



MARRIAGE PREPARATION MANUAL

OVERVIEW OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION Diocesan Catechetical Curriculum

DEPARTMENT of
EVANGELIZATION
and CATECHESIS

OFFICE of
MARRIAGE + FAMILY

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INTRODUCTION

The great evangelist to the Gentiles St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Colossians about the importance of centering everything we do on Christ Jesus Our Lord and Savior. He echoes these words:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Col 3:1-3

Every disciple's essential premise is to witness Christ's love to all who will listen. Witnessing this Christocentric faith, one of the key tenets of this journey involves proper catechetical instruction of the Catholic faith. One of the most important areas of formation prescribed by the Church and confirmed by Jesus Christ is the sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

The premise of matrimonial instruction within the Catholic Diocese of Columbus is to strengthen the identity of man and woman as children of God to enter into a life-long covenant in Holy Matrimony. At the heart of the marriage preparation process within the Catholic Diocese of Columbus is the formation and continual promulgation of the family as the foundation of Catholic life. The sacrament of Marriage possesses an Incarnational distinctive as an instituted sacrament by Jesus Christ.

The structure of this marriage preparation process possesses an intentional Trinitarian and Christocentric dimension meant to reflect the Holy Family as the model par excellence. Regardless of the state of marriage preparation the couple is in, e.g., first marriage, validation, convalidation, or if necessary sanation, the aim is to help the couple embrace and live an active, loving, and fruitful matrimonial sacrament.

We hope that your journey toward the sacrament of Holy Matrimony strengthens your relationship with Jesus Christ to serve one another in sacrificial spousal love, foster the gift of life with children, and set your path toward our Father in heaven.

“I appeal to you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Rom 12:1-2

“... love is always a mutual relationship between persons. . . Love between man and woman is one particular form of love, in which elements common to all of its form are embodied in a certain way.”

St. John Paul, II, Love and Responsibility p. 73

CATECHESIS ON MARRIAGE

At the heart of any doctrinal instruction is Jesus Christ. Our instruction is called to involve a Christocentric character, meaning everything we do is in the name of Jesus Christ.

Our aim in this journey of faith is to engage the couple towards an understanding of Salvation History. What we mean by this is an understanding of who the couple is in relation to God our Father and Creator. Reflecting on the question of why we are created in the image and likeness of God, the couple is directed to seek an understanding of his/her role in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (Mt 28:17-10)

“And they devoted themselves to the Apostles” teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers.”

Acts 2:42

“Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people, and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian Doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.”

CCC 5, CT 18

Catechesis

Those to be catechized, and those who will catechize are what make up the initial body of catechesis among all who will learn the faith. Jesus Christ is the Word that became flesh through the Divine Will of the Father sent forth through the power of the Holy Spirit so that we might have life and live-it abundantly. It was through His Incarnate Word that Christ, through his Father established for us those redemptive qualities that we receive in our Profession of Faith, the Mass and Sacraments, the Commandments, and in prayer that allow us to fully share in the history of Salvation with our Lord. We, as the people of God, are a faith-sharing community in the created image of God to profess and proclaim the Gospel message. This mission of catechesis has been practiced from the moment Christ was born. As part of the Church- community we hold a responsibility not only to learn our Catholic faith but teach it to all who will listen. The ministry of catechesis serves the Church in a decisive mission. This teaching first and foremost is passed on through the apostles and their successors, the Bishops of the Catholic Church.

“The moment of catechesis is that which corresponds to the period in which conversion to Jesus Christ is formalized, and provides a basis for first adhering to him.” (GDC 63)

“Quite early on, the name catechesis was given to the totality of the Church’s efforts to make disciples. To help men believe that Jesus is the Son of God so that believing they might have life in His name, and to educate and instruct them in this life, thus building up the body of Christ.” (CCC 4, CT 1; 2)

CATECHETICAL INSTRUCTION

Catechetical Instruction refers to the study of our Catholic faith where catechists intentionally pass on the traditions, beliefs, values, and practices of their religion. Catechetical instruction is conducted by committed, prepared, adult Catholics to provide a clear explanation of our teachings, our values, and our mission to those seeking sound information.

The Family, especially the parents must be the primary figures of religious instruction for their children on top of what is provided by a catechist outside of the family. It is the Baptismal commitment of the parent/guardian to pass on the Deposit of Faith to the child to learn, mature and grow in his or her own faith. Guided by the power of the Holy Spirit, and rooted firmly in the teachings of Jesus Christ, the child absorbs the sacred tradition of the Catholic Church while at the same time, applying those values, teachings, and prayers to his or her everyday life.

Catechesis must be complete, organic, and systematic to provide a fullness of the truth and assure that the Deposit of Faith is being passed on.

The educational mission of the Church is an integrated ministry embracing three interlocking dimensions: the message revealed by God (didache) which the church proclaims; fellowship in the life of the Holy Spirit (koinonia); service to the Christian community and the entire human community (diakonia).

Pope John Paul II has stressed that religious education; “must concern itself not only with nourishing and teaching the faith, but also with arousing it increasingly with the help of grace, with opening the heart, with converting, and with preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ on the part of those who are still on the threshold of faith” (CT 19).

“As religious educators with a mission to the People of God, we enlighten young and old to know better this (living) Jesus . . . to know his “mystery”; the Kingdom of God proclaimed by him, the requirements and promise contained in the Gospel message, and the paths that He has laid down for any who wishes to follow him” (CT 20).

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 8:12

CATECHETICAL MODELS

Pope John Paul II reminds us that “the parish community must continue to be the prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis” (CT 67). With this said, St. John Paul II lays the foundation for the church being “the pre-eminent place for catechesis. It must rediscover its vocation, which is to be a fraternal and welcoming family home, where those who have been baptized and confirmed become aware of forming the People of God. In that home, the bread of good doctrine and the Eucharistic Bread are broken for them in abundance, in the

setting of the one act of worship; from that home, they are sent out day by day to their apostolic mission in all the centers of activity of the life of the world (CT 67).”

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION PROGRAM

Pastors have the responsibility for sacramental preparation and all catechesis so that the faith of the faithful becomes living, explicit, and productive through formation in doctrine and the experience of Christian living (Can 843 2:773; 777). All the sacraments follow the order set forth by the Bishop through the Diocesan Manual for the Sacraments of Initiation in conformity with the general laws established by the Church.

IMPORTANT CATECHETICAL DOCUMENTS ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

- AL *Amoris Laetitia*
Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family
Pope Francis, 2016
- AP Letter to Children
Pope John Paul II, 1994
- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
Libreria Vaticana Editrice, 1994. (1st Ed.)
- CR Charter to the Rights of the Family
The Holy See, 1983
- CIC Code of Canon Law (1983 ed.)
- CPML *Catechumenal Pathways for Married Life*
Dicastery of Laity, Family, and Life, 2022
- CT *Catechesi Tradendae*
Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, 1979.
- DC *Directory for Catechesis*
Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, 2020
- EN Evangelii Nuntiandi
On Evangelization In the Modern World
Pope Paul VI, 1975
- EV Evangelium Vitae
The Gospel of Life
Pope John Paul II, 1995
- FC Familiaris Consortio
Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World
Pope John Paul II, 1995

- GCD *The General Catechetical Directory*
Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, 1971.
- GDC *The General Directory for Catechesis*
Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, 1997
- GMD *Go and Make Disciples: National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States*
USCC, November 1992
- GS *Gratissimam Sane*
Letter to Families
Pope John Paul II, 1994
- GS *Gaudium Et Spes*
Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World
Documents of the Second Vatican Council, 1965
- HV *Humane Vitae*
On Human Life
Pope Paul VI, 1973
- LW *Letter to Women*
Pope John Paul II, 1995
- MD *Mulieris Dignitatem*
On the Dignity and Vocation of Women
Pope John Paul II, 1988
- RCIA *RCIA Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*
USCC, Publication 1214-4, 1988
- The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*
Guidelines for Education within the Family
Pontifical Council for the Family, 1995
- TOB *Theology of the Body*
Pope John Paul II, 1983
- VS *Veritatis Splendor*
The Splendor of Truth
Pope John Paul II, August 5, 1993

SCRIPTURAL AND DOCTRINAL FOUNDATIONS ON HOLY MATRIMONY

Biblical Foundations

Scripture is a living breathing tradition of the Church. (CCC 136-137) Authentic interpretation of Scripture is meant to be a revelation towards our salvation. (CCC 136-137)

1. The origin of Marriage – Gen 1:27; 1 Jn 4, 8, 16; Gen 2:18
2. God our Father. – Jn 1:15-18
3. They are no longer two but one – Mt 19:6
4. Nativity Lk. - 2:1-20
5. Annunciation/Visitation - Lk. 1:26-56
6. Presentation in the Temple - Lk. 2:22-40
7. Purpose of Jesus' coming - Lk. 19:9-10
8. Marriage as a new covenant of Christ and His Church – Eph 5:31-32
9. Blessing of Children Mk. 10:13-16
10. Marriage as a Holy Institution centered on Christ – 1 Cor 7:39
11. The Call of the Twelve Mk. 3:13-19; Lk. 5:1-11
12. The indissolubility of Marriage – Mt 19:6-8; Mk 8:34;
13. Reception of the Holy Eucharist and the Rite of Marriage. – 1 Cor 10:17
14. The Spousal love of Christ and His Church. – Eph 5:26-27
15. Proper matrimonial consent. Gen 2:24; Mk 10:8; Eph 5:31
16. The Establishment of the Church. Primary events.- Acts 1:12-14, 2:42-47
17. Pentecost - Acts 2:1-41, Jn. 16:7-14

18. Command to preach the Good News to all the Nations. - Mk. 16:15-16; Mt. 28:16-20
19. Peter's Primacy and authority as the Cephas the foundation of the Church. Mt. 16:15-16; Mt. 28:16-20
20. The Marriage Bond. - Mk. 10:9
21. Mission of the Disciples - Lk. 10:1-12; Mt. 5:13-16
22. Sacred Tradition & Revealed Truths - Jn. 14: 25-26, Jn. 16: 12-13, 21:25
23. The institution of the Eucharist by Jesus - Mt. 26:26-28; Lk. 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26
24. Mary as the Mother of the Church - Jn. 19:25-27

Doctrinal Foundations

1. Faith is an adherence to God's call for us on earth. CCC 26
2. Faith in God equates to faith in His Son Jesus Christ. CCC 444-454
3. Faith is seeking understanding. CCC 158
4. The universality of Catholicism, Magisterium. CCC 172-175
5. The Mystery of God CCC 206-230
6. Our Profession of Faith lies in the Creed. CCC 194
7. Marriage has been part of God's plan from the very beginning. CCC 1602-1605
8. The Nature of the Trinity. Three persons in one nature. We are a Trinitarian people made in Hisimage and likeness. Temples of the Holy Spirit. CCC 252; CCC 782, 789, 810
9. The Mystery of Christ through his Divine and Human natures as one with God. CCC 481
10. Our Blessed Mother Mary and her Immaculate Conception as being free from the stain of sin. CCC 508
11. Marriage and the perils of sin. CCC 1606-1608
12. Marriage under the moral law-Ten Commandments. CCC 1609-1611

13. Spouses form a nuptial covenant with God. CCC 1612-1617
14. Jesus' public life, his profession of faith, his death. CCC 535-560, 565-570, 635-636
15. Virginitly for the sake of the Kingdom within marriage. CCC 1619-1620
16. The Liturgy and the Sacrament of Marriage. CCC 1621-1624
17. Realize Jesus descending into Hell, conquering death and rising as the heavenly priest who will always intercede for us. CCC 635-636, 662, 667
18. The Church is part of that Salvation History that has been instituted from the Creation of Adam and Eve to Christ which became glorified and fulfilled through Christ's death and resurrection on ..the cross. CCC 759-769
19. We are called to sustain a unity of prayer with Christ and the Communion of Saints. CCC 953, 2665, 2673, 2697-2699
20. The exchange of matrimonial consent lays the foundation for marriage. CCC 1625-1632
21. "I do." CCC 1631-1632
22. Trust in the Holy Spirit in living a life with Christ. CCC 684, 737, 739, 741
23. The Church's mission is to proclaim the good news of Christ through our Redemption signifying the reign of God. CCC 6-7, 127, 737-738, 830-831, 1070
24. We are the Body of Christ, active and alive in the Holy Spirit as a people of God. CCC 836-838, 1322-1323, 1391, 1396, 1405, 1691
25. The grace of the sacrament of Marriage. CCC 1638-1642
26. *The goods and requirements of conjugal love.* CCC 1643.
27. *Indissolubility.* CCC 1644-1645
28. The Incarnation. CCC 464, 479, 483
29. Fidelity in Marriage. CCC 1646-1651
30. Openness to life. CCC 1653-1654

31. Mary's role as a virgin mother, a perfect mother to us a model of perfect charity and obedience to God. CCC 496, 499, 510, 773, 829, 963-975

