure the couples' readiness to exercise their right to marry and to assist everyone in a particular case when the right to marry is questioned. "All persons who are not prohibited by law can contract marriage" (c. 1058). But the right to marry is not absolute and must be weighed against any factors which mitigate that right by challenging readiness of a couple or an individual. ... "In a special case, the local ordinary can prohibit marriage for his own subject...but only for a time, for a grave cause, and for as long as the cause continues" (c. 1077, §1).**

During the course of preparation, the pastoral minister may find that a particular couple is experiencing a significant difficulty or perceive that there is a serious issue that needs to be addressed. Such a situation would require further examination and may involve theological, medical, or psychological consultation. In that case, the pastoral minister will seek advice through whatever *process* has been established in each diocese. Such a referral might take place after professional counseling or may itself be a prelude to the recommendation of such counseling. Occasionally a suspected difficulty may be easily verifiable; for example, one or both of

the parties may be under age 18 or there may be a pregnancy that occurred prior to marriage. But in other cases the problem may be more difficult to pinpoint; for instance, immaturity, marrying to escape an unhappy home situation, excessive parental pressure, undue haste in planning a marriage, lack of commitment to the marriage preparation process or a truly insufficient commitment to the Church's teaching about marriage. In all such situations, it is mandatory that the pastoral minister who is working with a couple to refer the issues for review through the *process* that is in place in the particular diocese where the marriage takes place.

In such circumstances, the pastoral minister will inform the couple that their marriage preparation process may have to be extended. In a gentle and pastoral way, he should try to enable the couple to appreciate the reasons why he is making a referral and urge openness to a more extended preparation if it is the eventual recommendation for them. The pastoral minister should request the consent of the couple to release any information in the referral that may have been obtained from some professional agency.

The *process* seeks to guarantee adequate consultation with experienced persons of good judgment so that a negative evaluation of the couple's readiness for marriage is objective and not based on the whim or prejudice of a controlling individual. It provides opportunity for a couple to avail themselves of counselors who may help them to appreciate aspects of a lifelong commitment they may have overlooked.

Whenever a referral to this *process* is made, the pastoral minister will be clear with a couple that what is occurring is a consultation and not necessarily a conclusion as yet. The Church is not saying to a couple, "You cannot marry!", just because some serious question is under investigation. But, if after the consultation, the decision of the local Ordinary is to prohibit the marriage at least temporarily (c. 1077, §1), the couple should be urged to accept that advice and cooperate with whatever recommendations are offered for further preparation.

If a couple can not be persuaded to postpone their wedding and indicate that they will marry outside of the Church, the minister should not look upon such an attempted marriage as simply the lesser of two evils. If a couple is judged not ready for marriage, the pastoral minister should do all that he can to persuade the couple not to enter any kind of union at that time.

---

The right of any couple or individual to appeal directly to the Bishop as the head of the Catholic community is always guaranteed. The pastoral minister should assist a couple or the individual in making such an appeal.

The **Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation** assists engaged couples to “let the spouses themselves...be joined to one another in equal affection, harmony of mind and the work of mutual sanctification” and helps pastoral ministers and all who work in marriage preparation programs in assisting engaged couples to undertake “the joys and sacrifices of their vocation” so they may “become witnesses of the mystery of that love which the Lord revealed to the world by His dying and His rising to life again.” (*Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 52, Second Vatican Council, 1965).

**VII. IMMEDIATE PREPARATION.** *Marriage preparation includes the active participation by the couple in the wedding ceremony. “Pastors...are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the Christian faithful...a fruitful liturgical celebration of marriage which is to show that the spouses signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church...”*(c. 1063, §3).

The *Rite of Marriage* provides various options for the prayers, the readings and the ceremonies of a wedding liturgy. While marriage preparation is focused more to the lifetime experiences of a couple than to the single event of a wedding, the preparation of a wedding liturgy itself is also an important part of the process. Therefore a parish preparation program for marriage should support the active participation of the couple and their guests in the wedding ritual. The availability of musicians, assisting ministers and a welcoming church environment can only be achieved at the local level and with its own resources.

The pastoral ministers who work with engaged couples need to familiarize them with the *Rite of Marriage* and how they consider the various options for participating. In doing so everyone should keep in mind the perspective of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and its directives for all Masses (352). The pastoral effectiveness of a celebration will be heightened if the texts of readings, prayers, and songs correspond as closely as possible to the needs, religious preparation, and aptitude of the participants, however secular music is not permitted. Secular readings may

not replace scripture and the official texts may not be altered without approval. Choices are to be made in consultation with the pastoral minister.

**VIII. BEYOND THE WEDDING.** *The Church’s interest in married couples does not end with the wedding ceremony. “Pastors...are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the Christian faithful...help to those who are married, so that faithfully preserving and protecting the conjugal covenant, they daily come to lead holier and fuller lives in their families”* (c. 1063, §4).

Programs supportive to married couples have developed in the Church. The Christian Family Movement, Marriage Encounter, Retrouvaille, and parish-based support groups work in various ways to enhance the quality of married couples’ relationships or help couples that have experienced major tensions to rediscover the foundations of their love and commitment. Such efforts are to be commended and supported.

A somewhat newer recognition, however, is the importance of Church support for young couples in the first years of their marriage experience. Progressively, the anonymity of contemporary society often isolates many people from their neighbors and from the communities in which they live. People are highly mobile. Many work in one city, live in a suburb, recreate in other areas and are in touch with family more by telecommunications than by face-to-face contact. Young married couples sometimes have little connection with their parish church even if they regularly practice their religion.

The **Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation** offer suggestions to capitalize on the positive experience of marriage preparation by making contact with a newly married couple in the parish in which they reside. Many blessings can be gained by both the couples themselves and by the parish communities in which they may become actively involved.



# Section I: The Marriage Preparation Process

---

## STAGE ONE: INTRODUCTIONS AND ORIENTATIONS

<i>Marriage Preparation: A Commitment Of Time</i> .....	8
<i>Why Take The Time And Make The Effort?</i>	
<b>A Couple's First Contact With The Parish</b> .....	9
<i>The Importance Of A Welcoming Atmosphere</i>	
<b>Initial Meeting(s) With The Couple</b> .....	10
<i>A Time For Evangelization And Discernment</i>	
<b>Addressing A Couple's Experience And Needs</b> .....	11
<i>Benefits Of A Premarital Inventory</i>	
<b>The Engagement Blessing</b> .....	12
<i>A New Opportunity For Families And Parish</i>	

## STAGE TWO: MARRIAGE CATECHESIS AND FORMATION

<i>Participation In A Shared Preparation Process</i> .....	13
<i>Facilitating Attendance At Marriage Preparation Programs</i>	
<b>The Marriage Preparation Program</b> .....	14
<i>A Church Community Sharing Its Faith, Wisdom And Love</i>	

## STAGE THREE: PASTORAL SESSIONS, WEDDING LITURGY AND BEYOND

<i>Affirmation Of The Couple's Readiness For Marriage</i> .....	15
<i>The Couple Reflects On Their Experience With The Pastoral Minister</i>	
<b>Immediate Plans For The Wedding Liturgy</b> .....	16
<i>Suggested Guidelines For Planning The Wedding Liturgy</i>	
<b>Continuing To Grow, Being Active In Parish Life</b> .....	18
<i>New Ways For The Parish To Build Community</i>	

# *Stage One: Introduction And Orientation*

---

## ***Marriage Preparation: A Commitment Of Time***

**Goals:** To give couples adequate time to prepare for marriage and the wedding celebration.

To provide the pastoral minister and the engaged couple an opportunity to develop a relationship with one another.

**Policy:** *Ideally the marriage preparation process should begin when the engagement is announced even if that is more than a year before the proposed wedding date. Normally the preparation process begins not less than one year before the desired wedding date.*

### ***Discussion:***

- Couples should be encouraged to contact the parish as soon as they become engaged. Many couples initiate wedding plans almost a year and a half to two years in advance. The earlier the couples contact the parish to arrange for a wedding the more beneficial the marriage preparation process may be for them.
- Beginning the marriage preparation process early provides additional opportunities for the couple to assess their individual readiness to marry and sufficient time to go through the three stages of the preparation process.
- If either of the two parties has been previously married, or if there are particular circumstances that require further attention (cf. Section III), additional time may be needed to determine the party's freedom to marry in the Church and/or to address their particular circumstances.
- If the couple should approach the Church for marriage less than a year before the wedding, the process for preparation needs to be honored in a responsible and realistic way. It is expected that the pastoral minister will exercise appropriate pastoral discretion.
- It is strongly recommended that the preparation process be completed at least six weeks prior to the wedding date. This allows the couple those final weeks to focus on personal reflection and their last minute preparations for the wedding.

---

## ***A Couple's First Contact With The Parish***

**Goals:** To reflect Christ's love and the Church's concern for engaged couples by providing a warm and congratulatory welcome.

To recognize that regardless of a couple's active or inactive affiliation with the Church, many are apprehensive about the initial contact and may need encouragement and support.

**Policy:** *The parish staff should facilitate arrangements for the couple to meet with the pastoral minister as soon as possible. A wedding date is not to be entered, even tentatively, into the parish calendar until such a meeting takes place.*

### ***Discussion:***

- The engaged couple initiates the marriage preparation process when they call the parish to inquire about being married in the Church. It is important that the first persons contacted by the couple seeking a Church wedding have the information and skills to assist them in a pastoral manner.
- Experience has shown that some couples have been discouraged, even alienated, by parish personnel merely stating the requirements necessary to celebrate marriage. This can undermine the intent of these guidelines. It is essential therefore to provide training for secretaries and receptionists in terms of attitude, tone of voice and the type of information they give the couple.
- This is a special moment in the lives of the couple and a time when they should be assured of the Church's readiness to be of assistance to them.

---

## *Initial Meeting(s) With The Couple*

**Goals:** To establish a rapport with the couple by communicating an attitude of openness, support and hospitality.

To explain the marriage preparation process.

To provide information about available marriage preparation programs.

To ascertain the couple's canonical and civil eligibility for marriage.

To determine the date for the wedding, if possible.

To nurture the couple's faith by encouraging their spiritual preparation.

**Policy:** *Soon after a couple makes an initial contact with the parish, a meeting should take place with the pastoral minister before they participate in any formal marriage preparation program. There is a real value at this stage of the process for the couple to confer with the pastoral minister who will officiate at the wedding.*

### **Discussion:**

- The marriage preparation process can provide teachable moments for evangelization, particularly for those couples who do not have a strong faith commitment. Therefore, a caring response from the pastoral minister may be an invitation for the couple to take a deeper look at their faith.

- Review and explain the pastoral concerns and commitment of the Church as expressed in the **Pastoral Polices and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation**. The couple's edition of this handbook should be given to the engaged couple to facilitate their understanding of the requirements of the marriage preparation process.

- Explore the motives for marriage and any special circumstances that may affect their marriage, for example: age, cultural background, pregnancy, military service, physical or mental disability, levels of faith development and religious issues. If any impediment or special circumstance

seems to be present, refer to the special circumstances section of these guidelines.

- It is recommended that in the initial session the bride and groom assisted by the pastoral minister complete the biographical portion of the required canonical forms. This may reveal any canonical impediment that would prevent setting a wedding date.

- Instruct the couple in regard to Church and civil documents that will be required.

- ♦ Baptismal Certificates (issued within six months)
- ♦ Affidavits of Freedom to Marry

In the event of a second marriage:

- ♦ A Civil Decree of Divorce
- ♦ An Ecclesiastical Decree of Annulment, or
- ♦ A Death Certificate

- Couples have many questions about the celebration of their wedding. A well-prepared parish fact sheet/booklet can obviate the necessity of repeating the most basic answers about such things as the documents that they will need to obtain, how to make contact with an approved diocesan or parish marriage preparation program, wedding or rehearsal times, parish musicians, fees, and the like.

- The wedding date may be set provided there are no canonical impediments or other special circumstances that might delay the marriage. Pastoral ministers should familiarize themselves with all the special circumstances in Section III and be especially aware of those that may call for a delay in the wedding date.

- The couple should be reminded of the importance of personal prayer and participation in the sacramental life of the Church as they prepare for their marriage. If one of the Catholic parties has not been confirmed he or she should be encouraged to begin preparation for the sacrament although the reception of Confirmation itself is not required prior to marriage. (c. 1065 §1 states, "Catholics who have not yet received the sacrament of Confirmation are to receive it before they are admitted to marriage if it can be done without grave inconvenience".)

- The pastoral minister may discuss the value of a special blessing for the engaged couple (*Cf. Book of Blessings, pp. 96-101 Art. #195*).

---

## ***Addressing A Couple's Experience And Needs***

**Goals:** To assist a couple in assessing their own insights, understanding and mutual communication as part of preparation for Christian marriage.

To address the particular needs of each individual couple by recommending appropriate preparation opportunities and, if necessary, further counseling for special concerns.