32. Marriage and the Domestic Church. CCC 1655-1659

33. We are united in Christ through our Creation by God. CCC 283-285, 293-298

Sacramental Foundations

1. Baptism is a communion with Christ. CCC 1271

2. We are Baptized in Trinitarian form Father, Son, Holy Spirit. CCC 1256, 1278, 1284

3. Recognize that the Eucharist represents the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, the true single sacrifice. CCC 1365-1367

4. There are two forms of reception of Christ, bread, or bread and wine. CCC 1390

5. Know that the sacrifice of the mass is Christ offering His body for the salvation of all. CCC 1410

6. Recognize that all Catholics must go to confession at least once a year. CCC 1457

7. Realize that Jesus established authority to forgive sins to his priests through His name. Only priests can safeguard the administration of this sacrament along with the consecration of the Eucharist. CCC 1461, 1495, 1411

8. Know that the ultimate priest is Christ who shared his ministerial priesthood with the Apostles. CCC 1545, 1550, 1584

9. Know marriage as the Paschal Mystery of Christ celebrated at Mass. CCC 1621, 1663

10. Know that marriage is a covenant between the consenting couple. CCC 1625-1628, 1662, 1639, 1647

Church Foundations

1. We are called to work and celebrate in the Liturgy. CCC 1071

2. The mass as the ultimate form of prayer.

3. Discuss the importance of Eucharistic Adoration as a means to strengthen Marriage.

4. Encourage frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

5. The sacraments of initiation leave an indelible mark. CCC 1121
6. Grace is being poured out through reception of the sacraments. CCC 1131
7. The whole mass is centered on the death and Resurrection of Christ on the Cross.
8. Baptism is a necessity for our salvific call to holiness with God. Baptism confers acceptance into the Community of God. It is part of our mission to serve and profess the faith. CCC 1257-1260, 1276-1277, 1281
9. Being confirmed in the Holy Spirit, Confirmation is not only a right of Christian maturity for the initiated, it is a call to obedience, proclamation, and evangelization of our Catholic faith through the exposition of the Church to all. CCC 74, 91-93, 897-913, 1308
10. The Sacraments celebrate the fullness of what it means to be part of the Church. The Church is at its highest point when the sacraments are celebrated. CCC 959, 1068, 1071, 1116, 1118
11. The Eucharist is the actual body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the form of bread and wine being transformed (transubstantiation). CCC 1374-1376, 1413
12. The sacraments reveal the true nature of the Church through the outward signs professed through the sacraments. CCC 1068, 1071-1072, 1115, 1136, 1140, 1144, 1416
13. We are united in the Mystical Body of Christ in the Eucharist. CCC 1396, 1398
14. Explain concupiscence in relation to Baptism and the inclination of sin. CCC 1426
15. True reconciliation is achieved by confessing one's sins and receiving absolution so that we are reconciled with God. CCC 1484, 1497
16. Anointing of the sick is a sacrament of unity with God in times of serious illness, pending death and old age. CCC 1514, 1515, 1528, 1529
17. Explore the church's teachings on the Sacraments of Matrimony, Holy Orders and the single or . religious life realizing that all are called by God. (Vocations) CCC 1533-1666, 1694-1696
18. The Mass is the ultimate form of prayer in celebrating the Paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection on the cross.

Moral Foundations

1. Recognize the nature and origin of sin.
2. Begin to establish a relationship with Christ as a moral compass for daily actions.
3. The meaning of Prudence as a means of making wise choices in relation to one's faith.
4. The importance of a well-informed conscience with Christ as the central core of being.
5. Hope in God is part of our call to holiness.
6. Recognize that Sunday is truly the "Lord's day", the day of resurrection.
7. Know and understand what evil is in relation to the devil, acts against Christ's love for us.
8. The difference between mortal and venial sins.
9. Know and understand the seven capital sins along with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.
10. The importance of living a pure, chaste life in respect to your spouse.
11. Exercise the cardinal virtues of temperance and fortitude in relation to sexual pressures and promiscuity within the sacrament of Holy matrimony.
12. Develop a deeper awareness of what is pure and of Christ in relation to the sacrament of Holy Matrimony between spouses.
13. A person's right to life is a precious gift instituted by God for the sake of praising and worshiping the Lord.
14. Our Gospel values are to protect one another in Christ from any undue, unjust harm, spiritually or physically.
15. A performed deliberate abortion constitutes a direct killing of an innocent life and is a grave sin against the fifth commandment.
16. Application of a moral code utilizing all four cardinal virtues, especially prudence within the sacrament of Holy Matrimony.
17. Everything the married couple does should be centered on Christ.
18. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, and by this should not harm ourselves in anyway physically (drugs), sexually (pre-marital sex) or in any form of abuse against God's creation.

19. Explore responsibility and awareness of forming a strong conscience in relation to Christ.
20. Sin is a denial of God's love for us. Review the difference between venial and mortal sin.
21. We are called by Christ to keep the commandments true to our faith.
22. Establish the importance of maintaining a pure chaste life in regard to our Christian understanding about sex and sexuality within marriage.

Prayer Foundations

1. The Holy Spirit is our guide and pathway to Christ in prayer. CCC 2615
2. Prayer is a gift instituted by God. CCC 2658
3. The "Our Father" serves as the ultimate form of prayer. CCC 2777-2796
4. The Lord's Prayer is the summary of the whole Gospel. CCC 2761-2766
5. There is a universal call to prayer. CCC 2566; 2569
6. Jesus teaches us how to pray. CCC 2607-2615
7. Jesus hears our prayers. CCC 2616
8. Mary's Prayer. CCC 2617-2619
9. Different forms of prayer i.e. petition, adoration, thanksgiving, intercession, blessing, praise. .CCC 2626-2643
10. Expressions of Prayer vocal, meditation, contemplative. CCC 2700-2719

CATECHETICAL, DOCTRINAL, LITURGICAL, AND PASTORAL PRINCIPLES

CATECHETICAL

Pre-catechumenal phase: Remote Preparation Catechesis and initial inquiry into the sacrament

“Catechesis for Marriage is not limited to the period immediately before marriage. People begin to learn the meaning of married love and to acquire reverence for married life very early in childhood; parents are the primary catechists of their children with respect to such matters.” (*The National Catechetical Directory* (NCD) 131)

1. The Home

The home is the central place where remote catechesis for this sacrament takes place. The child’s parents are both catechists and models. From her/his earliest years, a child learns what a Christian marriage is through daily contact with the adults in the home environment. Establishing the integrity of the Gospel message is what the mission of Catechesis is all about. “Jesus proclaimed the Gospel integrally . . . because I have made known to you all that I have heard from my Father” (Jn 15:15), (GDC 111).

“Believing parents, with their daily example of life, have the most effective capacity to transmit the beauty of the Christian faith to their children.” (DC, 124)

“Spouses, conscientiously living out their married life in mutual love and respect and in the upbringing of their children, reflect the mutual love of Christ and His Church. They not only enrich each other’s lives, but they inspire and provide examples for their children. Inspired by the example and family prayer of their parents, children, and in fact everyone living under the family roof, will more easily set out upon the path of a truly human training, of salvation, and of holiness.” (Gaudium et Spes, #48)

“The church has always considered catechesis one of her primary tasks,” (Catechist, Pope John Paul II pg. 37).

“The *family is a proclamation of faith* in that it is the natural place in which faith can be lived in a simple and spontaneous manner.” (DC, 227)

2. Religious Education/Youth Ministry Programs

Catechesis for the Sacrament of Marriage should be an integral part of the parish religious education program. The scope and depth of this catechesis is to be adapted to the age of the students. Marriage as one of the sacraments of the Church should be presented at elementary level. For junior high and high school students the sacramentality, the indissolubility, the grace of the sacrament marriage, the covenantal relationship forged with Jesus Christ, fidelity, love of spouse, love of children, should be carefully presented. “To this end, a healthy

Christian anthropology should be formed already in children – including the first elements of human sexuality and the theology of the body – and their baptismal identity should be developed in a vocational perspective, whether to marriage or religious life.” (CPML, 28)

3. Content

Content of remote catechesis includes, but is not limited to, the following concepts:

- a. Christian marriage is between a baptized man and a baptized woman. CCC 160-1612
- b. Man and Woman are mutually, freely chosen. CCC 1625-1632
- c. The Marriage covenant reflects the union of Christ with the Church. CCC 1638-1642
- d. Christian marriage is a permanent, exclusive commitment to each other regardless of the pressures of society or peers. CCC 1644-1645
- e. Spouses are open to each other in love, to each other’s emotional, spiritual and social growth, to the procreation and the Christian parenting of children. CCC 1646-1651
- f. Marriage is a vocation. CCC 1621
- g. Characteristics of genuine love as distinguished from infatuation or as a process for mutual self satisfaction. CCC 1646-1651
- h. Reasons for and readiness for marriage.
- i. Human sexuality especially in the context of human growth and development and sexual intimacy. CCC 1643, 2361
- j. Communication and inter personal relationships.
- k. Marriage as a Christian lifestyle CCC 1655-1658

INTERMEDIATE PHASE: RECEPTION OF CANDIDATES

The intermediate phase is the reception of the engaged couple to the parish where they wish to receive marriage formation and catechesis. This phase can vary in length of time, but most likely would only last a few weeks unless there are serious impediments keeping the couple from entering into the marriage catechumenate.

The priest, deacon or pastoral administrator who interviews the couple, carries out much of this catechesis but other parish ministers, especially married couples, need to participate in this ministry. The proximate preparation for marriage, however, should ordinarily begin only when all impediments to the marriage have been removed.

The reception period should not be hasty one-time meeting to go through the “checklist” of items to complete in order to receive the sacrament of matrimony. This time is meant for the priest, deacon, and/or pastoral administrator(s) to receive the couple warmly, asking probing questions to their readiness for the marriage catechumenate, and if there are any serious objections (i.e. cohabitation, rejection of the faith, etc.). In the case of those who are far from religious practice or even near ignorance of the faith, “the period of reception should become a proclamation of the kerygma, so that the merciful love of Christ may create an authentic ‘spiritual place’ in which couples are welcome.” (CPML, 38)

After proper assessment has been made, a private ritual to initiate the couple into the Catechumenal Phase can take place (i.e. Giving a Bible to the couple). If a parish wishes to perform a ritual, it is **highly** recommended that it is done in private and not in public (i.e. Mass). This is for the benefit of the couple so there is no confusion or pressure placed upon them during this continual time of discernment for marriage.

CATECHUMENAL PHASE: FIRST AND SECOND STAGES: PROXIMATE AND FINAL PREPARATIONS

In addition to the guidelines outlined above, a couple preparing for marriage should receive specific catechesis to assist them in their readiness for celebrating this sacrament. Catechesis is appropriate not only for those wishing to enter into marriage for the first time, but also for those who have been in a previous marriage and for those who have been married outside the Church and who wish to have their marriage sanated or validated.

The first two stages of this phase are the proximate and final preparation.

The proximate phase should include formation meetings with a mentor couple, a full course of Natural Family Planning, and a Marriage Formation Day (Pre-Cana). This stage can conclude with a private ritual (i.e., Rite of Betrothal) and enter into the second stage of final preparation.

Final Preparation should review what was covered during the proximate stage, answer any remaining questions, assess readiness, cover the Liturgical Rite, and have the couple in proper disposition to receive the grace of the sacrament. This stage is concluded with the liturgical rite of matrimony.

1. General Catechetical Concepts

Couples preparing for marriage should enter into a model that is inspired by the catechumenate. “The *catechumenal inspiration of catechesis* does not mean reproducing the catechumenate in a servile manner, but taking on its style and its formative dynamism, responding also to the ‘need for a mystagogical renewal, one which would assume very different forms based on each educational community’s discernment.’” (DC, 64)

Those who are preparing for marriage should be provided a journey of faith that which is gradual and continuous throughout the process and gives priority on proclamation of the *kerygma* along with a “kind of initiation” to the sacrament of matrimony. “It is a good idea to stop using the name, where it is still in use, of *marriage preparation courses*, in order to restore to this journey its authentic meaning of formation and catechesis.” (DC, 232.a)

Couples preparing for marriage should understand clearly all the key doctrinal points outlined in remote catechesis and the implications for a lifelong experience of marriage. Proximity to the actual celebration of the sacrament brings those concepts out of the theoretical realm, and into the very practical context of immediate applicability.