**Policy:** *During the initial meeting, or in a subsequent meeting with the couple, the administration of a communications assessment instrument, a premarital inventory, is strongly recommended as an effective way to bring clarity to a couple's individual and shared experience as well as their own hopes for and expectations about marriage.*

*When special circumstances warrant, refer to Section III.*

### ***Discussion:***

- Just as every person is unique, so is each couple unique. Working with people preparing for marriage may offer many insights. But no one couple is an exact copy of another. Each time a couple approaches them, pastoral ministers are invited to become acquainted anew with the mystery of how human love and divine love are working themselves out in a particular way.

- Couples need to understand that they will come to know themselves in new ways. Through one another and in their mutual relationship, they can experience together the joys and sorrows of human love, the destructive influence of selfishness and sin and the uplifting power of genuine self-giving and sharing God's grace.

- The Church encourages the use of premarital communication instruments that can help couples to understand better where they are in their own relationship as they begin their marriage preparations. Results of taking such instruments can also help couples to review the implications for marriage preparation or any special circumstances in which they find themselves.

- The Pontifical Council for the Family, in its document, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, recommends the use of sound pedagogical aids for marriage preparation. Couples might use premarital inventories such as F.O.C.C.U.S. (Facilitating, Open, Couple, Communication, Understanding and Study), the PMI (Premarital Inventory) or PREPARE (Premarital Personal and Relationship Enrichment). Such instruments, interpreted by those trained to do so, can help an engaged couple to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their own relationship and to identify areas of agreement and disagreements both with each other or with Church teachings. Such realizations can lead to further consideration and reflection with one another, with the pastoral minister, and with the committed married couples who will work with them in their preparation experience.

- Premarital Inventories are not psychological tests. "Good results" do not guarantee a successful marriage. "Difficulties uncovered" are not absolute obstacles to continuing marriage preparation. Pastoral ministers should be careful not to "psychologize" or to draw unfounded conclusions. In cases of apparent serious difficulty, the couple and the pastoral minister will wish to consult with experts. The pastoral minister might refer couples to counselors recommended by the Diocese or to others known to be competent in providing counseling about the results of the communication instrument. If it would become necessary for the results of a premarital inventory to be reviewed by someone other than the pastoral minister working with the couple, the couple will be asked to complete a Counselor Release Form, both to provide for the review of the data by an appropriate counselor and to give that counselor permission to share information gleaned during the review process with the pastoral minister.

- Normally, F.O.C.C.U.S., PREPARE or another type of premarital inventory will be taken prior to participation in a diocesan approved program for preparation. In some circumstances, this order may be reversed at the discretion of the pastoral minister and with the couple's agreement. Couples should complete this entire process not less than 6 months before their marriage date.

---

## ***The Engagement Blessing***

**Goals:** To emphasize the importance of this time of discernment and preparation for marriage by invoking God's blessing on the couple.

To provide a ritual through which family and/or the parish community can bless and become involved in the couple's journey of faith in marriage.

**Policy:** *The parish may provide an opportunity for the couple's family and members of the parish community to affirm the couple's decision through an engagement blessing.*

### ***Discussion:***

- The engaged couple can benefit from the prayers and support of their family, friends and parish community during this time of discernment and preparation. It is a special occasion for the family and an opportunity for the parish to provide on-going support while asking God's blessings on the couple's time of preparation.
- The Engagement Blessing presents an opportunity for the couple to hear the Church's prayer . . . "that as they await the day of their wedding, God will help them grow in mutual respect and love for one another . . ." (*Cf. Book of Blessings, Art. #202*). It is not a public commitment to marriage nor a celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage itself.
- The blessing may be offered by the parents, pastoral minister or a lay minister. If this is not offered by the pastoral minister, the parents of the couple may offer this blessing at a family gathering (*Cf. Book of Blessings, Art. #197*).
- The special blessing of an engaged couple is never to be combined with the celebration of Mass (*Cf. Book of Blessings, Art. #198*).
- A copy of the Engagement Blessing is in the Couple's Guide. Eastern Catholics have their own engagement ceremony.

# *Stage Two: Marriage Catechesis and Formation*

---

## ***Participation In A Shared Preparation Process***

**Goal:** To facilitate the engaged couple's participation in a formational process of marriage preparation offered by the Church community.

**Policy:** *A variety of diocesan or parish sponsored preparation programs are to be available for couples.*

### ***Discussion:***

- All couples are to be prepared by the Church for marriage.
- The occupational demands made on their time and their residential geographical locations require that they be offered reasonable options when informed of their required participation in a marriage preparation program.
- Although convenient for most, couples are not to be restricted to programs offered in their parish or diocese.
- The type of marriage preparation programs currently available within the Province are:
  - ◆ Engaged Encounter Weekends
  - ◆ Marriage Preparation/Pre-Cana Sessions
  - ◆ Other appropriate parish-based marriage preparation programs approved by the diocese.
- Ecumenical, Interreligious and Second Marriage Programs  
Ecumenical, Interreligious and Second Marriage preparation programs should be available to meet the special needs of these couples.

---

## ***Marriage Preparation Programs***

**Goal:** To provide trained married couples for service in marriage preparation ministry (i.e. Engaged Encounter, Pre-Cana).

**Policy:** *Pastors are to recruit and, with the assistance of diocesan family life offices, train validly married couples competent and willing to help engaged couples prepare for Christian marriage. The selection of married team couples should reflect the diversity of engaged couples in terms of age, cultural heritage and faith tradition.*

### ***Discussion:***

- By Baptism all members of the Church are called to build up the Body of Christ.

- If marriage preparation in all its phases should be the concern of the entire Christian community (*Cf. Familiaris Consortio* and *Faithful to Each Other*) certainly married couples should have an important role in the immediate preparation of the engaged.

- In recruiting and training married couples for marriage preparation ministry, it is important that they be properly trained with due regard for the teachings of the Church on Christian marriage (*Cf. #43 Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, Pontifical Council on the Family.*)

- Experience has proven the value of the witness of married couples, who live their vocation in light of the Gospel, in preparing couples for marriage. When married couples speak out of their own conviction and from personal experiences about God, Church, love, commitment, sacrifice, forgiveness, prayer, stewardship and service, they offer a powerful witness.

- Married couples who serve in this capacity find that their encounter with the engaged enriches and strengthens their own marriages. Pastoral wisdom warrants that these successfully married couples should form the core of a marriage preparation team.

- Toward this end marriage preparation programs will strive to make ample time and space for the engaged couple's reflection and discussion, and for dialogue with those serving on marriage preparation teams. It is important to encourage the couple's on-going dialogue throughout the marriage preparation process.



## *Stage Three: Pastoral Sessions, Wedding Liturgy & Beyond*

---

### ***Affirmation Of The Couple's Readiness For Marriage***

**Goal:** To affirm the readiness of the couple for Christian marriage.

**Policy:** *Following their participation in a marriage preparation program, the couple will meet with the pastoral minister as soon as it is convenient. Once sufficient readiness for marriage is affirmed the liturgical planning may take place.*

#### ***Discussion:***

- Since there are a variety of pre-marital programs available it is essential that the pastoral minister is assured that the couple understands the sacramental dimension of marriage.

- Discuss the engaged couple's response to the interest, care, and the time given by the married couples helping them.

- The married couple's evident happiness, example of faith in God, commitment to one another and loyalty to the Church may tremendously influence the engaged couple. How was this expressed in the engaged couple's experience? Did it give them strong hope for their own future? Did it inspire them now to become reconciled with the Church or to participate more in its life?

- It is important to help the couple reflect on any serious or unresolved issues and concerns, any value and effect that the faith of the parish community had upon them during their preparation, and what they have learned about themselves, the parish, the Church, and Marriage. This is the time to ask, "What else needs to be covered/discussed?" before preparing for the wedding liturgy. This time should be used to encourage the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

- Completion of pre-nuptial documentation should take place at this meeting.

- Review the substantive questions regarding marital commitment.

- Collect any outstanding documents and/or witness forms.

- Complete the pre-nuptial documentation with the couple.

- If the couple is unfamiliar with liturgical ritual this can be another occasion for uncertainty and anxiety. The couple can be reassured by the pastoral minister if the liturgical planning resources for their wedding liturgy are given and explained to them at this time. (*Cf. Immediate Plans for the Wedding Liturgy, p. 16 of this manual*).

---

## ***Immediate Plans For the Wedding Liturgy***

**Goals:** To assist couples in the planning of their wedding liturgy so that the celebration expresses and deepens their faith and experience of the mystery of God's love in their marriage.

To provide information and resources to an engaged couple in order to enhance their understanding of the rite of marriage and provide guidance as they begin the process of personally selecting those prayers and scripture readings which reflect their loving relationship and individuality as a couple.

**Policy:** *In liturgical preparation, the pastoral minister will assist the engaged couple in planning a celebration that is "simple and dignified", according to the norms of the competent authorities of the Church" (Familiaris Consortio, #67). Since Christian marriage is a sacramental action of the Church, "the liturgical celebration of marriage should involve the Christian community, with full, active and responsible participation of all those present, according to the place and task of each individual" (Familiaris Consortio, #67). The celebration of a Nuptial Mass is most appropriate for a couple who are both practicing Catholics.*

*Planning a Nuptial Ceremony (outside of Mass) would be an appropriate choice for a couple who reflect differing faith traditions. Consult diocesan guidelines for the celebration of interchurch and interfaith marriages.*

### ***Discussion:***

- In planning the wedding liturgy, the couple should be offered the assistance of a musician, pastoral minister, sponsor couple or a parish member who is trained in liturgical planning and familiar with the local church's interior appointments and design.

- Such help may be invaluable in a discussion of all aspects and choices for their wedding liturgy, with due consideration given to the rubrics contained within the Catholic Rite of Marriage, parish policies and local guidelines.

- The wedding ceremony should reflect the distinctive quality of Christian faith, with special attention given to the celebration of the Word, the exchange of vows by the couple promising to live together in loving trust and fidelity, and the nuptial blessing.

- It is also possible for the planners, in accordance with concrete circumstances of time and place, "to include in the liturgical celebration such elements proper to each culture which serve to express more clearly the profound human and religious significance of the marriage contract, provided that such elements are in harmony with Christian faith and morality" (*Familiaris Consortio*, #67). Care and prudent consideration will determine what can be fittingly introduced from the traditions and cultures of individual people, without conflicting with the theological meaning of the wedding ceremony.

- The preparation of a brochure highlighting local marriage guidelines, procedures for contacting parish music ministers and offering a rationale for selecting appropriate music for wedding liturgies would be most helpful and could be shared with the couple at this time. Books such as [Together for Life](#) and [Marriage is for Keeps](#) are examples of resources available for couples' use in selecting the scriptures and reviewing the elements of the marriage rite.

- If a visiting pastoral minister is to officiate the wedding, a copy of the parish marriage guidelines should be sent to him well in advance of the wedding date.

- Couples planning weddings during the seasons of Advent and Lent should be advised of the special nature of these liturgical seasons and plan accordingly (e.g. selections of appropriate music and antiphons; limitations on choice of text for readings at Nuptial Masses, decoration of the worship environment reflective of the season).

- Details of the completed wedding liturgy should be reviewed by the officiant prior to the rehearsal.

### ***The Rehearsal***

- Set a date and time for the rehearsal. It is further encouraged that the clergy (or designate) provide a prayerful introduction to the rehearsal, which often has a calming effect upon those present, and encourages their reflective participation and cooperation.

---

- This is often the first opportunity for some members of the family and bridal party to meet. The engaged couple is encouraged to make the appropriate introductions of parents and family members to the witnessing clergy or person(s) designated to conduct the rehearsal.

- It is recommended that the civil marriage license be presented at that time as well as the wedding program booklets (if applicable).

- It is important that anyone who is participating in a special way in the liturgy (e.g. gift bearers, altar servers or especially those proclaiming the scripture readings) be present at the rehearsal in order to familiarize themselves with the church's layout and to receive instructions appropriate to their role in the wedding liturgy.

- The engaged couple should be encouraged to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation in advance of the wedding day. Announcing the availability of the Sacrament of Reconciliation following the rehearsal often affords the bride, groom and others a privileged opportunity to receive the grace of the sacrament and to deepen their awareness of the sacred character of their soon to be created marriage covenant.

---

## ***Continuing To Grow, Being Active In Parish Life***

**Goals:** To develop a process for introducing newly-married couples in a personal way to the parish community in which they will be residing after their wedding.

To overcome the phenomenon of isolation from parish life which often marks the early years of marriage before the birth and schooling of children necessitate that a young couple reach out to their local parish.

To enhance the opportunity for young couples to become active with their local parish so that regular Church practice becomes a “natural part” of their own newly-developing relationship as husband and wife.

**Policy:** *It is recommended that the pastoral minister who has prepared the couple for marriage will send an introductory “referral card” to the parish where the couple expects to reside after their marriage. (Cf. Sample Card, p. 17)*

### ***Discussion:***

- During their period of preparation for marriage, couples often develop a positive relationship with the pastoral minister and the married couples or other ministers who work with them. Those previously estranged are encouraged to practice the Faith by prayer and regular attendance at Sunday Mass. Their Marriage Preparation experience established a living connection to the parish church.

- After their marriage many married couples establish their homes in other localities. In a sense they become strangers to the Church in their new parish. For young couples who continue to live in the parish where they were married, their own new way of life as married adults can make for a different relationship with the local parish even if it is the place where they grew up.

- Married parishioners can help young couples fit into their new role. By reaching out to them, engaging them in discussion, encouraging their active participation and showing them hospitality, married parishioners can help those

newly-married to feel at home in their “new status” and in the parish instead of being anonymous parishioners until they present their first baby for Baptism.

- A referral card can be used as a way of “introducing” the couple to their new parish if they are not residing in the parish in which they were married. The bride and groom should complete this card at their wedding rehearsal or shortly beforehand. It is recommended that the pastoral minister who has prepared the couple for marriage mail the card in an envelope addressed to the pastor of the parish where the couple will be moving. Without much additional effort, copies of the card could be sent to pastors of parishes known to be in the immediate area of where the couple plan to reside. It is hoped that this strategy may succeed in alerting vigilant pastors and pastoral ministers to make note of addresses which fall within their parish territorial lines. It is expected that every parish will be eager to welcome these recently married couples into their faith community.

- An important ingredient in this welcoming process is human contact with the Church during this important transition in the new couple’s life. Given this highly mobile society, couples may actually know no one when they first arrive in a new town. For their new parish community to reach out in welcome to them could be exactly what is needed to encourage their continuing close relationship with the Church that began with their marriage preparation.

- Parishes might provide an opportunity to welcome newly married couples.

- The important thing is to make the recently married couple feel welcome and to invite them to get involved. They could learn about parish activities and make known their own talents and interest to parish leadership. It would be a chance to explain how to get involved in sharing their time and talent in their new parish community.

---

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ ,

For many months you have worked with our parish in preparation for your upcoming wedding. You have experienced some of the blessings which the Catholic Church community has to offer. We hope that, after your marriage celebration, you will continue to nurture your faith with daily prayer, keep up your commitment to faithful attendance at Sunday Mass and become engaged in parish life where you will be living.

We will write the pastor of the parish in which you will be living to let him know of your conscientious preparation for Christian marriage and that you will be moving into town. We ask, therefore, that you please complete the following information to help us introduce you to your new parish.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(Husband) (Wife) (Surname)

Future Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

New Telephone # \_\_ (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ (if known)

The date that you expect to take up residence in your new home is:

\_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_

Name of the local Catholic Church \_\_\_\_\_  
(if known)

*(The reverse side of the card reads:)*

Dear Pastor,

I write to inform you that the couple whose names and address are on the reverse side were married at \_\_\_\_\_ Church in \_\_\_\_\_, New Jersey on \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_. From what we can determine, yours is the nearest Catholic parish for them.

Our parish has worked with them in preparation of the Sacrament of Marriage. We ask that you please take the opportunity to welcome them to your parish community, or, if necessary, refer them to another parish.

Thank you for your continuing involvement in their journey of faith.

Rev. \_\_\_\_\_  
Pastor

## *Section II: Particular Ecclesial Situations in Marriage Preparation*

---

<b>Introduction</b> .....	21
<b>Marriage Of Catholics Of Different Churches “<i>Sui Iuris</i>”</b> .....	21
<b>Ecumenical Marriage With Other Baptized Christians</b> .....	23
<i>Catholics And Orthodox Or Eastern Christians</i>	
<i>Catholics And Other Christians</i>	
<b>Interfaith Marriage With Non-Baptized Persons</b> .....	25
<i>Catholics And Non-Baptized Christians</i>	
<i>Catholics And Jews Or Muslims</i>	
<i>Catholics And Other Non-Baptized Persons</i>	
<b>Marriage Of A Catholic Or Catholics Not Practicing Their Faith</b> .....	26
<i>Practicing Catholic And Non-Practicing Catholic</i>	
<i>Two Non-Practicing Catholics</i>	
<i>Two Baptized Non-Believers</i>	
<b>The Possibilities For Marriage Ceremonies</b> .....	28
<i>Marriage Of Catholics With Persons Who Are Not Catholic</i>	
<b>Mixed Marriage Dispensations Or Permissions</b> .....	30

---

## ***Introduction To Particular Ecclesial Situations In Marriage Preparation***

This section of the *Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation* deals with particular concerns for the celebration of marriage which arise from different religious or church-related backgrounds on the part of individuals or couples either in respect to church membership or the practice of their own religion. In this regard, four related ecclesial aspects can be considered.

### ***Marriage Of Catholics Belonging To Different Churches “Sui Iuris”***

**Goals:** To alert pastoral ministers to canonical issues which pertain to the validity of marriage celebrations between Catholics of different Churches “sui iuris” (commonly referred to as “Rites”).

To assist couples entering so-called “Mixed Rite” marriages to understand and appreciate the patrimony of their respective Churches “sui iuris” in order that the parties can share the diversity of religious traditions while enjoying the deep unity of a common Catholic Faith.

**Guideline:**

**The Church recognizes the legitimacy and fundamental equality of the Churches “sui iuris” or “Rites”. The rites of the Eastern Churches are to be preserved and fostered because they are constitutive elements in the patrimony of the Catholic Church. Pastoral ministers are to encourage the parties to observe their own rite faithfully, to acquire a deeper understanding and a more perfect practice of it. Religious freedom, however, must also be respected.**

**“Every family has the right freely to organize its own religious life in the home under the control of the parents. They have the right to decide in accordance with their own religious beliefs the form of religious upbringing which is to be given to their children”** (*Declaration on Religious Liberty, I, 5, Second Vatican Council, 1965*).

*Pastoral ministers will therefore make every effort to assist parties entering “Mixed Rite” marriages in the early organization of their family life while at the same time not inducing either or both of the parties to transfer to another Church “sui iuris”.*

**Discussion:**

- A group of Christian faithful united by a hierarchy according to the norm of law which the Church recognizes as “sui iuris” is called a Church “sui iuris”.
- A rite is the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, culture and circumstances of history of a distinct people, by which its own manner of living the faith is manifested in each Church “sui iuris”.
- The Eastern rites of the Catholic Church are those which arise from the Alexandrian, Antiochene, Armenian, Chaldean and Constantinopolitan traditions. These rites are manifested in the eparchies/dioceses of the Armenian, Syriac, Syro-Malabar, Maronite, Byzantine-Ruthenian, Byzantine-Melkite, Byzantine-Ukrainian, Byzantine-Romanian Churches, “sui iuris” with parishes in the State of New Jersey. Other Eastern Catholics (e.g. Coptic, Malankarese) are presently assigned to the spiritual care of the local bishop of the Latin Church “sui iuris”.
- The marriage of Catholics canonically enrolled in the Eastern Catholic Churches “sui iuris” is governed by the prescriptions of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*.
- At the time of the initial meeting with the couple the pastoral minister will request recent baptismal certificates from the bride and groom in order to determine the correct canonical enrollments of the parties. Careful review of the information received must be made by the pastor or parish priest. Reception of the sacraments (e.g. Baptism or reception of Holy Communion) in another Church “sui iuris” does not necessarily entail enrollment in that Church.
- Dispensations from canonical impediments, permissions and delegations are obtained by forwarding the application together with copies of the other canonical forms and documentation to one’s own chancery for review and presentation to the proper local Ordinary.

---

• The *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* directs that marriages are to be celebrated before the pastor of the groom unless a just cause excuses. Whenever possible pastoral ministers will also discuss the requested change with the pastor of the groom in order to clarify the reasons and confirm that a just cause excuses. The proper local Ordinary may permit an exception.

• Requests for permissions, delegations, etc. should also explain why a member of any Church “sui iuris” is requesting to celebrate marriage outside the canonically assigned church “sui iuris”. For example, the person may have been canonically enrolled in his or her father’s “Rite” but raised entirely in the “Rite” of his or her mother. This fact would constitute a “just cause” which the law requires. The proximity of a parish of the proper Church “sui iuris” could also be a problem. Or, a party may be thoroughly “Americanized” and unable to “fit in” to his or her parish of the proper Church “sui iuris” because of its strong ethnicity and the lack of services in the English language. Such mitigating factors are to be taken into consideration and duly noted when a petition is presented by the pastoral minister.

• For a priest of one Church “sui iuris” to assist and to bless the marriage of two Catholics of another Church “sui iuris”; or, a Catholic of another Church “sui iuris” and a non-Catholic, whether baptized or unbaptized, it is necessary for validity that the priest be expressly and specifically delegated by the proper local Ordinary or proper pastor of the other Church “sui iuris”.

• A deacon cannot be delegated the faculty to assist and bless the marriage of two Eastern Catholics, a Latin Catholic with an Eastern Catholic or an Eastern Catholic with a non-Catholic.

• At the celebration of or during the marriage, the wife is at liberty to transfer to the Church “sui iuris” of the husband. If the marriage ends (i.e. through the death of a spouse, etc.) she can freely return to the original Church “sui iuris”.

• At the celebration of or during the marriage, a husband enrolled in the Latin Church “sui iuris” is at liberty to transfer to the Church “sui iuris” of his wife. When the marriage has ended, he can freely return to the original Church “sui iuris”.

• Children born to parents enrolled in different Churches “sui iuris” are enrolled by virtue of baptism in the Church “sui iuris” of the father; or the Church “sui iuris” of the mother if only the mother is Catholic or if both parents by agreement freely request to have their children enrolled in the mother’s Church “sui iuris”. Notation of the agreement must be made in the parish baptism register.



---

## ***Marriage Of A Catholic To Another Christian***

**Goal:** To help the Catholic party to appreciate the significance of his or her own faith and religious practice as well as to help the couple see how their shared religious convictions and values can contribute to their life as a married couple as well as to the religious formation of their children.

**Guideline:**

***The pastoral minister works with a couple to help them understand how a Catholic is expected to express commitment to Catholic faith and practice while at the same time encouraging them to appreciate how their shared faith in Jesus Christ, their living out Gospel values and their active participation in the life of the Church can enhance their marriage and family life. Within this context, the pastoral minister will help a couple to face the challenges posed by their respective and differing religious traditions and convictions honestly and constructively.***

**Discussion:**

- The pastoral minister should realize that a couple from different Christian backgrounds may approach the Catholic Church with certain anxiety about how they will be received. The minister should be sensitive to their concerns about how they will be treated when planning a “religiously mixed” marriage.
- The pastoral minister should take into account the actual spiritual condition of each person, their past formation in faith as well as their present religious practice and should respect circumstances particular to a couple, the consciences of each partner and the holiness of the status of marriage itself (Cf. *Ecumenical Directory*, 146).
- The Catholic party as well as his or her intended spouse need to appreciate that the Catholic person’s professed faith is the reason for the Catholic Church’s involvement in their marriage preparation, wedding and future life. The Catholic partner is required to make his or her affirmation of Catho-

lic faith and practice and affirm a personal intention to do all that is in one’s power to share the Catholic faith with children born to the marriage by having them baptized and raised as Catholics. The other partner to the marriage does not need to agree with this commitment but must be aware that the Catholic partner has made such an affirmation. The church recognizes that the non-catholic party may feel a similar obligation to his or her religious commitment (Cf. *Ecumenical Directory*, 150).

- There is a real advantage in the couple discussing their individual beliefs, religious backgrounds and spiritual values. By exploring how these traditions can be shared in their family circle, spiritual values can be integrated in their marriage and family life. The emphasis should be “on the positive aspects of what a couple shares together as Christians in the life of grace, in faith, hope and love, along with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each person should continue to be faithful to his or her distinct Christian commitment and the practice of it but should seek to foster all that can lead to unity and harmony, without minimizing real differences and while avoiding an attitude of indifference” (*Ecumenical Directory*, 148).

- “Religiously mixed marriages, despite their particular difficulties, contain numerous elements that can develop their intrinsic value and contribute to the ecumenical movement when both parties are faithful to their religious duties. Their common Baptism and the dynamism of grace provide the spouses with a basis and motivation for expressing unity in the sphere of moral and spiritual values” (*Ecumenical Directory*, 145). The couple’s effort to understand their individual religious and ecclesial traditions and their serious consideration of the differences that exist can lead to greater honesty, charity and understanding of these realities and also of the marriage itself.

- Basic marital catechesis as summarized in the ecumenical “Declaration of Marriage” (in collaboration with the NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family Life) should be reinforced:

- ♦ “A marriage is a holy union of a man and a woman in which they commit with God’s help to build a loving, life-giving and faithful relationship that will last for a lifetime” (Cf. *Christian Declaration on Marriage*, Nov. 2000).