Examples of Key Doctrinal Points are as follows:

- The Sacrament Holy Matrimony is one of the Seven of the Sacraments of the Catholic Church. Gen 1:26-27
- The Catholic couple entering into the marriage covenant must be Baptized.
- Both parties must be free to marry i.e. there is no constraint or impediment arising from any natural or ecclesiastical law. CCC 1625; CIC 1057, 1071
- In the Latin Rite, marriage between two Catholics usually takes place during Holy Mass because of the sacramental connection to the Paschal mystery. CC 1621
- Reception of the sacrament of Penance is encouraged as part of the Marriage preparation for the couple. CCC 1622; FC 67
- Two distinctive graces of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony are the love of spouse and the love of Children.
- Marriage is indissoluble before the eyes of the Church. CCC 1644; Mt 19:6; FC 19
- The intimate union of marriage, as a mutual self-giving of two persons, and the good of children, demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable union between them. GS 48, 1

2. Other Catechetical Considerations

- a. Proper Catechesis helps couples understand marriage as a holy covenantal relationship, centered on Christ and for the duration of life itself. Their fidelity to one another reflects their fidelity to Christ and His Church.
- b. Proper Catechesis emphasizes the sacrament of marriage is the mutual self-giving of one another in conjugal fidelity, support, and growth of love between husband and wife in their relationship with Christ. CC 1643-1650
- c. Proper Catechesis will lead to openness to procreation (life) and the parenting of children is one of the foundational requirements in a Christian marriage. CCC 1652-1654

“But marriage is not merely for the procreation of children: its nature as an indissoluble covenant between two people and the good of the children demand that the mutual love of the partners be properly shown, that it should grow and mature. Even in cases where despite the intense desire of the spouses there are no

children, marriage still retains its character of being a whole manner and communion of life and preserves its value and indissolubility.” (Gaudium et Spes, 50)

d. “Catechesis also includes a clear presentation of the Church’s teaching concerning moral methods of regulating births (Natural Family Planning), the evil crime of abortion, artificial birth control and of sterilization for that purpose; it should stress the protection due to human life once conceived.” (NCD131) See also: CCC 2271; 2273; 2270

e. Proper Catechesis will demonstrate the value of the Catholic faith as a source of strength for the couple should be clearly emphasized. CCC 1456-1460 While, it recognizes the sac–ramental nature of interchurch marriages, the Church en–courages marriages within the faith. CCC 1633-1637

f. Proper Catechesis is provided even when only one spouse in a marriage is Catholic. Proper catechesis includes the norms (Rite) and laws (Code of Canon Law) of the Church pertaining to Christian marriage (CCC 1633-1637).

g. When a Catholic is about to enter into marriage with a non Chris–tian, the Catholic party requests a canonical dispensation. As the unity of Christian belief will not be available to them in their married life, catechesis should encourage the couple to explore honestly the difficulties that will affect them as a result of this reality.

h. Catechetical instruction under special circumstance is needed for those who have suffered the trauma of loss of a former spouse through death or annulment of a former marriage. In the latter case, a decree of invalidity may be obtained through the diocesan Marriage Tribunal. The declaration of invalidity states that a valid marriage never existed between the parties according to the Church’s understanding and definition of marriage.

i. “Catechesis on the Church’s teaching concerning the consequences of remarriage after divorce is not only necessary but will be suppor–tive for the divorced.” (NCD #131) The entire parish community should share concern for those involved in a divorce.

CATECHUMENAL PHASE: THIRD STAGE – MYSTAGOGY, ACCOMPANIMENT DURING THE FIRST YEARS OF MARRIED LIFE, AND ONGOING CATECHESIS

After the couple has given each other in the bonds of Holy Matrimony, it is important for continual catechesis, renewal and conversion take hold to further the outpouring of graces of the Sacrament of Marriage.

“The *catechesis of young married couples* is the catechesis offered in mystagogic form to new spouses after marriage, in order to lead them to the discovery of what they have become thanks to the sacrament that has been celebrated. It is good for these formative journeys, in the light of the word of God, to guide the lives of young couples in such a way that they may become ever more aware of the gift and mission they have received.” (DC, 232.b)

Continual spiritual, moral, and doctrinal support serves as three primary areas where on-going catechesis enriches the lives of the married couple. Examples of these areas are as follows:

- Fostering a genuine prayer life where the couple not only offers themselves in prayer to Christ, they also intercede for one another at Mass, through the intercession of the Saints, Eucharistic Adoration, Novenas, living an active liturgical life through the liturgical season.
- Treat each other with dignity as human beings created in the image and likeness of God. Respect each other as husband and wife freely giving of each other in conjugal fidelity.
- Continue to enrich their hearts and minds in the teachings of the Catholic Church through adult catechesis i.e. Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Other areas of ongoing catechesis may include, but is not limited to the following:

1. All the areas described above in the remote and proximate catechesis.
2. Programs of marriage enrichment should be part of every parish adult catechetical agenda and include opportunities for (a) those newly married, (b) new parents or those about to be parents, (c) those who want to revitalize their marriages, (d) those who are celebrating a significant family milestone or crisis, and (e) those who are celebrating a significant anniversary, e.g. 25th or 50th.
3. Special training programs provided by competent staff should be utilized for effective training of sponsor couples. Married couples should be involved in giving catechesis concerning marriage. They should continue pastoral involvement with the newly married couple through the early stages of the marriage.
4. Catechesis and pastoral care should always be available to those who have experienced the agony of failure in their efforts to live out their marriage commitment.

DOCTRINAL

EFFECTIVE SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

1. Clarifies all misconceptions towards the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. It seeks a balance between the value of adequate preparation and proper disposition, with the recognition of sacraments instituted by Christ himself.
2. Includes the engaged couple, their families, the larger parish community and trained catechists. CCC 1655-1658
3. Adapts to the needs, ages, and circumstances of the engaged couple. CCC 1625-1629
4. Focuses on the meaning of the sacrament, including scriptural and doctrinal foundation, historical development, and the sacramental rite itself. CCC1601-1605
5. Fosters effective evangelization, sound catechetical instruction, and a missionary spirit. CCC 1638-1642
6. Promotes active life-long participation in the sacramental life. CCC 1641; 1646-1651

PASTORAL

PASTORAL AND CATECHETICAL PRINCIPLES FOR MARRIAGE

1. Active participation in the Mass and reception of the Eucharist is the source and summit of Catholic life and is to be encouraged. (CCC 1324)
2. To receive the sacrament of Marriage fruitfully, the spouses are strongly advised to receive the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist. [CIC, can. 1065 # 2]
3. Catholics who have not yet received the sacrament of confirmation should receive it before being admitted to marriage, if it can be done without grave inconvenience. [CIC, can.1065 # 1]
4. Communion under both species is to be offered at all Eucharistic celebrations. The decision to receive from the cup should be the option of the communicant, not of the presider.
5. Effective catechesis requires sound doctrinal, liturgical and pastoral practice.

LITURGICAL

THE RITE OF MARRIAGE (UNDER REVISION IN LIGHT OF THE NEW NORMS)

INTRODUCTION

1. Communal Participation

The celebration of this sacrament is not one for the wedding party alone: all present are to be active witnesses and participants. Hence, the preparation of a simple worship aid is urged to enable all to take part as fully as possible.

2. Time of Celebration

The sacrament may be celebrated at any time of the year; however, certain holy days and seasons (e.g. Christmas, Epiphany, Holy Thursday through Easter, Corpus Christi...) displace the wedding Mass texts. Even on those days or during those seasons, one reading is to be taken from those designated for weddings, and the nuptial blessing given. Couples may be encouraged to celebrate this sacrament at the Sunday Eucharist before the entire community.

“When a marriage is celebrated during Advent or Lent or other days of penance, the parish priest should advise the couple to take into consideration the special nature of these times.” (*Rite of Marriage* (RM), Introduction, par. 11) This admonition would affect the decoration of the worship space in particular.

3. Ministers Needed

The primary ministers are the couple. The priest or deacon is the presider and official witness for the Church. Other ministers normally needed in the celebration of a sacrament: lectors, special ministers of the Eucharist, altar servers, ministers of hospitality, should be prepared for their proper roles in this sacrament. The use of members of the wedding party and members of the two families in these roles where possible is to be encouraged. After them, members of the parish community should be considered. Above all, the use of the priest or deacon for all readings is to be avoided.

PHYSICAL PREPARATION

The ceremony will always take place in a church or college chapel. When Marriage is celebrated within Mass, everything normally needed for the celebration of Mass should be prepared. Whatever may be called for in the use of a devotional, e.g., holy water, lasso, arras, unity candle, etc. should also be prepared.

OUTLINE OF RITE

“Within the Rite of the Sacrament of Marriage, the arrangement of its parts may be varied if it seems more suitable; even the consent may be omitted as long as the priest asks and receives the consent of the contracting parties.” (RM Intro., par 14)

Since it could weaken the sacramental sign to continue with the celebration of Eucharist where at communion only one may receive, in cases of Catholics marrying non-Catholics, the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage outside of Mass should be encouraged in order to strengthen this sacrament of unity.

CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE WITHIN MASS

1. Entrance Rites

Procession – instrumental, followed by Gathering Hymn sung by all

- or Procession with communal hymn
- or Procession – instrumental

Greeting and Welcome, Opening Prayer

(Penitential Rite and Gloria omitted)

2. Liturgy of the Word (always and only Scripture)

- Readings with psalm response, Gospel acclamation, Gospel and homily
- “There may be three readings...After the Gospel the priest gives a homily drawn from the sacred text.” (RM, par. 21,22)

3. Liturgy of Marriage

- Exchange of Vows
- Blessing and exchange of rings
- Devotional (optional see “Cultural Adaptations’ below)
- General Intercessions

4. Liturgy of the Eucharist

- Presentation of the Gifts: Members of the wedding party who are active practicing Catholics may bring unconsecrated bread and wine to the bride and groom who may then hand them to the priest.
- Nuptial Blessing is given.
- Sign of Peace- Care should be taken to keep this exchange brief, so as not to create the impression that this is a general “reception.”
- After Communion a song of thanksgiving by the community may be sung.
- Prayer after Communion may be followed by a devotional action.

5. Dismissal Rites

- Blessing
- Dismissal (which may include presentation of the couple to the community)
- Recessional as usual.

CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE OUTSIDE MASS

1. Entrance Rites

Procession – instrumental, followed by Gathering Hymn sung by all
or Procession with communal hymn
or Procession – instrumental

Greeting and Welcome, Opening Prayer
(Penitential Rite and Glory to God omitted)

2. Liturgy of the Word (Only from Sacred Scripture)

- Readings with psalm response, Gospel acclamation, Gospel and homily
- “There may be three readings...After the Gospel the priest gives a homily
- drawn from the sacred text.” (RM par. 21,22)

3. *Liturgy of Marriage*

- Exchange of vows
- Blessing and exchange of rings
- Devotional¹ (optional see “Cultural Adaptations” below)
- Sign of Peace (pastoral practice, not required by Rite)
- General Intercessions
- Nuptial Blessing
- Lord’s Prayer
- Solemn Blessing
- Devotional (optional)
- Presentation of the Couple (optional)
- Recessional

OTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER:

1. Symbols - The couple is itself the principal symbol, sealed by the spoken vows; care should be taken that the vows are audible to the community.

The ring(s) and other images, e.g. lazo, arras, unity candle, etc., serve to highlight one or another facet of the basic symbol.

2. Gesture - More than a hand movement, gesture extends to the total body language of the ritual. Attention should be paid, for example, to the planning of the wedding procession: one makes a statement without words in presenting the wedding party. Questions such as, “Does the wedding party enter as a fashion display or as logical procession?”; “Are both sets of parents actively engaged in the procession, or are they fringe figures, except for the father of the bride?”;

“*Is the ordained minister part of the procession?*” This question has arisen because of the strong (and correct) understanding that the couples are the ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage. However, it is the priest or deacon who presides and therefore is properly part of the procession, coming at the end.

3. Environment - The assembly gathered in the place of worship is the proper environment of this Sacrament. However, decoration of the worship space is both traditional and appropriate. What is to be sought is not the creation of a totally different setting, e.g. a garden scene, but instead the use of decorations which point to and enhance the action instead of calling attention to themselves. A word of caution: the multiple use of a symbol weakens its impact. Parishes may insist that important liturgical seasonal environments are not disturbed, e.g. Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, etc.

4. Cultural Adaptations - After the exchange of rings, what was called above a devotional may be inserted. The crowning or veiling already mentioned, the lazo, and the gift of gold coins are some possibilities. The choice should be meaningful to the couple and harmonize with the wedding liturgy’s true and authentic spirit, not simply a “filler” for the ceremony. The ritual should thus reflect both language and culture of the couple.

Devotional actions should not outweigh the sacramental action.

SPECIFIC MORAL FOUNDATIONS IN RELATION TO THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY MATRIMONY

- **Contraception**
- **Fornication**
- **Adultery**
- **Cohabitation**
- **In-Vitro Fertilization**
- **Homosexuality**



NORMS FOR READINESS

The couple is of age and displays maturity appropriate to assuming the rights and responsibilities of marriage. (Appropriate Consent – CCC1625-1632)

Through prayer and discernment, they each believe they are called to the vocation of marriage and that this is the right person with whom to enter into an exclusive relationship for life. (CCC 1632; 1639)

There are no pressures to marry or objections to the marriage. (CCC 1625)

They share a realistic view of marriage and expectations. (CCC 1641)

The priest, deacon, pastoral administrator or their representative has arrived at a prudent assessment that the couple is free to marry according to the terms of both civil and canon law.

If the priest, deacon or pastoral administrator, however, has valid reasons to believe that the couple is not capable of living the necessary commitments of Christian marriage (e.g., a history of violent behavior or chronic addiction), he must take the responsibility of halting the process at this point and do his best to recommend an appropriate course of therapy for the couple.

A positive assessment on the part of the priest, deacon or pastoral administrator does not exclude the possibility of doubts about the wisdom of the couple's desire to marry in the Church. Since no one can know for certain how the couple will make use of the graces that God is surely willing to give them, hesitancy is resolved, usually correctly, in favor of giving the couple - and God's grace - the benefit of the doubt.

Any concerns about the couple's readiness to marry are to be noted on the prenuptial forms.

Readiness of the couple to marry is ultimately determined by themselves, rather than by the clergy or delegated parish ministers. It is they, the bride and groom, who minister the sacrament to each other because of their natural right to marry. Prudent counsel may assist them to assess their readiness for marriage and prepare to receive the graces of the sacrament. CCC 1622)

OFFICE OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE NEW MARRIAGE PREPARATION MINISTERIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

Effective 2023

- Marriage Preparation is recommended to begin as soon as a couple is engaged. An initial meeting must be scheduled with a priest, deacon or marriage coordinator before booking a reception site, photographs, etc.
- While we anticipate most couples' preparation to take 9-12 months, this can vary depending on various factors. Please assess and work with couples whether the time is shorter or longer than this timeframe.
- Diocesan Primary Marriage Preparation (PMP) is to be experienced by both parties, preferably together. It in no way replaces the instruction by the Pastor, pastoral administrator or a clergy representative both before and after the PMP. An overview of the two steps to be completed is listed below.
- Refusal to participate in the PMP is a pastoral concern. It warrants a re-evaluation of readiness for marriage.
- Natural Family Planning is a mandatory requirement for all couples who seek the sacrament of Holy Matrimony within the Catholic Diocese of Columbus. The Natural Family Planning (NFP) process consists of a full course in NFP with respect to the method, process, actual application and follow through. All NFP courses are taught by a certified NFP instructor in the following methods of NFP: Billings, Couple to Couple league, Creighton, Marquette.
- It is strongly encouraged that PMP be completed 60 to 90 days before the wedding.

PREPARATION SCHEDULE	TIME FRAME
Schedule an initial meeting with the Pastor, deacon, or Marriage Preparation Coordinator	9-12 Months before desired wedding date
Complete a marriage preparation inventory at your parish (<i>Note: New Marriage Preparation Inventory is “The Fully Engaged Program” from the Diocese of St. Cloud, MN. It will replace the FOCCUS and Witness to Love Marriage Inventory Programs.</i>)	Within a few weeks of an initial meeting(s) with the pastor, deacon or marriage preparation coordinator.
FOR COUPLES IN WHICH BOTH MAN AND WOMAN ARE ENTERING THEIR FIRST MARRIAGE	
<p align="center">STEP 1-THEOLOGICAL-DOCTRINAL COMPONENT- PRE CANA FORMATION DAY*</p> <p>This one-day class explains the Sacrament of Marriage in the Catholic Church, the Vows of Consent and sexual morality in marriage, covenantal relationship, chastity, cohabitation, and Scriptural and doctrinal roots of Holy Matrimony.</p> <p align="center">STEP 2- LIFE SKILLS COMPONENT*</p> <p>“Fully Engaged” Sponsor Couple Program* A Parish-based program facilitated by a married couple from the parish focusing on life skills; communication, conflict resolution, personalities, finances, and living out your faith.</p> <p align="center">STEP 3-NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING*</p>	To be completed 60-90 days before the wedding date.
FOR COUPLES IN WHICH ONE OR BOTH HAVE BEEN PREVIOUSLY MARRIED	
<p>STEP 1-THEOLOGICAL COMPONENT – PRE CANA FORMATION DAY* This one-day class explains the Sacrament of Marriage in the Catholic Church, the Vows of Consent and sexual morality in marriage.</p> <p align="center">STEP 2 – LIFE SKILLS COMPONENT*</p> <p>Sponsor Couple Program (Fully Engaged) A Parish-based program facilitated by a married couple from the parish focusing on life skills, communication, conflict resolution, personalities, finances, and living out your faith.</p> <p align="center">STEP 3 – NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING*</p>	To be completed 60-90 days before the wedding.
FOR COUPLES CIVILLY MARRIED SEEKING CON-VALIDATION OR SANATION	
<p align="center">STEP 1 – THEOLOGICAL & SKILLS COMPONENT; (we are asking all to go through the “Pre Cana Formation Day as we continue to work on setting up this component)</p> <p align="center">STEP 2 – LIFE SKILLS COMPONENT*</p> <p align="center">Sponsor Couple Program (Fully Engaged)</p> <p align="center">STEP 3 – NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING*</p>	It is highly recommended that this class be completed 60-90 days before the wedding date if Con-validating or the Sanation date.
*Available in English and Spanish	

APPENDIX I

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY EXCERPTS FROM PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE 1996

INTRODUCTION

1. Preparation for marriage, for married and family life, is of great importance for the good of the Church. In fact, the sacrament of Marriage has great value for the whole Christian community and, in the first place, for the spouses whose decision is such that it cannot be improvised or made hastily. In the past, this preparation could count on the support of society which recognized the values and benefits of marriage. Without any difficulties or doubts, the Church protected the sanctity of marriage with the awareness that this sacrament represented an ecclesial guarantee as the living cell of the People of God. At least in the communities that were truly evangelized, the Church's support was solid, unitary and compact. In general, separations and marriage failures were rare, and divorce was considered a social "plague" (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* = GS, 47).

Today, on the contrary, in many cases, we are witnessing an accentuated deterioration of the family and a certain corrosion of the values of marriage. In many nations, especially economically developed ones, the number of marriages has decreased. Marriage is usually contracted at a later age and the number of divorces and separations is increasing, even during the first years of married life. All this inevitably leads to a pastoral concern that comes up repeatedly: Are the persons contracting marriage really prepared for it? The problem of preparation for the sacrament of Marriage and the life that follows emerges as a great pastoral need, first for the sake of the spouses, for the whole Christian community and for society. Therefore, interest in, and initiatives for providing adequate and timely answers to preparation for the sacrament of Marriage are growing everywhere.

2. Marriage preparation constitutes a *providential and favorable* period for those oriented toward this Christian sacrament, and a *Kayrós*, i.e., a period in which God calls upon the engaged and helps them discern the vocation to marriage and family life. The engagement period is set within the context of a rich evangelization process. In fact, questions that affect the family converge in the life of the engaged, the future spouses. They are therefore invited to understand the meaning of the responsible and mature love of the community of life and love which their family will be, a real domestic church which will contribute toward enriching the whole Church.

The importance of this preparation involves a process of evangelization which is both maturation and deepening in the faith. If the faith is weak or almost nonexistent (cf. *Familiaris Consortio* = FC 68), it must be revived. Thorough, patient instruction that arouses and nourishes the ardor of a living faith cannot be excluded. Especially where the environment has become paganized, it will be particularly advisable to offer a "journey of faith, which is similar to the catechumenate" (FC 66), and a presentation of the fundamental Christian truths that may help acquire or strengthen the maturity of the faith of the persons contracting marriage. It would be desirable if the favorable moment of marriage preparation could be transformed, as a sign of hope, into a New Evangelization for the future families.

3. This particular attention is highlighted by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council (GS 52), the guidelines of the Papal Magisterium (FC 66), the ecclesial norms themselves (*Codex Iuris Canonici* = CIC, can. 1063; *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* = CCEO, can. 783), the Catechism of the Catholic Church (n. 1632), and other documents of the Magisterium, including the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*. The two most recent documents of the Papal Magisterium — the Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane* and the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (= EV) — constitute a notable aid for our task.

4. The “Magna Carta” for families, the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, which has already been cited, had already pointed out that: “...the changes that have taken place within almost all modern societies demand that not only the family but also society and the Church should be involved in the effort of properly preparing young people for their future responsibilities. (...) The Church must therefore promote better and more intensive programs of marriage preparation, in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favor positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages” (FC 66).

The Code of Canon Law states that there should be “personal preparation for entering marriage, so that the spouses are disposed to the holiness and the obligations of their new state” (CIC can. 1063, 2, CCEO can. 783, §1). These instructions are also found in the *Ordo celebrandi matrimonium* 12.

In his Address to the Ninth General Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family (October 4, 1991), the Holy Father added: “The greater the difficulties caused by one’s surroundings for knowing the truth of the Christian sacrament and of the institution of marriage, all the greater must be our efforts to prepare spouses adequately for their responsibilities”. Then, with some more concrete observations regarding the courses as such, he went on to say: “You have been able to observe that, given the necessity of having such courses in parishes, in consideration of the positive results of the various methods used, it seems appropriate to start drawing up criteria to be adopted, in the form of a guide or directory, to offer the particular Churches a valuable aid”. This is all the more so because in the particular Churches, for much of “the people of life and the people for life’, *the family has a decisive responsibility*. This responsibility flows from its very nature as a community of life and love, founded upon marriage, and from its mission to ‘guard, reveal and communicate love” (EV 92 and cf. FC 17).

5. For this purpose, the Pontifical Council for the Family offers this document which has as its object the preparation for the sacrament of Marriage and its celebration.

The guidelines that emerge constitute an itinerary for the *remote, proximate and immediate preparation for the sacrament of Marriage* (cf. FC 66). The material provided herein is addressed first of all to the Episcopal Conferences, the individual Bishops and their co-workers in the pastoral care of marriage preparation, and it is also addressed to the engaged themselves who are the object of the Church’s pastoral concern.

6. Particular pastoral attention will be given to the engaged in special situations foreseen by the CIC can. 1071, 1072 and 1125, and by the CCEO can. 789 and 814. When the guidelines presented in the document cannot be applied completely in their regard, they can still be useful in guiding and accompanying them in a fitting way.

Faithful to the will and teaching of Christ, through her own legislation the Church expresses her pastoral charity in her care for all the situations of the faithful. The criteria offered are means for providing help in a positive way and should not be understood as further, constrictive requirements.

7. The underlying doctrinal motivation that inspires this document comes from the conviction that marriage is a value that takes its origin from the Creation and that it is rooted in human nature. “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one?”” (*Matthew 19: 4-5*). Therefore, what the Church does for the family and marriage certainly contributes to the good of society as such and to the good of all. Furthermore, as an expression of the new life made possible by the Risen Christ, Christian marriage always expresses the truth about married love and is like a prophecy that clearly proclaims a human being’s real needs: that man and woman are called upon from the beginning to live in a communion of life and love and that this complementarity will lead to strengthening the human dignity of the spouses, the good of the children and of society itself, through “...*the defense and promotion of life...everyone’s task and responsibility*” (*EV 91*).

8. Therefore, the present document *takes into consideration* both the natural human realities proper to this divine institution, and the specific ones of the sacrament instituted by Christ. It is divided into three parts:

- 1) The Importance of Preparation for Christian Marriage;
- 2) The Stages or Periods of Preparation;
- 3) The Celebration of Marriage.

I THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPARATION FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

9. The starting point for an itinerary of marriage preparation is the awareness that the marriage covenant was taken up and raised to a sacrament of the New Covenant by the Lord Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The sacrament joins the spouses to the self-giving love of Christ the Bridegroom for the Church, his Bride (cf. *Ephesians* 5: 25-32) by making them the image of, and sharers in this love. It makes them give praise to the Lord, it sanctifies the conjugal union and the life of the Christian faithful who celebrate it, and gives rise to the Christian family, the domestic church, the “first and living cell of society” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11), and the “sanctuary of life” (EV 92 and also 6, 88, 94). Therefore, the sacrament is celebrated and lived in the heart of the New Covenant, i.e. the paschal mystery. It is Christ, the Bridegroom in our midst (cf. *Gratissimam Sane*, 18; *Matthew* 9: 15), who is the source of its energies. Therefore, Christian couples and families are neither isolated nor alone.

10. As a community of life and love, both as a natural divine institution and a sacrament, marriage always possesses a source of formidable energies (cf. *FC* 43), no matter what difficulties there may be. Through the witness of the spouses, marriage can become Good News, contributing greatly to the new evangelization, and ensuring the future of society.

What is called *Preparation* in this document includes a broad and thorough process of education for married life which must be considered in the totality of its values. This is why if the current psychological and cultural situation is taken into consideration, marriage preparation represents an urgent need. In fact, preparation is educating for the respect and care for life which, in the Sanctuary of families, must become a real and proper culture of human life in all its manifestations and stages for those who are part of the people of life and for life (cf. *EV* 6, 78, 105). The very reality of marriage is so rich that it first requires a process of sensitization so that the engaged will feel the need to prepare themselves for it. Therefore, pastoral care of the family should direct its best efforts towards qualifying that preparation, also making use of pedagogical and psychological aids that have a sound orientation.