---

♦ “God has established the marriage state in the order of creation and redemption for spouses to grow with love for one another and for procreation, nurture, formation and education of children” (*Christian Declaration on Marriage, Nov. 2000*).

♦ “In marriage many principles of the Kingdom of God are manifested. The inter-dependence of healthy community is clearly exemplified in loving one another (*John 13:34*), forgiving one another (*Eph. 5:21*) confessing to one another (*James 5:16*), and submitting to one another (*Eph. 5:21*). These principles find unique fulfillment in marriage” (*Christian Declaration on Marriage, Nov. 2000*).

♦ “Marriage is God’s gift, a living image of the union between Christ and His Church and thus, in the Catholic understanding, a sacrament” (*Cf. Christian Declaration on Marriage, Nov. 2000*).

• Both parties should learn more about their partner’s religious convictions and the teaching and religious practice of the Church to which he or she belongs. A Catholic partner may find this experience a practical reason to purchase and study the 1997 edition of the **Catechism of the Catholic Church**.

• The couple should be reminded that prayer together is essential for their spiritual harmony and that reading and study of Sacred Scripture is especially important.

---

## ***Marriage Of A Catholic To A Non-baptized Person***

**Goal:** To help the Catholic party to appreciate the significance of his or her own faith and religious practice as well as to alert the couple to discover how differing religious convictions and values may affect their lives as a married couple and influence the religious formation of children.

**Guideline:**

*The pastoral minister helps a couple to understand how a Catholic is expected to express commitment to Catholic faith and practice while at the same time encouraging both of them to be informed about and respectful of the religious traditions and values of his or her future spouse (or the lack of such traditions for a person who has no religious belief as such). Within that context, the pastoral minister will help a couple to face honestly and constructively the challenges posed by their respective and differing religious traditions and convictions.*

**Discussion:**

The Catholic partner should appreciate that his or her own practice of the Catholic faith can contribute positively to their marriage and their family life together when he or she lives the faith in a way that is sensitive to the partner's concerns.

- The Church teaches: "all peoples comprise a single community, and have a single origin, since God made the whole human race dwell over the entire face of the earth. One also is the final goal: God, whose providence, manifestations of goodness and saving designs extend to all" (*Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Documents of Vatican Council II, p 660-661*).

- In a marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized Christian, emphasis should be placed on any convictions or implicit assumptions of the non-Catholic's belief that may be common to both.

- ♦ Some non-baptized persons consider themselves to be Christians whether or not they are church-goers. If such persons were disposed, they might be invited to learn

more about the Christian assumptions of their intended Catholic partner by attending Mass together.

- ♦ Christians, Jews and Muslims all profess a belief in the one true God of Abraham. Efforts at understanding may bring forth common values.

- ♦ In the case of individuals with other beliefs and even persons who profess no faith, the pastoral minister should encourage the couple to explore together what vision of life they share and cherished values they hold.

- There is a real advantage in the couple discussing their beliefs, religious backgrounds and spiritual values. It is also advantageous for the couple to explore how these traditions can be shared in their family circle and how spiritual values can be integrated in their marriage and family lives.

- The Catholic party as well as his or her intended spouse need to appreciate that the Catholic person's professed faith is the reason for the Catholic Church's involvement in their marriage preparation, wedding and future life. The Catholic partner is required to make his or her affirmation of Catholic faith and practice and affirm a personal intention to do all that is in one's power to share the Catholic faith with children born to the marriage by having them baptized and raised as Catholics. The other partner to the marriage does not need to agree with this commitment but must be aware that the Catholic partner has made such an affirmation. The Church recognizes that the non-Catholic party may feel a similar obligation to his or her religious commitment (*Cf. Ecumenical Directory, 150*).

- The pastoral minister will encourage the couple to discuss before the wedding, the matters of Catholic baptism and formation of the children. The Catholic party's living witness of the Gospel values in their marriage is the most effective way to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

---

## ***Marriage Of A Catholic Or Catholics Not Practicing Their Faith***

**Goal:** To foster a desire in the couple to deepen their personal faith in God, to bond closer with the Catholic Church community and to appreciate the positive impact their participation will have on their marriage.

**Guideline:**

***When a couple approaches the Church for marriage, it is important that the pastoral minister encourage their renewed participation in Church life; or at least, to nurture a more informed faith by building on the roots of their Catholic faith.***

**Discussion:**

- If one of the partners is a practicing Catholic, the pastoral minister will try to help the Catholic appreciate the significance of his or her own faith and religious practice and will try to help the couple see how Church practice and shared religious values can contribute to their life as a married couple and to the religious formation of their children.

- If neither partner is very committed to the practice of the Catholic faith, the pastoral minister will seek to renew within one or both an understanding of the value of a Catholic's commitment to faith, religious practice and appreciation of how Jesus Christ can enhance their marriage and family life. It can be important to explore the reason, perhaps painful, why people are not active Catholics. The pastoral minister can help a couple to face honestly and constructively problems posed by indifference to their religious tradition and a lack of conviction.

- Since a pastoral minister is concerned about the authenticity of faith in those persons who present themselves for marriage, the perspective offered by Pope John Paul II is to be kept in mind. In the preparation for the sacrament very special attention must be devoted to the moral and spiritual dispositions of those being married, in particular their faith. We must deal here with the not too infrequent difficulty in which the pastors of the Church can find themselves in the context of our secularized society.

In the Apostolic Exhortation, **The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World**, in a section entitled, “Cele-

## **bration of Marriage and Evangelization of Non-believing Baptized Persons,”** Pope John Paul II wrote:

“In fact, the faith of the person asking the Church for marriage can exist in different degrees, and it is the primary duty of 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 to admit to the celebration of marriage, those who are imperfectly disposed” 68.

- Encouraging dialogue with them may lead a couple to a better understanding of the short and long term effects of religious participation on their marriage and family life. The minister can reflect on the benefits of Sunday worship; he can invite them to participate in adult education opportunities that familiarize people with the life of the Church, and he might utilize a faith inventory that will help them explore their faith.

John Paul II continues,

“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 a 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 of profound obedience to the will of God, an attitude which cannot exist without God’s grace. They have thus already begun what is in a true and proper sense a journey towards 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 intention.”

“On the other hand, it is true that in some places engaged couples ask to be married in the Church for motives which are social rather than genuinely religious. This is not surprising. Marriage, in fact, is not an event that concerns only the persons actually getting married. By its very nature it is also a social matter, committing the couple being mar-

---

ried in the eyes of society. And its celebration has always been an occasion of rejoicing that brings families and friends together. It therefore goes without saying that social as well as personal motives enter into the request to be married in the Church.”

“Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that these 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 is not enough to justify refusal on the part of pastors... “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 celebration of marriage... it is not the Church that is placing an obstacle in the way of the celebration that they are asking for, but themselves.”

- If one of the parties notoriously rejects the faith but the other party makes an affirmation of faith (and renewed) practice and declares the intention to share the Catholic faith with children born to the marriage by having them baptized and raised as Catholics, the permission for this marriage should simply be sought as in a mixed religion marriage. Otherwise, except in case of necessity, the pastoral minister should seek the permission of the diocesan bishop to witness the marriage. When neither party could be induced to make an affirmation of faith and practice, and, a couple’s rejection of the Catholic faith is notorious, that is, their abandonment is so publicly known that it can in no way be concealed or legally excused, no one is to assist at the celebration of marriage without the permission of the local ordinary, except in case of necessity (c. 1071, 4°).

---

## ***The Possibilities For Marriage Ceremonies For Marriages of Catholics With Persons Who Are Not Catholic***

**Goal:** To help the pastoral minister to understand the requirements of the Catholic Church about the obligation of being married properly and the circumstances in which there might be a situation that would be the exception to such norm for the lawful and valid celebration of marriage.

**Policy:** *The pastoral minister is to make a couple aware of the requirements of the Church for the lawful and valid celebration of the marriage ceremony and, if the situation warrants, to present to the local Ordinary whatever might be sufficiently motivating causes justifying consideration of an exception.*

**Discussion:**

- The *Code of Canon Law* for the Latin Church requires that, outside of exceptional circumstances, a Catholic marry in the presence of a duly delegated priest, deacon or lay minister. The *Code of Canon of the Eastern Churches*, however, requires that, outside of exceptional circumstances, a Catholic marry according to the requisite ceremony with the sacramental blessing – constitutive of marriage – of a duly ordained priest.

- As an exception, however, when they are otherwise free to marry, a Catholic and an Eastern non-Catholic Christian who marry before a duly-ordained Eastern non-Catholic priest are presumed to have done so validly whether or not they sought the permission needed to do so lawfully.

- When marrying a person of some other tradition, the Church expects that the celebration of marriage will take place in a Catholic Church. But in some circumstances, the diocesan bishop of the Catholic party may be requested to provide that the marriage may take place in a Church that has a particular importance to the other spouse, before that person's minister or to take into consideration special sensitivities and concerns of the other family. A dispensation of this kind, nevertheless, is only granted when all of the other prerequisites of marriage preparation have been fulfilled.

“The local ordinary of the Catholic partner, after having consulted the local ordinary of the place where the marriage will be celebrated, may for grave reasons and without prejudice to the law of the Eastern Churches dispense the Catholic partner from the observance of the canonical form of marriage. Among these reasons for dispensation may be considered the maintaining of family harmony, obtaining parental consent of the marriage, the recognition of the particular religious commitment of the non-Catholic partner or his/her blood relationship with a minister of another church or ecclesial community” (*Ecumenical Directory*, 154).

“If the wedding is celebrated with a dispensation from canonical form, some public form of celebration is still required for validity. To emphasize the unity of marriage, it is not permitted to have two separate religious services in which the exchange of marriage consent would be expressed twice, or even one service which would celebrate two such exchanges of consent jointly or successively” (*Ecumenical Directory*, 156).

“With the previous authorization of the local ordinary, and if invited to do so, a Catholic priest or deacon may attend or participate in some way in the celebration of mixed marriages in situations where the dispensation from canonical form is granted. In these cases, there may be only one ceremony in which the presiding person receives the marriage vows. At the invitation of this celebrant, the Catholic priest or deacon may offer other appropriate prayers, read from the Scriptures give a brief exhortation and bless the couple” (*Ecumenical Directory*, 157).

“Upon the request of the couple, the Catholic priest may invite the minister of the party of the other church or ecclesial community to participate in the celebration of the marriage, to read from the Scriptures, give a brief exhortation and bless the couple” (*Ecumenical Directory*, 158).

“Because of problems concerning eucharistic sharing which may arise from the presence of non-Catholic witnesses and guests, a mixed marriage

---

celebrated according to the Catholic form ordinarily takes place outside the eucharistic liturgy. For a just cause, however, the diocesan bishop may permit the celebration of the Eucharist. In the latter case, the decision as to whether the non-Catholic party of the marriage may be admitted to Eucharistic Communion is to be made in keeping with the general norms existing in the matter for Eastern Christians and for other Christians, taking into account the particular situation of the sacrament of Christian marriage by two baptized Christians” (*Ecumenical Directory*, 159).

“Although the spouses in a mixed marriage share the sacraments of baptism and marriage, eucharistic sharing can only be exceptional and in each case the norms stated above concerning the admission of a non-Catholic Christian to eucharistic communion, as well as those concerning the participation of a Catholic in eucharistic communion in another church, must be observed” (*Ecumenical Directory*, 160).

When marrying a person who is not a baptized Christian, the Church expects that the celebration of the marriage will take place in a Catholic Church. In some circumstances, however, the marriage ceremony may take place outside of a church. Moreover, if it is especially important to a spouse of some other religion or to that person’s family, the Bishop of the Catholic party may be requested to provide that the marriage ceremony may take place before a religious official of that person’s persuasion. A dispensation of this kind, nevertheless, is only granted when all of the other prerequisites of marriage preparation have been fulfilled.

The *Rite for Celebrating Marriage Between a Catholic and an Unbaptized Person* provides that the blessing and exchange of rings and its accompanying recitations of the Trinitarian formula may be omitted.

---

## ***Mixed Marriage Dispensation Or Permission***

**Goal:** To help the pastoral minister to understand the requirements in petitioning any marriage dispensations or permissions which may be needed in order for a particular couple to have their marriage lawfully and validly celebrated.

**Policy:** *The pastoral minister is responsible for identifying the proper diocesan bishop from whom any dispensation or permission is to be sought, explaining what dispensation or permission is needed in the manner prescribed by that diocesan bishop and providing the necessary facts as well as reasons in support of a dispensation or permission.*

### ***Discussion:***

• In all instances, for validity, any **dispensations from impediments are to be properly obtained:** namely, insufficient age (*CIC 1083, CCEC 800*); disparity of worship (*CIC 1086, CCEC 803*); sacred orders (*CIC 1087, CCEC 804*); vow of chastity (*CIC 1088, CCEC 805*); abduction (*CIC 1089, CCEC 806*); crime (*CIC 1090, CCEC 807*); consanguinity (*CIC 1091, CCEC 808*); affinity (*CIC 1092, CCEC 809*); public propriety (*CIC 1093, CCEC 810*); spiritual relation (*CCEC 811*) or legal adoption (*CIC 1094, CCEC 812*) and any **permissions needed for lawfulness are to be secured;** namely, mixed marriages (*CIC 1124, CCEC 813*) and marriages of persons who are transients, marriages which can not be recognized in civil law, marriages of persons with natural obligations to a third party or to children, marriages of minors if the parents are unaware or opposed, marriages of persons forbidden by a juridical sentence to enter a new marriage and marriages of persons who have publicly rejected the Catholic faith (*CIC 1071, CCEC 789*) or marriages by proxy or for a person who is under an ecclesiastical censure (*CIC 1071*).

• For a marriage involving **Catholics of different Churches sui iuris**, the minister who witnesses the marriage must have canonical jurisdiction over at least one of the Catholics or be properly delegated by the diocesan bishop and have any necessary permission to witness the marriage ac-

ording to his own Rite of Marriage.

• For **ecumenical marriages** between a Catholic and a baptized person who belongs to another Church or ecclesial community, the mixed religion affirmations must be made by the Catholic party and the non-Catholic party must be aware of that fact (*CIC 1125, CCEO 814*) and permission of the proper diocesan bishop must be obtained.

• For **inter-faith marriages** between a Catholic and a person who is not baptized the mixed religion affirmations must be made by the Catholic party and the non-Catholic party must be aware of that fact (*CIC 1125, CCEO 814*) and the dispensation from disparity of worship by the proper diocesan bishop must be obtained.

• For marriages involving a **Catholic or Catholics not practicing the faith**, the practice is to secure the equivalent of the mixed religion affirmations, if possible, by at least one of the parties (*CIC 1125, CCEO 814*) or to refer the question of celebrating the marriage to the proper diocesan bishop for his permission (*CIC 1071, CCEO 789*).

♦ When for a just and reasonable cause permission for a mixed marriage is requested, both parties are to be instructed on the essential ends and properties of marriage which are not to be excluded by either party.

♦ The Catholic party will be asked to affirm that he or she is prepared to avoid the dangers of abandoning the faith and to promise sincerely to do all in his/her power to see that the children of the marriage be baptized and educated in the Catholic Church.

♦ The other partner is to be informed of these promises and responsibilities. At the same time it should be recognized that the non-Catholic partner may feel a like obligation because of his/her own Christian commitment or no faith commitment. No formal written or oral promise is required of this partner in canon law.

• “Those who wish to enter into a mixed marriage...should be invited and encouraged to discuss the Catholic baptism and education of the children they will have and where possible come to a decision on this question before the marriage” (*Ecumenical Directory, 150*).

• “In carrying out the duty of transmitting the Catholic faith to the children, the Catholic parent will do so with



---

respect for the religious freedom and conscience of the other parent and due regard for the unity and permanence of the marriage and for the maintenance of the communion of the family. If, notwithstanding the Catholic's best efforts, the children are not baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church, the Catholic parent does not fall subject to the censure of canon law. At the same time, his/her obligation to share the Catholic faith with the children does not cease, and may be fulfilled by contributing to the Christian atmosphere in the home: e.g. by witnessing by word and example to the specific values of the Catholic tradition; by being well informed about his/her own faith so as to be able to explain and discuss it; and by praying with the family for the grace of Christian unity as the Lord wills it" (*Ecumenical Directory*, 151).

- When a Catholic marries a person who has never been baptized, a dispensation from the Catholic party's Bishop must be obtained in order for the marriage to be valid. In presenting this request to the Bishop's office, the pastoral minister must affirm that all aspects for marriage preparation have been completed, that the Catholic party has given the required assurance of his or her own faith as well as commitment to share the Catholic faith with children and the other partner's awareness of those promises and that there is an adequate canonical reason to grant dispensation from disparity of worship.

# Section III: Special Circumstances in Marriage Preparation

---

*Introduction* ..... 33

*Abusive Relationship* ..... 34

*Addictions* ..... 35

*Choosing Not To Have Children* ..... 36

*Cohabitation And Premarital Sex* ..... 37

*Communicable Diseases And Marriage* ..... 39

*Convalidation* ..... 40

*Couples Who Have Had Children Together* ..... 41

*Couples With Children From Other Relationships* ..... 42

*Cultural, Ethnic And Racial Diversity* ..... 43

*HIV/AIDS And Marriage* ..... 44

*Immaturity* ..... 45

*Infertility* ..... 46

*Long Distance/Absent Partner Relationship* ..... 47

*Marriage Of Minors* ..... 48

*Marriage Of Non-Citizens* ..... 49

*Marriage of Older Persons* ..... 50

*Marriage of Persons With Disabilities* ..... 51

*Pregnancy* ..... 52

*Pre-Nuptial Agreements* ..... 53

*Previous Marriages* ..... 54

*Sexual Identity* ..... 55

---

## ***Introduction To Special Circumstances In Marriage Preparation***

Couples approaching the Church for marriage may find themselves in circumstances affecting the quality of their lives or even the validity of marriage. This section is intended for the use of the pastoral minister, assisting exploration of these circumstances with the couple.

The *1983 Code of Canon Law* states that “all persons not prohibited by law can contract marriage” (*c.1058*) and that “before marriage is celebrated, it must be evident that nothing stands in the way of its valid and licit celebration” (*c.1066*). It does nevertheless, empower the local ordinary to “prohibit marriage, but only for a time for a serious cause and as long as that cause exists” (*c.1077*).

Some of the topics that follow may surface through the use of premarital instruments, such as F.O.C.C.U.S., PREPARE, etc. Such instruments can also be helpful as the pastoral minister works with the couple. At times, circumstances may call for the assistance of a counseling professional. This is not intended as an exhaustive catalogue but a catalogue of some circumstances which may be encountered.

The Dioceses of the Province of New Jersey have a *process* to provide the pastoral minister with additional assistance or resources.

---

## ***Abusive Relationship***

**Goal:** To help a couple address responsibly any pattern of abuse within their relationship.

**Guideline:**

*The existence of abuse requires immediate attention in order to provide adequate time for the couple to address it responsibly. A referral to a professional therapist/counselor is the most prudent, pastoral response.*

**Discussion:**

- *Abuse* is any kind of behavior that one person uses to control another through fear and intimidation. It includes emotional and psychological abuse, battering and sexual assault. Abuse cuts across racial and socio-economic backgrounds, occurring in families from every ethnic, religious and educational background. Although most cases of physical abuse are against women, men are also subject to physical abuse.

- Family of origin issues may play a significant role in recognizing abuse. Violence is a learned behavior. Those reared in a household where abuse is present and viewed as normal, are most likely to repeat this behavior. Abuse frequently manifests itself (or at least the tendency toward it) before the wedding.

- It is important for the couple to understand the impact of their family background on their relationship since they are most likely to repeat this behavior.

- The following questions may be useful to begin a discussion on this topic. Such a discussion may motivate a couple to engage the assistance of a trained counselor.

- ♦ How were stress and disagreements handled in your home in your childhood or teenage years?
- ♦ How do you handle stress/arguments with each other?
- ♦ Do you think your future spouse has a volatile temper? Have you ever been afraid?
- ♦ Do either of you feel you have the right to hurt (abuse) each other?
- ♦ Do either of you have a problem with jealousy?
- ♦ Have you ever hit each other?

---

## ***Addictions***

**Goal:** To provide pastoral guidance to couples affected by serious addictions.

**Guideline:**

*The existence of **active** addiction may be a reason for delaying the marriage. The purpose of such a delay would be to allow the parties to have resource to appropriate counseling and/or rehabilitative programs.*

**Discussion:**

- Serious addictions may include:
  - ♦ alcohol
  - ♦ drugs
  - ♦ gambling
  - ♦ sex
  
- Dealing with addictions of all kinds is a life-long process. There is no such thing as a **recovered** addict. Addicts are said to be in recovery or recovering. Even in the recovery phase, emphasis must be placed on continually safeguarding the recovery process.
  
- When couples are affected by addiction we need to keep in mind that:
  - ♦ Some addictive behaviors are medically categorized as diseases (i.e. alcoholism). The pastoral minister must see the addictive person as one in need of healing, encouragement and support.
  
  - ♦ The prospective spouses must understand that they will need to be supportive of their recovering partner.
  
  - ♦ People with addictions may have behavior patterns which challenge the relationship, such as deception and manipulation. Co-dependency is an inherent challenge to the other spouse.
  
  - ♦ Special attention should be given when both parties are struggling with addiction.
  
  - ♦ Addiction is a complicated system of delicate balances affecting addicts in all their relationships.

- The most prudent pastoral response to parties afflicted with serious addictions is to recommend to them professional counseling, rehabilitative programs and available support groups (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, Sexaholics Anonymous, Alanon and Naranon).

---

## ***Choosing Not To Have Children***

**Goal:** To help engaged persons disposed otherwise to appreciate the wisdom of the Church's teaching that marriage and married love are by nature ordered to the procreation and education of children.

**Guideline:**

***A decision by the couple or one party to permanently exclude children affects the fundamental nature of marriage and renders the marriage invalid. Awareness of such a disposition could be just cause for delaying a wedding.***

**Discussion:**

- There are times when one or both parties may indicate a preference not to have children or manifest an intention to delay indefinitely any consideration of having children in their marriage.

- The pastoral minister is challenged to respond with patience and sensitivity. This may be an issue lacking full agreement by both parties or on which they have shared very little with each other. The pastoral minister is to seek clarification of their precise intentions and to explore possible factors that might be influencing their expressed choice not to have children. Some possible factors may include:

- ♦ memories of an unhappy childhood/family background
- ♦ a sense of inadequacy, self-doubts about the capacity for good parenting
- ♦ anxiety over disease, addictions, abuse they may wish to spare their children
- ♦ impasse over decision regarding religious affiliations of children in a religiously mixed marriage
- ♦ the fear of pregnancy or the experience of giving birth
- ♦ the fear of eventual separation, divorce
- ♦ the equally strong commitment of both parties in their pursuit of professional careers
- ♦ an excessive individualism, preoccupation with self-fulfillment, e.g., more time, freedom, possessions, or freedom for themselves, i.e. an absence of a self-sacrificing spirit

- The pastoral minister should see this as a teachable moment and process in which the couple is invited to recon-

sider their position in light of other values, the wisdom of the Church's teaching and interpretation of divine law, as well as from human experience.

- ♦ *Authentic and Lasting Love is Life-Giving:*

In the Christian ideal of the marriage covenant, a man and woman pledge to give themselves completely and without reserve to one another. The love required for a close, committed, long term relationship, for the type of intimacy essential in a satisfying marriage, must be self-giving, unselfish, trusting, unconditional, life-giving, open and receptive to life. With that love spouses are called to the blessing of children as a gift from God.

- ♦ *A child enriches and deepens a marriage:*

The mix of joy and sorrow, of pain and pleasure, of anxiety and relief that generally accompanies childbearing and child rearing reflects the deepest patterns of human existence. The birth of every child is something of a mystery and a miracle. The child conceived manifests and deepens the spouses' love for one another. The child is a unique reflection of the special bond between husband and wife. Children also can be a unique and precious source of companionship, consolation, support and assistance to their parents, especially in later years.

- An effective marriage preparation method to employ in this circumstance is a sponsor couple model. A sponsor couple can spend the time needed to build a relationship with the engaged couple. By sharing their own experience the sponsor couple can address in a personalistic manner, the issues behind the choice to exclude children.

- During the preparation process should the engaged party(ies) give no other indication than their choice not to have children, they should be informed that the pastoral minister will need to refer the matter to the diocesan bishop's office for further investigation on a decision to postpone the proposed wedding.

---

## ***Cohabitation And Premarital Sex***

**Goal:** To help engaged couples understand how cohabitation or premarital sex may compromise the essential characteristics of marriage.

**Guideline:**

***The issues of cohabitation and premarital sex should be addressed in the early stages of marriage preparation.***

The following principles are essential elements of a pastoral ministry to couples in this situation.

- The pastoral minister should affirm the engaged couple's decision to marry and approach the period of preparation as an opportunity for continued evangelization, catechesis, conversion and discernment.
- Two extremes are to be avoided: ignoring the issue or acting so passively as if it was of no consequence or confronting and condemning a couple.
- Cohabitation and/or premarital sex are not canonical impediments to marriage. A couple may not be denied a wedding for these reasons.
- The pastoral challenge for the minister is to invite the engaged couple to consider living separately and chastely. The couple is not to be refused marriage if they fail to separate.

**Discussion:**

• There are various types of cohabiting couples. Based on the reason given for cohabitation each has distinct pastoral implications:

♦ *Couples who become publicly engaged and then live together* are in a different situation than those who choose to live together and from that situation decide to marry. The pastoral minister can focus the couple's understanding of the meaning of sacrament and the commitment to permanence and stability in marriage.