11. Lastly, because of the present circumstances which were mentioned earlier, the Church’s concern has become more urgent with regard to marriage preparation. On the one hand, the recovery of values and some important aspects of marriage and the family can be observed together with the flourishing of joyful testimonies by countless Christian spouses and families. However, on the other hand, the number of persons is increasing who ignore or reject the riches of marriage with a form of mistrust that goes so far as to doubt or reject its goods and values (cf. *GS* 48). Today we see with alarm the spread of a “culture” or a mentality that has lost heart with regard to the family as a necessary value for spouses, children and society. Some attitudes and some measures envisaged in laws do not help the family based on marriage and even deny its rights. As a matter of fact, a secularized atmosphere has been spreading in different parts of the world which *especially* affects young people and subjects them to the pressure of a secularized environment in which one ends up losing the meaning of God and consequently the deep meaning of spousal love and the family as well. Is it not denying the truth of God to shut out the very origin and source of this intimate mystery? (cf. *GS* 22). The negation of God in

its different forms often includes the rejection of the institutions and structures which are part of God's plan, and which have been laid down since Creation (cf. *Matthew 19: 3SS*). As a result, everything is interpreted as being the fruit of human will and/or consensus that can change.

12. In countries where the process of de-Christianization is more prevalent, the disturbing crisis of moral values stands out, in particular, the loss of the identity of marriage and the Christian family and hence the meaning of engagement. In addition to these losses, there is a crisis of values within the family itself to which a climate of widespread and even legalized permissiveness contributes. This is greatly encouraged by the communications media that present contrary models as if they were real values. What seems to be a cultural fabric is formed, offered to the new generations as an alternative to the concept of conjugal life and marriage, its sacramental value, and its links with the Church.

Phenomena which confirm these situations and reinforce such a culture are connected with new lifestyles which devalue the human dimensions of the contracting parties with disastrous consequences for the family. These include sexual permissiveness, the decrease in marriages or their continuous postponement, the increase in divorces, the contraceptive mentality, the spread of deliberate abortion, the spiritual void and deep dissatisfaction which contribute to the spread of drugs, alcoholism, violence and suicide among young people and adolescents.

13. Permissive laws contribute toward aggravating the situation with all their force in forging a mentality that harms families (cf. *EV 59*) with regard to divorce, abortion and sexual freedom. Many means of communication¹ spread and help strengthen a climate of permissiveness and form what seems to be a cultural fabric that impedes young people from their normal growth in the Christian faith, their ties with the Church, and their discovery of the sacramental value of marriage and the requirements derived from its celebration. It is true that education for marriage has always been necessary, but a Christian culture made its formulation and assimilation easier. Today this is sometimes more arduous and more urgent.

14. For all these reasons, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* — which brings together the results of the 1980 Synod on the Family — His Holiness John Paul II indicates that “More than ever necessary in our times is preparation of young people for marriage and family life” (FC 66). He urges the promotion of “better and more intensive programs of marriage preparation, in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favor positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages” (*Ibid.*).

16. Alive in the tradition of the Church and deepened by the Magisterium, the Word of God stresses that marriage for Christian spouses implies a response to God's vocation and the acceptance of the mission to be a sign of God's love for all the members of the human family, by partaking in the definitive covenant of Christ with the Church. Therefore, spouses become cooperators with the Creator and Saviour in the gift of love and life. Hence Christian marriage preparation can be described as a journey of faith which does not end with the celebration of marriage but continues throughout family life. Therefore, our perspective does not close with marriage as an act, at the moment of its celebration, but is on-going. This is why preparation is also a “special opportunity for the engaged to rediscover and deepen the faith received in Baptism and nourished by their

Christian upbringing. In this way they come to recognize and freely accept their vocation to follow Christ and to serve the Kingdom of God in the married state” (FC 51).

17. From the experience of many pastors and educators it appears that the engagement period can be a time of mutual discovery but also of a deepening of faith. Therefore, it is a period of special supernatural gifts for personal and interpersonal spirituality. Unfortunately, for many, this period which is intended for human and Christian maturation, can be disturbed by an irresponsible use of sexuality which does not help spousal love to mature and, therefore, some make a kind of apologia for premarital relations.


The successful outcome of the engaged couple’s deepening in the faith is also conditioned by their previous formation. On the other hand, the way in which this period is lived will certainly have an influence on their future life as spouses and as a family. From this comes the decisive importance of the help offered to the engaged by their respective families and the whole ecclesial community. This also consists in prayer. **In this regard, the blessing of the engaged which is foreseen in the *De benedictionibus* (nos. 195-214) is significant, in which the signs of this initial commitment are mentioned: the ring, the exchange of gifts and other customs (nos. 209-210). In any case, the human depth of the engagement should be recognized and saved from any commonplace approach.**

Therefore, both the *riches* of marriage and the sacrament of Marriage, and the *decisive* importance of the engagement period—which today is often extended for years (with the various kinds of difficulties that this implies), are reasons which call for the particular solidity of this formation.

19. In the formation process, according to what is also referred to in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, three stages or principal periods must be distinguished in marriage preparation: **remote, proximate and immediate.**

The particular goals of each stage will be achieved if — in addition to the fundamental human qualities and the basic truths of the faith — the engaged will also learn about the principal theological and liturgical content that marks the different phases of preparation. As a result, in the effort to adapt their life to those values, the engaged will acquire the true formation that prepares them for married life.

20. Marriage preparation must be set within the urgent need to evangelize culture — by permeating it to its *roots* (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19) — in everything that concerns the institution of marriage: making the Christian spirit penetrate minds and behavior, as well as the laws and structures of the community where Christians live (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2105). This preparation, both implicitly and explicitly, constitutes one aspect of evangelization, so much so that it can deepen the strength of the Holy Father’s affirmation: “The family is the heart of the New Evangelization” (...). The preparation itself “is a responsibility which first concerns married couples, called to be givers of life, on the basis of an ever greater *awareness of the meaning of procreation as a unique event which clearly reveals that human life is a gift received in order then to be given as a gift*” (EV 92).



In addition to religious values, abundant good and values that strengthen solidarity, respect, justice and forgiveness in personal and collective relations flow from marriage as the foundation of the family. In turn, the family, based on marriage, expects from society “*a recognition of its identity and an acceptance of its status as a subject in society*” (Gratissimam Sane, 17), and therefore to become “*the heart of the civilization of love*” (*Ibid.*, 13).

II THE STAGES OR PERIODS OF PREPARATION

21. The stages or periods which will be discussed are not rigidly defined. In fact, they cannot be defined either in relation to the age of the participants, nor in relation to their duration. However, it is useful to be familiar with them as working itineraries and instruments, especially for the content to be transmitted. They are broken up into remote, proximate and immediate preparation.

A. Remote preparation

22. Remote preparation includes infancy, childhood and adolescence and takes place first of all in the family and also in the school and formation groups, as a valid assistance to the family. This is the period in which respect for all authentic human values both in interpersonal and social relations is transmitted and instilled, with all this implies for the formation of character, self-control and self-esteem, the proper use of one's inclinations, and respect for persons of the other sex. Moreover, especially for Christians, a solid spiritual and catechetical formation is also required (cf. FC 66).

23. In the Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane*, John Paul II mentions two fundamental truths in the task of education: “first, that man is called to live in truth and love; and second, that everyone finds fulfillment through the sincere gift of self” (n. 16). Children's education thus begins before birth in the atmosphere in which the new life is awaited and welcomed, especially through the mother's loving dialogue with her child (cf. *Ibid.*, 16). This continues in childhood since education is “before all else a reciprocal ‘offering’ on the part of both parents: together they communicate their own mature humanity to the newborn child” (*Ibid.*). “In giving origin to a new life, parents recognize that the child, as the fruit of their mutual gift of love, is, in turn, a gift for both of them, a gift which flows from them” (EV 92).

In its integral sense, which implies the transmission and basic growth of human and Christian values, Christian education — as the Second Vatican Council affirms — “not only develops the maturity of the human person ..., but is especially directed towards ensuring that those who have been baptized, as they are gradually introduced to a knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become daily more appreciative of the gift of faith which they have received...They should be trained to live their own lives in the new self, justified and sanctified through the truth” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 2).

24. In this period, a faithful and courageous education in chastity and love as self-giving must not be lacking. Chastity is not a mortification of love but rather a condition for real love. In fact, if the vocation to married love is a vocation to self-giving in marriage, one must succeed in possessing oneself in order to be able to truly give oneself.

In this regard the sexual education received from parents in the first years of childhood and adolescence is important, as has been indicated in the document of this Pontifical Council for the Family mentioned earlier in n. 10.

25. In this stage of remote preparation some specific objectives should be achieved. Without pretending to make a complete list of them, as an indication it is noted that above all this preparation should attain the goal whereby every member of the faithful called to marriage will understand completely that, in the light of God's love, human love takes on a central role in Christian ethics. In fact, as a vocation and mission, human life is called to the love that has its source and end in God, "without excluding the possibility of the total gift of self to God in the vocation to the priestly or religious life" (FC 66). In this sense, it should be recalled that even when remote preparation deals more with doctrinal content of an anthropological nature, it is to be placed in the perspective of marriage in which human love becomes a sharing, as well as a sign, of the love between Christ and the Church. Therefore, married love makes present among mankind the same divine love made visible in the redemption. The journey or conversion from a rather external and vague level of faith, typical of many young people, to a discovery of the "Christian mystery" is both essential and decisive: a faith that involves the communion of Grace and love with the Risen Christ.

26. Remote preparation will have achieved its main goals if it succeeds in instilling the essentials for acquiring more and more the parameters of a right judgment regarding the hierarchy of values needed in choosing the best that society has to offer, according to St. Paul's advice: "...test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 *Thessalonians* 5: 19). It should not be forgotten that, through the grace of God, love is also cherished, strengthened and intensified through the necessary values connected with giving, sacrifice, renunciation and self-denial. In this stage of formation, pastoral help should already be directed toward making moral behavior be supported by faith. The example of parents, which becomes a real witness for those who will marry in the future, provides stimulus, support and consistency to this kind of *Christian lifestyle*.

27. This preparation will not lose sight of the importance of helping young people acquire a critical ability with regard to their surroundings, and the Christian courage of those who know how to be in the world without belonging to it. This is what we read in the *Letter to Diognetus*, a venerable and certainly authentic document from the early Christian era: "Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind by either country, speech, or customs...the whole tenor of their way of living stamps it as worthy of admiration and admittedly extraordinary... They marry like all others and beget children; but they do not expose their offspring. Their table they spread for all, but not their bed. They find themselves *in the flesh*, but do not live according to *the flesh*" (V, 1, 4, 6, 7, 8). Formation should arrive at a mentality and personality capable of not being led astray by ideas contrary to the unity and stability of marriage, thus able to react against the structures of the so-called social sin that "With greater or lesser violence, with greater or lesser harm, every sin has repercussions on the entire ecclesial body and the whole human family" (Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 16). In the face of these sinful influences and so many social pressures, a critical conscience must be instilled.

28. A *Christian lifestyle*, witnessed to by Christian families, is in itself a form of evangelization and the very foundation of remote preparation. In fact, another goal of this stage is the presentation of the parents' educational mission. It is in the family, the domestic church, that Christian parents are the first witnesses and educators of the children both in the growth of "faith, hope and charity", and in each child discovering his or her own vocation. "*Parents are the first and most important educators of their own children, and they also possess a fundamental competence in this area: they are educators because they are parents*" (GS 16). For this purpose parents need suitable and adequate assistance.

29. Among the types of assistance, the parish can be listed as the first place of Christian ecclesial formation. It is there that a style of living together as a *community* is learned (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 42). Moreover, the school, other educational institutions, movements, groups, Catholic associations and, of course, associations of Christian families must not be overlooked.

Of particular importance in the educational processes of young people are the means of mass communication which ought to aid the family's mission in society in a positive way and not make it difficult.

30. This educational process must also be taken to heart by catechists, animators of the pastoral care of youth and vocations and, above all, pastors who will take advantage of homilies during liturgical celebrations and other forms of evangelization, personal meetings, and ways of Christian commitment, in order to stress and highlight the points that contribute to a preparation directed toward possible marriage (cf. *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, 14).

31. Therefore, the ways and means must be “invented” for the on-going formation of adolescents in the period preceding engagement which follows the stages of Christian initiation. Exchanging information about the most appropriate experiences in this regard is extremely useful. Families joined together in the parishes, institutions and different forms of association, help create a social atmosphere in which responsible love will be healthy. Wherever it may be corrupted, for example, by pornography, they can react through the family's right. All of this is part of a “human ecology” (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 38).

B. Proximate preparation

32. Proximate preparation takes place during the period of engagement. It consists of specific courses and must be distinguished from immediate preparation which is usually concentrated during the last meetings between the engaged and pastoral workers before the celebration of the sacrament. During proximate preparation, it seems useful to provide the possibility to verify the maturation of the human values pertaining to the relationship of friendship and dialogue that should characterize the engagement. In view of the new state in life as a couple, the opportunity should be offered to deepen the life of faith, especially regarding knowledge about the sacramentality of the Church. This is an important stage of evangelization in which the faith must involve the personal and community dimensions both of the individual engaged persons and their families. In this process, it will also be possible to identify any difficulties they may have in living an authentic Christian life.