♦ *For couples who began to cohabit without any*

*previous commitment to each other and then decided to get married...* the pastoral minister should focus on their overall readiness for marriage and for permanent lifetime commitment in addition to the treatment of commitment and sacrament.

♦ *For couples seeking marriage more for the sake of appearance, or to accommodate social or family needs...* the pastoral minister should postpone marriage preparation until further spiritual and psychological maturity exists (*Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples, USCC, August 1999*).

- The pastoral minister should examine each situation case by case and according to Pope John Paul II, they ought to make "tactful and respectful contact with the couples concerned and 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" (*Familiaris Consortio, #81*).
- While couples need to be welcomed with the gospel values of love, understanding, and acceptance, they also need to be challenged by the gospel message of commitment and faithfulness.
- "The Church has consistently taught that human love 'demands a total and definitive gift of persons to one another' that can only be made in marriage (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2391*). Since cohabitation violates the Church's teaching about sexual love and marriage, church ministers must speak and teach about it" in the spirit of Christian charity (*Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples*).
- Current data from sociological studies do not support the presumption that marriages following cohabitation will have a greater degree of stability.
- The pastoral minister should "encourage the couple to reflect on their situation and why they decided to cohabit and to provide insights into possible consequences, factors that may present special challenges to them or put them at risk for later marital disruption" (*Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples*).
- In *Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples*, it is noted that the following questions, drawn from a section of

---

F.O.C.C.U.S., may assist the pastoral minister by inviting the couple to reflect on their experience of living together:

- Why did you originally choose to live together? How does the commitment you wish to make now differ from the commitment you made when you decided to cohabit?
  - What are your reasons for wanting to marry at this time? Is there any reluctance to marry? Is pressure from family or around children a major reason for marriage now?
  - What have you learned from your experience of living together? How do you expect your relationship to grow and change in the future?
  - Why do you want to marry in the Catholic Church at this time? Do you understand the concerns the Church has had about your cohabiting situation?
  - What does marriage as a sacrament mean to you?
  - What are the greatest challenges you will face in making yours a lifetime and faithful marriage?
- After these discussions, the pastoral minister may ask the couple how the information gained from the preparation process has raised their understanding of Church teaching and cohabitation.
- “Even if the couple chooses not to separate, they can be encouraged to live chastely before marriage. ‘They should see in this time of testing a discovery of mutual respect, an apprenticeship in fidelity and the hope of receiving one another from God’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2350*). In this way, the couple can experience together the real spiritual joys and sorrows of human love. They can come to recognize as well the destructive influence of selfishness and sin. Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and conversion of heart, the couple can know the uplifting power of God’s mercy.
- During marriage preparation, a couple can come to understand themselves in new ways. The ease of sexual intimacy can displace the hard work needed to develop that loving relationship between themselves which is the solid foundation for marriage.



---

## ***Communicable Diseases And Marriage***

**Goal:** To provide pastoral guidance for couples living with communicable diseases, including sexually transmitted diseases.

**Guideline:**

***While the presence of a communicable disease is not an impediment to marriage, it is a matter of serious concern. It is essential that couples preparing to marry are open and candid with each other about the presence of disease and its implications. (Cf. "HIV/AIDS and Marriage", p. 44).***

**Discussion:**

- Marriage is an intimate sharing. Intimacy is an expression of trust. Trust is a sign of love. A prospective spouse should be entrusted with a person's life story, including their medical history and current state of health. This honest communication is an expression of respect and trust. It is part of the total sharing of covenantal love in marriage.
- As the intimacy of marriage includes physical intimacy, notably sexual intimacy, the presence of a communicable disease is a matter of concern. A sexually transmitted disease may be passed to one's spouse and could lead to infertility and other problems. As appropriate, couples should seek information and guidance from health care professionals and/or counseling professionals who may be able to offer couples assistance.
- A couple living with a communicable disease may be better informed about the disease and its effects than the pastoral minister. It is not the pastoral minister's responsibility to be a physician or a counsel (unless professionally qualified). Rather, it is to encourage the couple to embrace openly the totality of their lives as they prepare for Christian marriage.

---

## Convalidation

**Goal:** To help a couple recognize the wise and prudent reasons for convalidating their marriage.

**Guideline:**

*When approached by a couple requesting the convalidation of their marriage, the pastoral minister should endeavor to balance affirmation of the couple's desire to regularize their marital status, with concern for the integrity of the new marriage to be celebrated.*

**Discussion:**

- It is common to hear convalidation defined as having one's marriage "blessed by the Church," but this is a misunderstanding. The effect of a convalidation is to establish a canonical marriage where there was previously only a civil marriage.

- There are various reasons why a couple might seek the convalidation of their union. It is hoped that a request is born of the couple's or the Catholic party's desire to return to the active practice of the Faith. Their initiative may arise because an impediment to a valid marriage has now been removed. Currently, even many who consider themselves practicing Catholics are unfamiliar with the Church's teaching on marriage and they ask that their marriage be convalidated simply because they have only recently become aware of its irregular status.

- It is not uncommon for a convalidation to be sought for reasons that may jeopardize the valid celebration of the new marriage. For example, a husband or wife may seek a marriage in the church to remedy a troubled relationship. This is to be addressed adequately, lest the convalidated marriage result in separation.

- The pastoral minister should be especially careful to:

- ♦ *Inquire about the couple's motivation for wanting to regularize their marriage at the present time. The following are some questions touching on the validity of marriage which the pastoral minister should explore with the couple prior to scheduling the convalidation:*

- ♦ Is the couple making the request freely, or are

they being pressured by parents or others to be married in the Church?

- ♦ Do the parties consider their relationship to be a loving and fulfilling one, or is the couple experiencing serious problems which they believe can somehow be resolved through a religious ceremony?

- ♦ Explain to the couple that for the validity of the marriage now coming into being, both parties must make a new act of consent (cc. 1156-1160).

- ♦ Canon 1157 requires that at the exchange of vows for convalidation there must be a new act of the will consenting to marriage. The renewing parties must be aware that their prior ceremony of marriage was invalid from the beginning. Thus the pastoral minister must make it clear to the parties that their new act of consent will bring marriage into being. It would be counterproductive to tone down the language by suggesting that convalidation is simply the blessing of a marriage.

- ♦ Should the pastoral minister find the parties unable or unwilling to acknowledge the invalidity of their earlier marriage ceremony, the pastoral minister should bring the matter to the attention of the appropriate diocesan official. If it is clear that their naturally sufficient marriage consent perdures, the proper diocesan bishop could be asked to grant a radical sanation (c. 1161).

- In order to avoid endangering the Church's competence to also preside over marriages on behalf of the civil authority, the pastoral minister should inform the couple that New Jersey law requires a "Remarriage License" issued by the appropriate municipal official at the time of the convalidation.

---

## ***Couples Who Have Had Children Together***

**Goal:** To help a couple address the impact of parenthood on their relationship and to recognize their responsibilities as parents.

**Guideline:**

*The birth of a child is not, of itself, sufficient reason to marry. A couple who has had a child together has a right to the benefits a complete marriage preparation process provides.*

**Discussion:**

• Unmarried parents approaching the Church for marriage should receive an especially warm welcome, as they may have some anxiety about approaching the Church in their situation. In a culture which all too often disposes of human life through the tragedy of abortion, this couple has chosen to respect life and accept God's gift of human life in less than ideal circumstances. The pastoral minister should commend their courage and respect for human life.

• Some couples may have been in a committed relationship for some time. Others may approach having never considered marriage until the birth of their child. Still others, under external pressure to marry, may have had a child without any intention to marry. While marriage may seem to be "the right thing" with respect to familial or societal norms, it may be the worst thing in the lives of three (or more) people who will be principally and immediately affected by such a decision. The presence of children in the lives of a couple should not obscure the need to focus on the relationship of the parties to each other as a couple. A couple may be easily distracted by the dynamics of their children's relationship to themselves as parents.

• This couple, like all parents, should be the best parents they can be. They should be helped to recognize and assume the obligations of parenthood as best they can. Since the birth of their children may not have been planned, they may benefit from the guidance and advice of a mentor couple from the parish. For the sake of their children and themselves, the couple needs to direct their attention toward the good of their family, apart from familial or societal pressures to marry.

• Since marriage will affect not only the parties, but also their children, the children (as age and other considerations allow) should be included in every stage of the marriage preparation process.

• The pastoral minister needs to be sensitive to the additional difficulty this couple may have attending to all of the requirements of the marriage preparation process in a timely manner.

---

## ***Couples With Children From Other Relationships***

**Goal:** To help both parties address in a constructive manner the impact of bringing their own children into this marriage.

**Guideline:**

***It is essential that engaged couples are urged to consider the impact their own children will have on their time, their mutual support, and other resources in marriage. Additional time for marriage preparation may be required.***

**Discussion:**

- The children that couples may bring into marriage have had diverse experiences that will affect the tone and extent of the marriage preparation process: The children may be from a relationship that was:

- ♦ Loving, perhaps marital
- ♦ Unsustained through divorce or abandonment
- ♦ Ended by the death of a spouse
- ♦ Abusive
- ♦ Adoptive

- The children of either or both parties bring gifts as well as needs to their relationship as a couple. A child is a gift: divine and wondrous. However, a child presents many needs which must be addressed through responsible parenting. An infant child is totally dependent, requiring constant attention. An older child requires a considerable amount of a parent's time and attention as a priority. The parties should appreciate both the gifts and needs presented by children they are bringing into marriage.

- When a party brings his or her own children into a relationship leading to marriage, the couple relationship is different. The child is present to the relationship. The couple relationship needs to be nurtured, as does the child. The parties will need to find a balanced approach which respects both their couple relationship and provides for the child's proper care and nurture.

- Each party needs to be attentive to their relationship with the child, whether their own or their partner's child. The party without a child should not merely be an addition to

the family structure. The party who brings the child into the relationship should not be the sole authority figure and nurturer. Each party will relate to the child in their own way. They should be attentive to each other's strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the child.

- Frequently, the dynamics of the couple relationship and the parties' relationship to the children are interwoven. It is important that concerns about the child or the desire to provide emotional support for the single parent, should not distract the couple from the issues essential to their own relationship.

- Each party needs to be respectful of the child's relationship with his/her non-custodial parent and extended family. They are part of the child's life, with the opportunity to offer support. The parties should respect the child's freedom to associate and share love with everyone in his/her family, without prejudice.

- When both parties bring a child into a relationship leading to marriage, special attention should be given to the children's relationship to each other. As the relationship of their parents progresses toward marriage, they deepen what they already share in common. The parties should receive the children's concerns and feelings openly, taking care to avoid defensiveness while affirming their important place in the family they may form.

- The complicated role of step-parenting deserves special attention. The role of the parent and the step-parent needs to be clearly defined: the responsibilities and expectations regarding the children need to be clarified and agreed upon. While parties can benefit from advice and guidance from experienced step-parents and counselors, they will have to apply this knowledge creatively in their own family. Responsible step-parenting requires a secure spousal relationship, as the strength of the spousal relationship contributes to the child's sense of stability. A person shows love for the child by showing love for the child's parent.

---

## ***Cultural, Ethnic And Racial Diversity***

**Goal:** To encourage the couple to openly and honestly share their thoughts and feelings about how cultural, ethnic, and/or racial diversity will be lived out in marriage.

**Guideline:**

***Cultural, ethnic and racial differences contributing to a couple's interpersonal relationship as well as their relationship with family of origin and in-laws are worthy of the couple's attention and reflection.***

**Discussion:**

- All peoples have customs, traditions and role expectations. While the practices of some are indeed foreign to others, they are not without significance and value. Customs and traditions are to be respected, so long as they do not detract from the essentials of marriage (permanence of marriage and fidelity) and the real stability of the relationship. The parties need to be open and honest about their differences and what they are. These differences may affect other important issues such as parenting and raising children, role expectations of the spouses, and extended family obligations.
- Distinctive expressions will highlight differences, but with good will they can give rise to respect and enriched welcome and sharing. Some customs and traditions may be part of the wedding liturgy. Other customs and traditions may enrich family life throughout marriage, contributing to the distinctiveness of the family they create.
- Couples with cultural, ethnic or racial differences very likely have shared some of their thoughts with each other before approaching the church for marriage. They have personal experience dealing with these differences. The pastoral minister should support the couple's journey to embrace diversity in marriage.
- Social pressures and prejudices may greatly impact couples as they prepare for and as they live out their marriage. They should be encouraged to focus on the love and commit-

ment they share. They should be encouraged to focus on their faith in God who transcends cultural, ethnic and racial differences.

- The pastoral minister must not discourage marriage solely because of cultural, ethnic or racial differences.

---

## ***HIV/AIDS And Marriage***

**Goal:** To assist a couple affected by HIV\*/AIDS\*\* to deal responsibly with its implications for marriage.

**Guidelines:**

*It is essential that persons who are living with HIV/AIDS be open and candid with their prospective spouse about their HIV/AIDS status.*

*The pastoral minister should encourage the couple to take a substantial period of time to explore the personal and social ramifications of HIV/AIDS for marriage in the light of Catholic moral teaching and the human challenges a couple will face. To do so realistically, they will need the support of counseling and spiritual direction.*

*The pastoral minister is bound by civil law as well as in certain circumstances by ecclesiastical law to guard the confidentiality of what is shared by either of the parties.*

**Discussion:**

- An appreciation of moral principles required for all engaged couples takes on a greater urgency for those couples dealing with the reality of HIV infection. The pastoral minister needs to be able to articulate the principles with utmost compassion, pastoral sensitivity and confidentiality. A pastoral minister must balance diverse interests such as Church teaching, each party's needs, the concerns of their families and the possibility of children.
- Sexual intercourse when one or both parties is/are HIV infected could place the other partner or any child that would be conceived in serious danger to life and health. While HIV/AIDS is not a canonical impediment to marriage, it has serious implications for the natural right to marry and for the decisions that a man and a woman must make. The Church has, at times and for grave reasons, accepted the validity of a marriage in which the couple freely agrees to abstain from sexual relations throughout their marriage.
- Living with HIV/AIDS begins with accepting the reality of the virus. Accepting this reality includes informing trusted friends and loved ones when appropriate. In justice, a person living with HIV/AIDS must inform a prospective spouse. The pastoral minister may be of great help to the person and the couple dealing with HIV/AIDS. Pastoral ministers must remember that to disclose another person's HIV/AIDS status without a person's permission is unlawful. If a pastoral minister were aware that a person is HIV infected but refuses to inform their prospective spouse, perhaps the pastoral minister can do no more than state that he cannot continue the process of marriage preparation. If the other party inquires as to why, the pastoral minister may say that it appears the couple does not actually know one another sufficiently.
- Along with the moral dilemma, there are a multitude of spiritual, psychological, social and economic challenges that should be explored: the agony of a devastating illness, mounting health care costs and the possibility of an early death. It may be advisable for the couple to seek consultation with medical experts as well as psychological counseling.
- The couple and the pastoral minister will need to discern through prayer and reflection whether or not the couple wishes to proceed with the marriage. Such a discernment process will take note of factors that may be interfering with a responsible decision: a long-standing relationship, mutual sympathy, expectations of families and friends, possible embarrassment about canceling the wedding, fears about one's health, the health of one's partner and the health of potential children. Amid such pressing concerns, it is crucial that each party decide freely and be confident about the course they choose.
- Regardless of the decision to marry or not to marry, the couple has a right to continued love, care and support from the Church. Those involved in the discernment process have a duty to minister to the parties whether they cancel their wedding plans or decide to marry.

---

\* HIV- human immunodeficiency virus

\*\* AIDS – acquired immune deficiency syndrome

---

## ***Immaturity***

**Goals:** To help the engaged couple appreciate the responsibilities and implications of marriage on their lives and as a couple.

**Guideline:**

*The Church presumes the maturity of the engaged couple as well as the maturity of their decision to marry. If the couple expresses doubt or manifests immaturity, the couple should be assisted through personal sharing, use of instruments such as F.O.C.C.U.S., PREPARE, etc., and in some cases professional counseling.*

**Discussion:**

- The capacity to assume responsibility in life in a mature way is a critical factor for the growth and stability in a marriage relationship. We must not presume a correlation of maturity and age. Younger adults may be remarkably mature. Older adults may be immature.
- A couple must move beyond an overly simplistic view of marriage and reflect more realistically and concretely on what the marriage vocation and its responsibilities will mean for them.
- Marriage is a process of two becoming one; a partnership involving day-to-day commitment, hard work, communication, compromise and cooperation with God's grace.
- Each marriage is unique and will require the couple to deal with their own specific challenges and difficulties in a manner that is positive and constructive.
- Some indications of immaturity may become apparent to the pastoral minister. For example:
  - ♦ the couples' lack of respect toward one another
  - ♦ indifference or hostility to the marriage preparation process
  - ♦ failure to appreciate the practical importance of basics, such as: reliable employment and proper use of financial resources
  - ♦ lack of common sense
  - ♦ tendency to overlook or rationalize inappropriate behavior in the future spouse

• Discussion may be enabled by using the following questions:

- ♦ Have I chosen to marry of my own free will?
- ♦ Do friends and relatives consider me reliable?
- ♦ Do friends and relatives consider me honest?
- ♦ Am I known to handle responsibility well? Do I blame others?
- ♦ Am I known to handle changes well?
- ♦ Am I willing to put my future spouse's needs ahead of my own?
- ♦ Am I willing to put my children's needs ahead of my own?
- ♦ Do I have a steady job? Where do I see myself in ten years?
- ♦ What is the difference between a church marriage and a civil marriage?
- ♦ Do I have difficulty making judgments?
- ♦ Do I have difficulty controlling my actions?
- ♦ Do I relate well to others, especially my future spouse?

---

## ***Infertility***

**Goal:** To provide pastoral guidance for couples aware of their infertility before marriage.

**Guideline:**

***While infertility is not an impediment to marriage, it should be discussed with openness and candor. The pastoral minister while being supportive to the couple, should also help them to see their condition in light of the Church's spirituality and moral teaching.***

**Discussion:**

- Infertility is to be distinguished from impotence. While impotence is the inability to have sexual intercourse, infertility is the inability (or diminished ability) of a couple to conceive a child. Either or both persons may have a condition that makes the couple infertile. Physical conditions associated with infertility may be due to age or of natural origin, e.g., low sperm count; they may also be result of illness, injury or surgery, i.e., hysterectomy, vasectomy. At times, couples believed to be infertile do actually conceive. Couples may wish to receive medical intervention to correct a physiological problem associated with infertility.

- Infertility cannot only be disappointing and discouraging but in some instances quite devastating. The parties should share the feelings associated with infertility. An experienced counselor may be of help to a couple dealing with such concerns. The pastoral minister can help the couple to realize they may freely choose to enter marriage even if they are probably unable to conceive children of their own. The realization that a child is a gift from God and not an object to which a man and a woman have a natural or civil right may help a couple avoid morally questionable technologies for conception or other outside interventions.

- A commendable alternative for an infertile couple is adoption. It takes heroic love for a couple to embrace an adopted child as their own.

- Couples are specially challenged to be life-giving in other ways. Assisted by prayer, support, communication, and counseling, couples without children can have life-giving marriages.



---

## ***Long Distance/Absent Partner Relationship***

**Goals:** To clarify at the outset of preparation, the various responsibilities of the pastoral minister and the couple in conducting a long distance/absent partner marriage preparation process.

To facilitate communication between the parish proposed as the site of the marriage celebration and the parish or parishes where the parties actually live.

To realistically determine an arrangement for the most effective preparation.

### ***Guideline:***

***If the couple first approaches the parish of the proposed site of their marriage celebration, the pastoral minister there will facilitate the couple's contact with their own local pastor(s) to obtain the permission(s) that are required to be married outside of their proper parish(es).***

***If a couple first approaches the parish where one or both of them are living but proposes marriage at another church, the pastoral minister should show a willingness to work with his parishioner(s) but explain he can facilitate their request but not guarantee that the marriage can take place at the other location.***

***Determine with the couple and other pastor(s) the most effective means for a quality marriage preparation experience.***

### ***Discussion:***

• Long distance relationships present special challenges to the opportunity for mutual dialogue and interaction that are key components to a marriage preparation process.

• There are two kinds of "long distance" relationships. First, the intended spouse may be separated from one another, e.g. Military service. Second, both of the intended spouses may live in proximity to one another but are far removed from the parish church where they propose to marry. There may also be intermixed variations of these situations, e.g.

the groom may reside in New York, the bride in Boston and the intended parish of marriage is in Philadelphia, the hometown for both parties.

• The couple should make special efforts to share with each other their expectations and take the time necessary to do so. A first step should be administration of a premarital inventory (F.O.C.C.U.S.) that might point out areas of concern and help to direct the couple's attention to working on those matters.

• Given modern transportation, the couple should be encouraged to join one another when possible for at least some aspects of the marriage preparation experience such as a Pre-Cana, Engaged Encounter or periodic meetings with a mentoring couple.

• Once it is determined which particular priest or deacon at one location will undertake responsibility to work with the couple, he should write to the pastor of the parish where the marriage will be celebrated to clarify their mutual expectations.

• The Province of New Jersey does not require that documentation for marriages from outside of a diocese be transmitted through respective Chancery Offices. However, requests from other dioceses are to be honored.

• Since each diocese may have their own prenuptial investigation form, it might be helpful, if the local pastor of the parish in which the marriage takes place and is recorded, mailed the prenuptial investigation form used locally to the (out-of-area) pastoral minister witnessing the marriage.

---

## Marriage Of Minors

**Goal:** To inform a couple, and to the extent necessary their parents, of the particular demands marriage places on minors and to help them to decide whether their maturity is sufficient for them to make such a commitment realistically.

**Guideline:**

*Marriage preparation in which one or both of the parties is under age 18 requires that the couple be assisted in evaluating their own personal maturity and the quality of their relationship with one another as well as affording them opportunity to appreciate realistically the dangers of marrying too early and factors that lead to the high failure rate for youthful marriage in America today.*

*In every instance, a proposed marriage in which one of the parties is under age 18 requires the pastoral minister to refer the couple's situation to the diocesan Common Policy process. If parents are unaware of, or reasonably opposed to, the marriage of a minor child, the pastoral minister needs the permission of the diocesan bishop before he may witness a marriage (c. 1071 § 1, 7\*).*

**Discussion:**

• To marry even a young man or woman must possess a sufficient emotional and intellectual maturity and life experience to establish that partnership of the whole of life which the Church understands a valid marriage to be. The Church has a deep concern for the couple and their well being. Hasty decisions are to be avoided. The pastoral minister will find it helpful to meet not only with a couple but also with the parents.

• If a parent reasonably objects to the proposed marriage, the pastoral minister is to advise everyone that no marriage date may be scheduled without further consultation. A pre-marital inventory such as F.O.C.C.U.S. should be utilized. Even in the circumstance of the parents being in agreement that a young couple ought to marry, a minor or minor couple must have the opportunity to meet with a professional coun-

sel who would be able to assess their situation.

• If everyone including the pastoral minister is in agreement that a couple may marry, the pastoral minister, nevertheless, must review the couple's situation and his recommendations about it through the diocesan process before going ahead with the marriage.

• In the worldwide law of the Catholic Church, a minimum age for validly entering a marriage is established as age 14 for a woman and age 16 for a man (c. 1083). But the circumstances of American society in this millennium demonstrate that many young people in their 20's struggle still with unfinished adolescent issues and may hardly find themselves prepared for making a lifetime commitment.\*

• The maturity needed for marriage has many dimensions: sexual, moral, familial, social, developmental, personal and financial. One who possesses a minimally sufficient level of maturity is not to be excluded from marrying just because the person is under age 18. Yet marriage is a partnership, and both parties must really enjoy at least such a minimal level of maturity. The fact that young people assert that they are capable of marrying and insist that they must be married does not relieve the Church of the right and obligation to seek the advice of professionals in making its own judgment in any individual case. If there is actual evidence of immaturity, a local ordinary can prohibit witnessing a particular marriage until the young couple demonstrates that they have, indeed, developed the necessary maturity (c. 1077)

• The *New Jersey State Law* requires that a minor (under age 18) who wishes to marry obtain their parents' consent before two witnesses in the presence of a marriage license officer. For anyone under age 16, moreover, written approval of such consent is needed from a Superior Court judge in the Chancery Division, Family Part. (There are exceptions to these norms in regard to incompetent parents or guardians and if a young man has been arrested for having had sexual intercourse resulting in a single woman being pregnant.)

---

\* c. 1072, Pastors...are to take care to dissuade youth from the celebration of marriage before the age at which a person usually enters marriage according to the accepted practices of the region.

---

## ***Marriage Of Non-Citizens***

**Goal:** To inform a couple, when one or both are non-citizens, of the particular immigration issues they must confront as they prepare for marriage.

**Guideline:**

*A person does not have to be a U.S. citizen or Legal Permanent Resident to obtain a marriage license in the state of New Jersey. Thus, undocumented persons may marry in New Jersey. Proof of domicile in the state is generally required.*

*If a U.S. citizen wants to marry an alien residing outside the U.S., a special temporary Visa must be obtained that specifically allows the person to enter the U.S. to marry. This is called a K Visa and is generally valid for 90 days, during which the marriage must take place.*

*A new K-3 Visa is also available for the spouse of a U.S. citizen. The K-3 Visa is a speedy mechanism that allows the non-citizen spouse living abroad to join the U.S. citizen spouse and obtain immigration status in the United States.*

**Discussion:**

- More and more newcomers are making their home in New Jersey. As a result, Catholic parishes will be confronted with legal and social issues facing immigrants. It is important to recognize the legal and immigration ramifications of marriage.
- As discussed above, a non-citizen residing overseas requires a Visa for entry to marry a U.S. citizen (K or fiance Visa).
- After a U.S. citizen or Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) marries an alien, various petitions/applications should be filed. Since this is an extremely technical field of law, legal assistance should be obtained.
- Generally, legal issues should be referred to the appropriate professionals in the Diocesan Immigration Program.