33. The period of proximate preparation generally coincides with the period of youth. Therefore it includes everything that pertains to the pastoral care of youth as such which is concerned with the integral growth of the faithful. The pastoral care of youth cannot be separated from the framework of the family as if young people make up a kind of separate and independent “social class”. It should reinforce the young people's social sense, first with regard to the members of their own family, and orient their values toward the future family they will have. The young people should have already been helped to discern their vocation through their own personal efforts and with the aid of the community, and above all the pastors. This discernment must take place before any commitment is made to get engaged. When the vocation to marriage is clear, it will be sustained first by grace and then by adequate preparation. The pastoral care of youth should also keep in mind that, because

of various kinds of difficulties — such as a “prolonged adolescence” and remaining longer in one’s family (a relatively new and troubling phenomenon), young people today tend to put off the commitment to get married for too long.

34. Proximate preparation should be based first of all on a catechesis sustained by listening to the Word of God, interpreted with the guidance of the Magisterium of the Church, in view of an ever greater understanding of the faith and giving witness to it in concrete life. Instruction should be offered in the context of a community of faith between families, especially in the parish, who participate and work in the formation of young people, according to their charismas and roles, and expand their influence to other social groups.

35. The engaged should receive instruction regarding the natural requirements of the interpersonal relationship between a man and a woman in God’s plan for marriage and the family: awareness regarding freedom of consent as the foundation of their union, the unity and indissolubility of marriage, the correct concept of responsible parenthood, the human aspects of conjugal sexuality, the conjugal act with its requirements and ends, and the proper education of children. All of this is aimed at knowing the moral truth and forming the personal conscience.

Proximate preparation should certainly ascertain whether the engaged have the basic elements of a psychological, pedagogical, legal and medical nature for marriage and family life. However, especially with regard to total self-giving and responsible procreation, the theological and moral formation will have to be given in a particular way. In fact, conjugal love is total, exclusive, faithful and fruitful (cf. *Humanae Vitae*, 9).

Today the scientific basis² of the natural methods for the regulation of fertility are recognized. Knowledge about these methods is useful. When there is just cause, their use must not only be a mere behavioral technique but be inserted into the pedagogy and process of the growth of love (cf. EV 97). Then the virtue of chastity will lead the spouses to practice periodic continence (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2366-2371).

This preparation should also ensure that Christian engaged persons have correct ideas and a sincere “sentire cum ecclesia” regarding marriage itself, the mutual roles of a woman and a man in a couple, the family and society, sexuality and openness towards others.

36. Young people should also be helped to become aware of any psychological and or emotional shortcomings they may have, especially the inability to open up to others, and any forms of selfishness that can take away from the total commitment of their self-giving. This help will also aid in discovering the potential and the need for human and Christian growth in their life. For this purpose, the persons in charge of marriage preparation should also be concerned with giving solid formation to the moral conscience of the engaged so that they will be prepared for the free and definitive choice of marriage which is expressed in the mutually exchanged consent before the Church in the marriage covenant.

37. During this stage of preparation, frequent meetings will be necessary in an atmosphere of dialogue, friendship and prayer, with the participation of pastors and catechists. They should stress the fact that “The family celebrates the Gospel of life through daily prayer, both individual prayer and family prayer. The family

prays in order to glorify and give thanks to God for the gift of life, and implores his light and strength in order to face times of difficulty and suffering without losing hope” (EV 93). Moreover, Christian married couples who are apostolically committed, in a vision of sound Christian optimism, can contribute to shedding greater light on Christian life in the context of the vocation to marriage and in the complementarity of all the vocations.

38. In line with the sound pedagogical principles of a gradual and comprehensive personal growth, proximate preparation must not neglect formation for the social and ecclesial tasks proper to those who will have new families as a result of their marriage. Family intimacy should not be conceived as being closed in on itself, but rather as a capacity to interiorize the human and Christian riches inherent in married life in view of an ever greater giving to others. Therefore, in an open concept of the family, married and family life requires the spouses to recognize themselves as subjects having rights but also duties towards society and the Church. In this regard, it will be very useful to encourage reading and reflecting on the following documents of the Church which are a rich and encouraging source of human and Christian wisdom: *Familiaris Consortio*, the Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane*, the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, *Evangelium Vitae*, and others.

39. The proximate preparation of young people should make them understand that the commitment they take on through the exchange of their consent “before the Church” makes it necessary for them to begin a path of reciprocal fidelity in the engagement period. If necessary, any practices to the contrary must be abandoned. This human commitment will be enhanced by the specific gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to the engaged who invoke him.

40. Since Christian love is purified, perfected and elevated by Christ’s love for the Church (cf. GS 49), the engaged should imitate this model and develop their awareness of self-giving which is always connected with the mutual respect and self-denial that help this love grow. Reciprocal self-giving thus implies more and more the exchange of spiritual gifts and moral support in order to make love and responsibility increase. “The indissolubility of marriage flows in the first place from the very essence of that gift: *the gift of one person to another person*. This reciprocal giving of self reveals the spousal nature of love” (*Gratissimam Sane*, 11).

41. Spousal spirituality, by involving human experience which is never separated from moral life, has its roots in Baptism and Confirmation. Preparation of the engaged should therefore include regaining the dynamism of the sacraments, with a special role of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. The sacrament of Reconciliation glorifies divine mercy toward human misery and makes the vitality of Baptism and the dynamism of Confirmation grow. From this the pedagogy of redeemed love is strengthened which lets the greatness of God’s mercy be discovered before the drama of man, created by God and wonderfully redeemed. By celebrating the memory of Christ’s giving to the Church, the Eucharist develops the affective love proper to marriage in daily giving to one’s spouse and children, without forgetting and overlooking that “the celebration which gives meaning to every other form of prayer and worship is found in *the family’s actual daily life together*, if it is a life of love and self-giving” (EV 93).

42. For this kind of multifaceted and harmonious preparation, the persons who will be in charge will have to be identified and given adequate formation. It would be useful to create a group, on different levels, of pastoral workers who are aware of being sent by the Church. This group should be composed of Christian married

couples in particular, and include experts possibly in medicine, law, psychology, with a priest who will prepare them for the roles they will play.

43. The pastoral workers and persons in charge must have a solid doctrinal preparation and unquestionable fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church so that they will be able to transmit the truths of the faith and the responsibilities connected with marriage with sufficient in-depth knowledge and life witness. It is quite obvious that these pastoral workers, as educators, will also have to be capable of welcoming the engaged, whatever their social and culture extraction, intellectual formation and concrete capacities may be. Moreover, their faithful life witness and joyful giving are indispensable conditions for carrying out their task. Based on their own experiences in life and human problems, they can offer some starting points for enlightening the engaged with Christian wisdom.

44. The above implies the need for an adequate formation program for the pastoral workers. The formation leaders' preparation should prepare them to present the fundamental guidelines of marriage preparation which we have spoken about with clear adherence to the Church's Magisterium, a suitable methodology and pastoral sensitivity, and also enable them to offer their specific contribution, according to their own expertise, to the immediate preparation (nos. 50-59). The pastoral workers ought to receive their formation in special Pastoral Institutes and be carefully chosen by the Bishop.

45. The final result of this period of proximate preparation should be a clear awareness of the essential characteristics of Christian marriage: unity, fidelity, indissolubility, fruitfulness; the conscience of faith regarding the priority of the sacramental Grace which associates the spouses, as subjects and ministers of the sacrament, to the love of Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church; the willingness to carry out the mission proper to families in the educational, social and ecclesial areas.

46. As *Familiaris Consortio* notes, the formative journey of young engaged persons should therefore include: deepening of personal faith and the rediscovery of the value of the sacraments and the experience of prayer. Specific preparation for life as a couple "will present marriage as an interpersonal relationship of a man and a woman that has to be continually developed, and it will encourage those concerned to study the nature of conjugal sexuality and responsible parenthood, with the essential medical and biological knowledge connected with it. It will also acquaint those concerned with correct methods for the education of children, and will assist them in gaining the basic requisites for well-ordered family life" (FC 66); "preparation for the family apostolate, for fraternal solidarity and collaboration with other families, for active membership in groups, associations, movements and undertakings set up for the human and Christian benefit of the family" (*Ibid.*).

Moreover, the engaged should be helped beforehand to learn how to preserve and cultivate married love later, interpersonal, marital communication, the virtues and difficulties of conjugal life, and how to overcome the inevitable conjugal "crises".

47. However, the center of this preparation must be a reflection in the faith on the sacrament of Marriage through the Word of God and the guidance of the Magisterium. The engaged should be made aware that to become "una caro" (*Matthew 19:6*) in Christ, through the Spirit in Christian marriage, means imprinting a new

form of baptismal life on their existence. Through the sacrament, their love will become a concrete expression of Christ's love for his Church (cf. LG 11). In the light of the sacramentality, the married acts themselves, responsible procreation, educational activity, the communion of life, and the apostolic and missionary spirit connected with the life of Christian spouses are to be considered valid moments of Christian experience. Although still not in a sacramental way, Christ sustains and accompanies the journey of grace and growth of the engaged toward the participation in his mystery of union with the Church.

48. With regard to a possible Directory that will bring together the best experiences with marriage preparation, it seems useful to recall what the Holy Father John Paul II stated in his concluding Discourse to the General Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family held from September 30-October 5, 1991: "It is essential that the time and care necessary should be devoted to doctrinal preparation. The security of the content must be the center and essential goal of the courses in a perspective which makes spouses more aware of the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage and everything that flows from it regarding the responsibility of the family. Questions concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage, and all that regards the meaning of the union and of procreation in married life and its specific act, must be treated faithfully and accurately, according to the clear teaching of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (cf. nn. 11-12). This is equally true for everything that pertains to the gift of life which parents must accept responsibly and joyfully as the Lord's collaborators.

The courses should not only emphasize what concerns the mature and vigilant freedom of those who want to contract marriage, but also their own mission as parents, the first educators of their children and their first evangelizers".

With deep satisfaction, this Pontifical Council observes that the tendency is growing towards greater commitment and awareness of the importance and dignity of the engagement period. Similarly, it urges that the specific courses will not be so brief as to reduce them to a mere formality. On the contrary, they should provide sufficient time for a good, clear presentation of the fundamental subjects indicated earlier.³

The course can be carried out in the individual parishes, if there are enough engaged persons and well-prepared collaborators, in the Episcopal or forane Vicariats, or in parish coordinating structures. Sometimes they can be given by persons in charge of family movements, associations or apostolic groups guided by a competent priest. This is an area which should be coordinated by a *diocesan organism* that works on behalf of the Bishop. Without neglecting the various aspects of psychology, medicine and other human sciences, the content should be *centered* on the *natural and Christian doctrine of marriage*.

49. In proximate preparation, especially today, the engaged must be given formation and strengthened in the values concerning the defense of human life. Particularly in view of the fact that they will become the domestic church and "Sanctuary of life" (EV 92-92), they will become part in a new way of the "people of life and for life" (EV 6, 101). The contraceptive mentality which is prevalent today in so many places, and the widespread, permissive laws with all they imply in terms of contempt for life from the moment of conception to death, constitute a series of multiple attacks to which the family is exposed and wounded in the most intimate part of its mission, and which impede its development according to the requirements of authentic human growth (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 39). Therefore, today more than before, formation is needed of the minds and hearts of the

members of new families not to conform to the prevailing mentality. In this way, through their own new family life, one day they will be able to contribute towards creating and developing the culture of life by respecting and welcoming new lives in their love, as the testimony and expression of the proclamation, celebration and service to every life (cf. EV 83-84, 86, 93).

C. Immediate preparation

50. If a suitable itinerary and specific courses have been followed and have worked well during the period of proximate formation (cf. n. 32ss.), the aims of immediate preparation could consist of the following:

- a) A synthesis of the previous preparation, especially its doctrinal, moral and spiritual content, thus filling in eventual gaps in basic formation;
- b) Experiences of prayer (retreats, spiritual exercises for the engaged) in which the encounter with the Lord can make them discover the depth and beauty of the supernatural life;
- c) A suitable liturgical preparation which also envisages the active participation of the engaged, with special attention to the Sacrament of Reconciliation;
- d) Good use the canonical talks that are envisaged with the parish priest, so that everyone can get to know one another better.

These ends will be achieved through special meetings of a more intensive nature.

51. The pastoral usefulness and positive experience of marriage preparation courses show that they can be dispensed with *only for proportionally serious reasons*. Therefore, if couples present themselves with the urgency of celebrating their marriage soon and without proximate preparation, the parish priest and his co-workers will have the responsibility of offering them some occasions to make up an adequate knowledge of the doctrinal, moral and sacramental aspects set out in the proximate preparation for marriage and finally include them in the phase of immediate preparation.