---

## ***Marriage Of Older Persons***

**Goal:** To offer a pastoral marriage preparation appropriate to the unique needs of older persons.  
(In the event of a second marriage, see section on “Previous Marriage”.)

**Guideline:**

*Age does not automatically assure readiness for marriage. Older couples (forties and older) have particular marriage preparation needs which may or may not be apparent to them. The marriage preparation process should be adapted to the age and maturity of the couple as well as help them to integrate their past experiences and assess their future together in terms of the vocation of marriage.*

**Discussion:**

- Merging two lives is not easy but is facilitated when there is a common faith. The couple needs to discuss the differences in the ways they perceive and practice their faith, and more so for those who worship in different denominations.
- Some of the issues which may be unique to older couples and which merit discussion are: previous relationships, especially for the widowed; finances; transition from a single lifestyle to a marriage partnership, obligations to family members and their faith and religious practice.
- Especially if there had been a previous long and good marriage by one or both of the individuals, they should keep in mind that this relationship is unique and that their marriage partnership will require its own adjustments and commitment.
- Financial issues can be very challenging and should be realistically addressed. For example: Are both parties economically secure? Issues of what’s “yours” “mine” and “ours” must be addressed. What expectations do children or other family members have regarding financial obligations? How will future health care costs be met? How will their marriage affect insurance coverage, pension and social security benefits? How will they manage budgeting in their new life together?
- Many details of an older person’s life are already shaped if not somewhat rigidly fixed. A change to a new lifestyle in a marriage requires flexibility of both partners.
- Has the couple assured the family members of their continuing love and communicated with them about their wedding plans and their new life together?

---

## ***Marriage Of Persons With Disabilities***

**Goals:** To encourage the couple to share openly and honestly their thoughts and feelings about the challenges presented to them by their disabilities.

**Guidelines:**

***Issues associated with the presence of a disability are matters which the couple must share with one another and are worthy of the pastoral minister's attention and support.***

**Discussion:**

- Respecting the God-given gifts and talents of every person should be the main focus of the marriage preparation process not he disability.
- Some disabilities are the result of a genetic condition. Couples presented with such a situation will need to openly share their thoughts and feelings about the children they may bring into the world.
- Some disabilities are the result of injury or illness. Pastoral ministers should be open to the couple's desire to share their thoughts and feelings about how this has contributed or may affect their relationship.
- The pastoral minister should make the couple aware of any resources available in the community. Some additional resources may be available for both the couple and the pastoral minister (e.g. Catholic Charities).

---

## **Pregnancy**

**Goal:** To ascertain the parties' freedom, maturity and commitment when there is a premarital pregnancy.

**Guideline:**

*A pregnancy should not diminish the pastoral minister's focus of assisting the couple to assess their freedom and readiness for a commitment to the covenantal life of marriage. This value is of paramount importance. Sufficient time must be spent in preparation. A sense of urgency based on familial or societal norms should not accelerate/reduce a wedding celebration.*

*In light of our Church's consistent witness to the sanctity of human life, the couple's choice to embrace the pregnancy should be affirmed by the pastoral minister.*

*A couple is to be referred to a professional counselor for evaluation or at least the situation of the couples is to be referred by the pastoral minister through the diocesan common policy process. A premarital inventory such as F.O.C.C.U.S. is always to be utilized in cases of pregnancy.*

**Discussion:**

- The decision to marry must be freely made by the parties, i.e., without external pressure from any third party, e.g., parents and other family members.
- The pastoral minister should assist the parties in appreciating the effect of the pregnancy on their relationship and on their plans to marry.
- The pastoral minister should ask each of the parties when they first began to think about marrying this person and when it first became a topic of their discussions. It is important for the pastoral minister to know whether the couple was planning to marry in the Church before the pregnancy. If they were already planning to marry, it is important to know if the pregnancy is a factor prompting them to marry at this time.
- If a couple is experiencing external pressure to marry soon, the parties may benefit from the pastoral minister's special attention to practical considerations that are part of every

mature decision to marry: stable employment, current financial obligations, expectations of lifestyle changes, and compatibility of the parties (including their ability to solve problems together and work together toward common goals).

- The pastoral minister has the responsibility to teach the couple that the Church does not automatically expect them to marry because of pregnancy. In justice, they are entitled to all of the usual pastoral care required in marriage preparation.
- Pregnancy can influence the parties' sense of commitment. The pastoral minister should help inquire whether a couple is committed toward marriage or toward the child? What will they do if the pregnancy is not carried to full term? Has the topic of adoption been part of their discussions?
- Amidst the complicated considerations of commitment, there is one commitment that is clear: this couple has committed themselves to respect life and allow this child, God willing, to be born. They have not aborted a human life. The pastoral minister should take note of their courageous decision. The Church has an obligation to offer pastoral care and support to this couple whether or not they marry.

---

## ***Pre-Nuptial Agreements***

**Goal:** To provide couples with a practical understanding of marriage as a covenant relationship which is a partnership of the whole life.

**Guideline:**

*A pre-nuptial agreement as described below is foreign to the Church's understanding of covenant. A pre-nuptial agreement that severely limits the complete commitment of the spouses to each other must be referred for consultation with the diocesan process.*

**Discussion:**

- A covenant is a relationship based on an enduring committed love, expressed in marriage: a partnership of the whole of life. Whole of life is understood in two ways. Firstly, it is a lifelong partnership, “*as long as we both shall live,*” as expressed in the wedding ceremony. Secondly, it is a comprehensive sharing of both spiritual and temporal goods.
- A pre-nuptial agreement is understood as any agreement on terms related to a possible divorce made prior to marriage. Commonly, pre-nuptial agreements provide for the division of property when a couple divorces. A pre-nuptial agreement mitigates the enduring commitment of covenant love. It distorts the partnership of the whole of life.
- Let it be clear that this discussion applies only to pre-nuptial agreements as described above. It does not apply to wills. A will provides for the management of one's estate upon death.
- A couple considering a pre-nuptial agreement may be in need of education regarding the Church's understanding of covenant love and partnership of the whole of life. A couple cannot be reasonably expected to fulfill the promise of marriage if the parties do not understand the basic premises that marriage endures until death.
- It is important for the pastoral minister to realize that couples who desire a pre-nuptial agreement often understand such agreements to be reasonable and responsible arrangements. The pastoral minister's challenge is to demonstrate that the only reasonable and responsible way to enter marriage is with an appreciation of covenant love and

partnership of the whole of life.

- There may be some pre-nuptial considerations, however, which are not contrary to the indissolubility of marriage because they do not relate to the consent of the couple to marry one another in a conditional way.

---

## ***Previous Marriages***

**Goal:** To provide guidance and pastoral care to couples who have had previous marriages and now wish to marry in the Catholic Church.

**Guidelines:**

*The pastoral minister must first determine the couple's freedom to marry in the Catholic church and then, should assist the couple in the marriage preparation process. The minister should be mindful of how the particular circumstances of a previous marriage may effect the couple's new life together.*

**Discussion:**

- At the initial meeting with the couple the pastoral minister should determine that both parties are free to marry in the Church. If the spouse from a previous marriage is deceased a certificate of death is required. A decree from the Catholic Church establishing the freedom to marry, such as a church annulment, is necessary for any marriage where the previous spouse is still living. No wedding date may be set until an annulment is granted and any conditions contained in the decree of nullity are met.
- As the couple prepares for marriage they should be aware of how a previous marriage may effect their new relationship. A time for grieving or healing may still be necessary due to the feelings of loss or anger associated with a prior marriage. Idealized memories of a deceased spouse or comparisons arising from another marriage may affect the new bond the couple seeks to share. Such feelings need to be identified and discussed. The pastoral minister should encourage and facilitate honest sharing and should assist the couple in taking advantage of the resources and opportunities that may be available to them.
- The pastoral minister should avoid the tendency to presume that persons marrying a second (or third) time do not require a great deal of marriage preparation since the institution of marriage is familiar to them. Marriage preparation is not just about the institution of marriage; it is about the particular couple preparing for marriage together. A new relationship presents new challenges.
- Remarriage preparation programs and the use of sponsor couples with similar circumstances can be most helpful in

responding to the needs of those who seek remarriage in the Catholic Church.



---

## ***Sexual Identity***

**Goal:** To help the engaged couple appreciate the significance of sexual identity in general, and sexual orientation in particular when considering marriage.

**Guideline:**

*We presume that a man and a woman asking to marry understand themselves as heterosexual man and a heterosexual woman. When either person expresses doubt or conflict about sexual identity or sexual orientation, careful attention must be given to both parties. If the couple has not dealt with this topic, further assistance by a counseling professional is strongly recommended.*

**Discussion:**

In the course of the marriage preparation process, issues concerning a person's sexual identity may arise (e.g. in the findings of the premarital inventory, F.O.C.C.U.S.). These issues may be related to sexual orientation: homosexuality, bisexuality or other aspects of sexual identity. The following principles will help the pastoral minister to reflect with the couple on these issues with pastoral sensitivity.

- Human beings are blessed with profound and mysterious gifts. Among these are rationality, spirituality, personality, and sexuality. We synthesize all these gifts as we grow in self-understanding. We call this self-understanding our identity.
- Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his or her sexual identity. Physical, moral and spiritual difference and complementarity are oriented towards the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out.
- Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of the person's body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others. Creating the human race in his own image, God who is love, inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion.

- Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves totally to one another is proper and exclusive to spouses, not simply biological, it concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and woman commit themselves totally to one another until death.

- Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of a human person's bodily and spiritual being.

- All components of one's identity are important considerations when deciding to marry. Sexual identity is of particular importance as it can, of its very nature, seriously disrupt the partnership of married life and love. It can even contribute to a defect of consent. (*c. Canon 1055*)

- If the couple has already addressed this topic, it is important to discuss with the pastoral minister their reasons for marrying and the conflict they may face. Neither the desire nor the physical ability to have children lessens the importance of this discussion.

- Other complex issues of sexual identity should be referred to the diocese for the appropriate course of pastoral care.

# Selected Bibliography and Reference Material

---

## **Documents of the Second Vatican Council**

Flannery, Austin: Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, Northport, NY, Costello Publishing Col., 1992

- Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium Et Spes*, 1965
- On the Apostolate of Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 1965
- Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, 1965
- Decree on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1965

## **Vatican Documents**

- Marriages between Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, *Crescens Matrimoniorum*, 1967
- Of Human Life, *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI, 1968
- Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages, *Matrimonia Mixta*, 1970
- Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics, *Persona Humana*, Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 1975
- The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II, 1981
- On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons, Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 1986
- Instruction on Bioethics, Respect for Human Life, *Donum Vitae*, Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 1987
- Directory For the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1993
- Letter to Families, Pope John Paul II, 1994
- The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, The Pontifical Council for the Family, 1995
- The Gospel of Life, *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II, 1995
- Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, The Pontifical Council for the Family, 1996
- Pope John Paul II, The Theology of the Body, Human Love in the Divine Plan, Boston, MA, Pauline Books and Media, 1997
- Family, Marriage and “De Facto Unions”, The Pontifical Council for the Family, 2001

- The Natural Dimension of Marriage, Pope John Paul II to Roman Rota, 2001

## **Other Ecclesial Documents**

- Catechism of the Catholic Church
- Code of Canon Law
- Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches
- The Roman Ritual, the Book of Blessings
- The Rite of Marriage

## **The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**

- Brothers and Sisters to Us, 1979
- A Family Perspective in Church and Society, 1987
- Faithful to Each Other Forever, 1988
- Go and Make Disciples – A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization, 1992
- When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women, 1992
- Always Our Children, 1997
- Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples, 1999

## **Ecumenical Documents**

- A Christian Declaration on Marriage, *Origins*, Nov. 23, 2000, Vol. 20: No. 24, p. 338

## **Other Resources**

- Healy, James, Living Together and the Christian Commitment, Allen, Texas, 1993, 1999
- Kippley, John F., Marriage is for Keeps, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1993
- Family Life Office, FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study), Omaha, Nebraska, 1985, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, 1997
- Olson, David, David Fournier, Joan Druckman: PRE-PARE (Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation), Minneapolis, MN, Life Innovations, Inc., 1980
- Champlin, Joseph, Together for Life, Notre Dame, IN, Ave Maria Press, Inc. 1970, 1988, 1997
- Michigan Catholic Conference, Provincial Guidelines for Marriage Preparation, 1993
- Wisconsin Catholic Conference, Pastoral Guidelines for Marriage Preparation, 1994

---