This is required because of the necessity to personalize the formative itineraries in a real way, to take every occasion to deepen the meaning of what takes place in the sacrament, but without rejecting those who show they are well disposed towards the faith and the sacrament just because they were absent from some stages of preparation.

52. The immediate preparation for the sacrament of Marriage must find suitable occasions to introduce the engaged couple to the rite of marriage. As well as deepening the Christian doctrine on marriage and the family with particular attention to moral duties, in this preparation the engaged should be guided to take an informed and active part in the marriage celebration, and understand the meaning of the liturgical actions and texts.

53. This preparation for the sacrament of Marriage should be the culmination of a catechesis which helps engaged Christians to retrace their sacramental journey intelligently. It is important that they know that they are uniting themselves in marriage as persons baptized in Christ, and that they should behave in conformity to the Holy Spirit in their family life. Thus it is right that future spouses dispose themselves for the celebration of marriage so that it may be valid, worthy and fruitful, by receiving the sacrament of Penance (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1622). The liturgical preparation for the sacrament of Marriage should make the most of the elements of ritual that are currently available. To indicate a clearer relationship between the nuptial sacrament and the paschal mystery, the celebration of marriage is normally set within the celebration of the Eucharist.


54. In order to make the Church visible in the diocese and articulate this in the parishes, it is understandable that all the canonical-pastoral preparation for marriage should culminate in the parish and diocese. Thus it is more in conformity with the ecclesial meaning of the sacrament for the marriage to be celebrated normally in the church of the parish community to which the spouses belong (*CIC*, Canon 1115).

It is desirable that the whole parish community take part in this celebration, around the families and friends of the engaged. Provisions for this should be made in various dioceses, taking local situations into account, but also decisively favoring truly ecclesial pastoral action.

55. Those who will take an active part in the liturgy should be invited also to prepare themselves properly for the sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. It should be explained to the witnesses that they are not only the guarantors of a juridical act, but also representatives of the Christian community which, through them, participates in a sacramental act relevant to it, because a new family is a cell of the Church. On account of its essentially social character, marriage calls for the participation of society and this is to be expressed through the presence of the witnesses.

56. The family is the most appropriate place where, according to the decision of the local Ordinary and through the common priesthood, parents can carry out sacred acts and administer some sacramentals, such as for example in the context of Christian Initiation, in the joyful or sad events of daily life, in saying grace at meals. A special place should be given to family prayer. This creates an atmosphere of faith within the home and will be the means of living out a richer fatherhood and motherhood for the children, teaching them to pray and introducing them to the gradual discovery of the mystery of God and personal dialogue with him. Parents should remember that they carry out their mission of proclaiming the Gospel of life through educating their children (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, 92).

57. Immediate preparation is a propitious occasion to begin the on-going pastoral care of marriage and the family. From this point of view, the preparation needs to be carried out so that spouses know their mission in the Church. Here they can be helped by the richness offered by specific family movements, so as to cultivate a spirituality of marriage and the family and the way they fulfil their tasks within the family, the Church and society.



58. The preparation of the engaged should be accompanied by sincere and deep devotion to Mary, Mother of the Church, the *Queen of the Family*. The engaged themselves should be taught to recognize that Mary's presence is as active in the family, the Domestic Church, as it is in the wider Church. Likewise they should be taught to imitate Mary in her virtues. Thus the Holy Family, the home of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, makes the engaged discover "how sweet and irreplaceable education in the family is" (Paul VI, *Discourse at Nazareth*, January 5, 1964).

59. A gift and enrichment for the whole Church will be sharing with others whatever is creatively proposed in various communities to make these proximate and immediate phases of preparation deeper and more adequate.

III THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

60. Preparation for marriage leads to married life, through the celebration of the sacrament, which is the culmination of the journey of preparation which the spouses have made and the source and origin of their married life. Therefore, the celebration cannot be reduced only to a ceremony, the product of culture and sociological conditioning. Nevertheless, praiseworthy customs that belong to various peoples or ethnic groups can be brought into the celebration (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 77; *Familiaris Consortio*, 67), provided that they express above all the coming together of the ecclesial assembly as a sign of the faith of the Church, which recognizes in the sacrament the presence of the Risen Lord uniting the spouses to the Love of the Trinity.

61. Through diocesan liturgical commissions, the bishops should give precise directions and supervise how these are applied in practice, in order to put into effect, in the celebration of marriage, what is indicated in article 32 of the Constitution on the Liturgy, so that even externally the equality of the faithful may be evident and, further, that any appearance of pomp be avoided. The active participation of those present is to be favored in every way. Suitable materials should be provided to help them comprehend and savor the richness of the rite.

62. Mindful that where two or three are gathered in the name of Christ (cf. *Matthew* 18:20), there he is present, a restrained style of celebration (which should also continue in the feasting that follows) must not only be an expression of the community of faith, but a motive for praising the Lord. To celebrate getting married in the Lord and before the Church means professing that the gift of grace made to the spouses by the presence and love of Christ and His Spirit calls for a practical response, with a life of worship in spirit and truth, in the Christian family, the “domestic church”. Precisely because the celebration is to be understood not only as a legal act but also as a moment in the history of salvation of those being married, and through their common priesthood, for the good of the Church and society, it will be good to help all present to take part actively in the celebration itself.

63. It will be the duty of whoever presides to make use of the possibilities which the ritual itself offers, especially in its second typical edition promulgated in 1991 by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, so as to highlight the role of the ministers of the sacrament who, for Christians of the Latin Rite, are the spouses themselves, as well as the sacramental value of the community celebration. With the formula of the exchange of consent, the spouses will always remember the personal, ecclesial and social aspect gained from this consent for all their life, as a gift of one to the other even unto death.⁴

The Eastern Rite reserves the role of the minister of marriage to the assisting priest. In any case, according to the law of the Church, the presence of a priest or a duly authorized minister is necessary for the validity of the matrimonial union and clearly sets forth the public and social meaning of the spousal covenant, both for the Church and for all of society.

64. Bearing in mind that marriage is normally celebrated during Mass (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 78; *Familiaris Consortio*, 57), when dealing with a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic, the celebration will take place according to the special liturgical and canonical provisions (cf. *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium* - OCM, 79-117).

65. The celebration will lead to more active participation if apposite introductions to the meaning of the liturgical texts and the content of the prayers are used. The simplicity of these introductions should favor recollection and understanding the importance of the celebration (cf. OCM, 52, 59, 87, 93, 99), and avoid turning the celebration into a didactic moment.

66. The celebrant who presides and presents the ecclesial meaning of the marriage commitment for the assembly, will try to involve those who are being married, together with their relatives and the witnesses, so that they can comprehend the structure of the rite. This applies especially to the most characteristic parts, such as: the Word of God, the consent exchanged and ratified, the blessing of the signs that symbolize marriage (rings etc.), the solemn blessing of the spouses, the reference to the spouses in the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer. “The various liturgies abound in prayers of blessing and epiclesis asking God’s grace and blessing on the new couple, especially the bride.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1624). It will also be necessary to explain the gesture of imposing hands on the “subject ministers” of the sacrament. Standing, the sign of peace or other rites determined by the competent authorities, etc. will be appropriately brought to the attention of all present.

67. To achieve a style of celebration at once restrained and noble, whoever presides should be helped by the presence of assistant ministers, of people who will animate and sustain the singing of the faithful, lead the responses and proclaim the Word of God. With particular concrete attention to those who are being married and their situation, and absolutely avoiding any preference for persons, the celebrant should adapt himself to the truth of the signs used in the liturgical action. Thus, in welcoming and greeting those about to be married, their parents if present, the witnesses and others who attend, he will be the living spokesman of the community that welcomes those who are being married.

68. The proclamation of the Word of God is to be made by suitable and prepared lectors. They can be chosen from among those present, especially witnesses, family members, friends, but it does not seem appropriate for the bride and groom to be lectors. In fact, they are the primary receivers of the proclaimed Word of God. However, the choice of readings can be made in accord with the engaged couple during the phase of immediate preparation. In this way they will more easily bear the Word of God in mind so as to put it into practice.

69. The homily, which is obligatory, will have as its center the presentation of the “great mystery” being celebrated before God, the Church and society. “Saint Paul uses a concise phrase in reference to family life: it is a great mystery (*Ephesians* 5: 32)”. (*Gratissimam Sane*, 19). Beginning with the proclaimed texts of the Word of God and/or the liturgical prayers, light should focus on the sacrament, hence the consequences for the life of the spouses and their families should be illustrated. Superfluous personal references to the spouses should be avoided.

70. If the rite takes place during the celebration of Mass, the gifts may be brought to the altar by the spouses themselves. In any case, the well-prepared prayer of the faithful should be neither too long nor lacking in concrete content. As may be pastorally appropriate, Holy Communion can be given under both Species.

71. Care should be taken that the details of the marriage celebration are characterized by a restrained, simple and authentic style. The festive tone should not be disturbed by excessive display.

72. The solemn blessing of the spouses recalls that the gift of the Holy Spirit is invoked in the sacrament of Marriage. Through this gift, the married couple are made more constant in their mutual concord and spiritually sustained in carrying out their mission, also in the difficulties of their future life. In the framework of this celebration, it will certainly be appropriate to present the Holy Family of Nazareth as a model of life for Christian spouses.

73. With regard to the periods of remote, proximate and immediate preparation, while it is good to bring together actual experiences in order to effect a major change of mentality and practices associated with the celebration, pastoral workers should take care to follow and make comprehensible what is already set down and established by the liturgical rite. It is obvious that such understanding will depend on the whole process of preparation and the community's level of Christian maturity.

Vatican City State, May 13, 1996

Alfonso Cardinal López Trujillo

President of the Pontifical Council for the Family

APPENDIX II

THE CATECHISM AND THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

1601 “The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.”

I. MARRIAGE IN GOD’S PLAN

1602 Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God and concludes with a vision of “the wedding feast of the Lamb.” Scripture speaks throughout of marriage and its “mystery,” its institution and the meaning God has given it, its origin and its end, its various realizations throughout the history of salvation, the difficulties arising from sin and its renewal “in the Lord” in the New Covenant of Christ and the Church.

Marriage in the order of creation

1603 “The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws. . . . God himself is the author of marriage.” The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator. Marriage is not a purely human institution despite the many variations it may have undergone through the centuries in different cultures, social structures, and spiritual attitudes. These differences should not cause us to forget its common and permanent characteristics. Although the dignity of this institution is not transparent everywhere with the same clarity, some sense of the greatness of the matrimonial union exists in all cultures. “The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life.”

1604 God who created man out of love also calls him to love the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love. Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator’s eyes. And this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation: “And God blessed them, and God said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.’”

1605 Holy Scripture affirms that man and woman were created for one another: “It is not good that the man should be alone.” The woman, “flesh of his flesh,” his equal, his nearest in all things, is given to him by God as a “helpmate”; she thus represents God from whom comes our help. “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.” The Lord himself shows that this signifies an unbreakable union of their two lives by recalling what the plan of the Creator had been “in the beginning”: “So they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

Marriage under the regime of sin

1606 Every man experiences evil around him and within himself. This experience makes itself felt in the relationships between man and woman. Their union has always been threatened by discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy, and conflicts that can escalate into hatred and separation. This disorder can manifest itself more or less acutely, and can be more or less overcome according to the circumstances of cultures, eras, and individuals, but it does seem to have a universal character.

1607 According to faith the disorder we notice so painfully does not stem from the *nature* of man and woman, nor from the nature of their relations, but from sin. As a break with God, the first sin had for its first consequence the rupture of the original communion between man and woman. Their relations were distorted by mutual recriminations; their mutual attraction, the Creator's own gift, changed into a relationship of domination and lust; and the beautiful vocation of man and woman to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth was burdened by the pain of childbirth and the toil of work.

1608 Nevertheless, the order of creation persists, though seriously disturbed. To heal the wounds of sin, man and woman need the help of the grace that God in his infinite mercy never refuses them. Without his help man and woman cannot achieve the union of their lives for which God created them "in the beginning."

Marriage under the pedagogy of the Law

1609 In his mercy God has not forsaken sinful man. The punishments consequent upon sin, "pain in childbearing" and toil "in the sweat of your brow," also embody remedies that limit the damaging effects of sin. After the fall, marriage helps to overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one's own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving.

1610 Moral conscience concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage developed under the pedagogy of the old law. In the Old Testament the polygamy of patriarchs and kings is not yet explicitly rejected. Nevertheless, the law given to Moses aims at protecting the wife from arbitrary domination by the husband, even though according to the Lord's words it still carries traces of man's "hardness of heart" which was the reason Moses permitted men to divorce their wives.

1611 Seeing God's covenant with Israel in the image of exclusive and faithful married love, the prophets prepared the Chosen People's conscience for a deepened understanding of the unity and indissolubility of marriage. The books of *Ruth* and *Tobit* bear moving witness to an elevated sense of marriage and to the fidelity and tenderness of spouses. Tradition has always seen in the *Song of Solomon* a unique expression of human love, insofar as it is a reflection of God's love - a love "strong as death" that "many waters cannot quench."

Marriage in the Lord

1612 The nuptial covenant between God and his people Israel had prepared the way for the new and everlasting covenant in which the Son of God, by becoming incarnate and giving his life, has united to himself in a certain way all mankind saved by him, thus preparing for "the wedding-feast of the Lamb."

1613 On the threshold of his public life Jesus performs his first sign - at his mother's request - during a wedding feast. The Church attaches great importance to Jesus' presence at the wedding at Cana. She sees in it the

confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence.

1614 In his preaching Jesus unequivocally taught the original meaning of the union of man and woman as the Creator willed it from the beginning permission given by Moses to divorce one's wife was a concession to the hardness of hearts. The matrimonial union of man and woman is indissoluble: God himself has determined it "what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder."

1615 This unequivocal insistence on the indissolubility of the marriage bond may have left some perplexed and could seem to be a demand impossible to realize. However, Jesus has not placed on spouses a burden impossible to bear, or too heavy - heavier than the Law of Moses. By coming to restore the original order of creation disturbed by sin, he himself gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the Reign of God. It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves, and taking up their crosses that spouses will be able to "receive" the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ. This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life.

1616 This is what the Apostle Paul makes clear when he says: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her," adding at once: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church."

1617 The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery; it is so to speak the nuptial bath. which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist. Christian marriage in its turn becomes an efficacious sign, the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church. Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between baptized persons is a true sacrament of the New Covenant.

Virginity for the sake of the Kingdom

1618 Christ is the center of all Christian life. The bond with him takes precedence over all other bonds, familial or social. From the very beginning of the Church, there have been men and women who have renounced the great good of marriage to follow the Lamb wherever he goes, to be intent on the things of the Lord, to seek to please him and to go out to meet the Bridegroom who is coming. Christ himself has invited certain persons to follow him in this way of life, of which he remains the model:

"For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it" (Mt 19:12).

1619 Virginity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven is an unfolding of baptismal grace, a powerful sign of the supremacy of the bond with Christ and of the ardent expectation of his return, a sign which also recalls that marriage is a reality of this present age which is passing away.

1620 Both the sacrament of Matrimony and virginity for the Kingdom of God come from the Lord himself. It is he who gives them meaning and grants them the grace which is indispensable for living them out in conformity with his will.¹¹⁷ Esteem of virginity for the sake of the kingdom¹¹⁸ and the Christian understanding of marriage are inseparable, and they reinforce each other:

Whoever denigrates marriage also diminishes the glory of virginity. Whoever praises it makes virginity more admirable and resplendent. What appears good only in comparison with evil would not be truly good. The most excellent good is something even better than what is admitted to be good (St. John Chrysostom, *De virg.* 10, 1:PG 48, 540; cf. St. John Paul II, FC 16).

II. THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

1621 In the Latin Rite the celebration of marriage between two Catholic faithful normally takes place during Holy Mass, because of the connection of all the sacraments with the Paschal mystery of Christ. In the Eucharist the memorial of the New Covenant is realized, the New Covenant in which Christ has united himself forever to the Church, his beloved bride for whom he gave himself up. It is therefore fitting that the spouses should seal their consent to give themselves to each other through the offering of their own lives by uniting it to the offering of Christ for his Church made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice, and by receiving the Eucharist so that, communicating in the same Body and the same Blood of Christ, they may form but “one body” in Christ.

1622 “Inasmuch as it is a sacramental action of sanctification, the liturgical celebration of marriage . . . must be, per se, valid, worthy, and fruitful.” It is therefore appropriate for the bride and groom to prepare themselves for the celebration of their marriage by receiving the sacrament of penance.

1623 According to Latin tradition, the spouses as ministers of Christ’s grace mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church. In the tradition of the Eastern Churches, the priests (bishops or presbyters) are witnesses to the mutual consent given by the spouses, but for the validity of the sacrament their blessing is also necessary.

1624 The various liturgies abound in prayers of blessing and epiclesis asking God’s grace and blessing on the new couple, especially the bride. In the epiclesis of this sacrament, the spouses receive the Holy Spirit as the communion of love of Christ and the Church. The Holy Spirit is the seal of their covenant, the ever available source of their love and the strength to renew their fidelity.

III. MATRIMONIAL CONSENT

1625 The parties to a marriage covenant are a baptized man and woman, free to contract marriage, who freely express their consent; “to be free” means:

- not being under constraint;
- not impeded by any natural or ecclesiastical law.

1626 The Church holds the exchange of consent between the spouses to be the indispensable element that “makes the marriage.” If consent is lacking there is no marriage.

1627 The consent consists in a “human act by which the partners mutually give themselves to each other”: “I take you to be my wife” - “I take you to be my husband.” This consent that binds the spouses to each other finds its fulfillment in the two “becoming one flesh.”

1628 The consent must be an act of the will of each of the contracting parties, free of coercion or grave external fear. No human power can substitute for this consent. If this freedom is lacking the marriage is invalid.

1629 For this reason (or for other reasons that render the marriage null and void) the Church, after an examination of the situation by the competent ecclesiastical tribunal, can declare the nullity of a marriage, i.e., that the marriage never existed. In this case the contracting parties are free to marry, provided the natural obligations of a previous union are discharged

1630 The priest (or deacon) who assists at the celebration of a marriage receives the consent of the spouses in the name of the Church and gives the blessing of the Church. The presence of the Church’s minister (and also of the witnesses) visibly expresses the fact that marriage is an ecclesial reality.

1631 This is the reason why the Church normally requires that the faithful contract marriage according to the ecclesiastical form. Several reasons converge to explain this requirement

- Sacramental marriage is a liturgical act. It is therefore appropriate that it should be celebrated in the public liturgy of the Church;
- Marriage introduces one into an ecclesial order, and creates rights and duties in the Church between the spouses and towards their children;
- Since marriage is a state of life in the Church, certainty about it is necessary (hence the obligation to have witnesses);
- The public character of the consent protects the “I do” once given and helps the spouses remain faithful to it.

1632 So that the “I do” of the spouses may be a free and responsible act and so that the marriage covenant may have solid and lasting human and Christian foundations, preparation for marriage is of prime importance. The example and teaching given by parents and families remain the special form of this preparation. The role of pastors and of the Christian community as the “family of God” is indispensable for the transmission of the human and Christian values of marriage and family, and much more so in our era when many young people experience broken homes which no longer sufficiently assure this initiation:

It is imperative to give suitable and timely instruction to young people, above all in the heart of their own families, about the dignity of married love, its role, and its exercise, so that, having learned the value of chastity, they will be able at a suitable age to engage in honorable courtship and enter upon a marriage of their own (GS, 49, 3)

Mixed marriages and disparity of cult

1633 In many countries the situation of a *mixed marriage* (marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic) often arises. It requires particular attention on the part of couples and their pastors. A case of marriage with *disparity of cult* (between a Catholic and a non-baptized person) requires even greater circumspection.

1634 Difference of confession between the spouses does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle for marriage, when they succeed in placing in common what they have received from their respective communities, and learn from each other the way in which each lives in fidelity to Christ. But the difficulties of mixed marriages must not be underestimated. They arise from the fact that the separation of Christians has not yet been overcome. The spouses risk experiencing the tragedy of Christian disunity even in the heart of their own home. Disparity of cult can further aggravate these difficulties. Differences about faith and the very notion of marriage, but also different religious mentalities, can become sources of tension in marriage, especially as regards the education of children. The temptation to religious indifference can then arise.

1635 According to the law in force in the Latin Church, a mixed marriage needs for liceity the *express permission* of ecclesiastical authority. In case of disparity of cult an *express dispensation* from this impediment is required for the validity of the marriage. This permission or dispensation presupposes that both parties know and do not exclude the essential ends and properties of marriage; and furthermore that the Catholic party confirms the obligations, which have been made known to the non-Catholic party, of preserving his or her own faith and ensuring the baptism and education of the children in the Catholic Church.

1636 Through ecumenical dialogue Christian communities in many regions have been able to put into effect a *common pastoral practice for mixed marriages*. Its task is to help such couples live out their particular situation in the light of faith, overcome the tensions between the couple's obligations to each other and towards their ecclesial communities, and encourage the flowering of what is common to them in faith and respect for what separates them.

1637 In marriages with disparity of cult the Catholic spouse has a particular task: "For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband." It is a great joy for the Christian spouse and for the Church if this "consecration" should lead to the free conversion of the other spouse to the Christian faith. Sincere married love, the humble and patient practice of the family virtues, and perseverance in prayer can prepare the non-believing spouse to accept the grace of conversion.

IV. THE EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

1638 "From a valid marriage arises a *bond* between the spouses which by its very nature is perpetual and exclusive; furthermore, in a Christian marriage the spouses are strengthened and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state *by a special sacrament*."

The marriage bond

1639 The consent by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself. From their covenant arises "an institution, confirmed by the divine law, . . . even in the eyes of society." The covenant between the spouses is integrated into God's covenant with man: "Authentic married love is caught up into divine love.

1640 Thus *the marriage bond* has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved. This bond, which results from the free human act of the spouses and their consummation of the marriage, is a reality, henceforth irrevocable, and gives rise to

a covenant guaranteed by God's fidelity. The Church does not have the power to contravene this disposition of divine wisdom.

The grace of the sacrament of Matrimony

1641 "By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God." This grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple's love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace, they "help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children."

1642 *Christ is the source of this grace.* "Just as of old God encountered his people with a covenant of love and fidelity, so our Savior, the spouse of the Church, now encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of Matrimony." Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens, to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love. In the joys of their love and family life he gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb:

How can I ever express the happiness of a marriage joined by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels, and ratified by the Father? . . . How wonderful the bond between two believers, now one in hope, one in desire, one in discipline, one in the same service! They are both children of one Father and servants of the same Master, undivided in spirit and flesh, truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, one also is the spirit (Tertullian, *Ad uxorem*. 2, 8, 6-7:PL 1, 1412-1413; cf. FC 13)

V. THE GOODS AND REQUIREMENTS OF CONJUGAL LOVE

1643 "Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter - appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands *indissolubility* and *faithfulness* in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to *fertility*. In a word it is a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values."

The unity and indissolubility of marriage

1644 The love of the spouses requires, of its very nature, the unity and indissolubility of the spouses' community of persons, which embraces their entire life: "so they are no longer two, but one flesh." They "are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving." This human communion is confirmed, purified, and completed by communion in Jesus Christ, given through the sacrament of Matrimony. It is deepened by lives of the common faith and by the Eucharist received together.

1645 "The unity of marriage, distinctly recognized by our Lord, is made clear in the equal personal dignity which must be accorded to man and wife in mutual and unreserved affection." Polygamy is contrary to conjugal love which is undivided and exclusive.

*** *The fidelity of conjugal love***

1646 By its very nature conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of the spouses. This is the consequence of the gift of themselves which they make to each other. Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement “until further notice.” The “intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children, demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable union between them.”

1647 The deepest reason is found in the fidelity of God to his covenant, in that of Christ to his Church. Through the sacrament of Matrimony the spouses are enabled to represent this fidelity and witness to it. Through the sacrament, the indissolubility of marriage receives a new and deeper meaning.

1648 It can seem difficult, even impossible, to bind oneself for life to another human being. This makes it all the more important to proclaim the Good News that God loves us with a definitive and irrevocable love, that married couples share in this love, that it supports and sustains them, and that by their own faithfulness they can be witnesses to God’s faithful love. Spouses who with God’s grace give this witness, often in very difficult conditions, deserve the gratitude and support of the ecclesial community.

1649 Yet there are some situations in which living together becomes practically impossible for a variety of reasons. In such cases the Church permits the physical separation of the couple and their living apart. The spouses do not cease to be husband and wife before God and so are not free to contract a new union. In this difficult situation, the best solution would be, if possible, reconciliation. The Christian community is called to help these persons live out their situation in a Christian manner and in fidelity to their marriage bond which remains indissoluble.

1650 Today there are numerous Catholics in many countries who have recourse to civil divorce and contract new civil unions. In fidelity to the words of Jesus Christ - “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” the Church maintains that a new union cannot be recognized as valid, if the first marriage was. If the divorced are remarried civilly, they find themselves in a situation that objectively contravenes God’s law. Consequently, they cannot receive Eucharistic communion as long as this situation persists. For the same reason, they cannot exercise certain ecclesial responsibilities. Reconciliation through the sacrament of Penance can be granted only to those who have repented for having violated the sign of the covenant and of fidelity to Christ, and who are committed to living in complete continence.

1651 Toward Christians who live in this situation, and who often keep the faith and desire to bring up their children in a Christian manner, priests and the whole community must manifest an attentive solicitude, so that they do not consider themselves separated from the Church, in whose life they can and must participate as baptized persons:

They should be encouraged to listen to the Word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts for justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God’s grace (FC, 84).

The openness to fertility

1652 “By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory.”

Children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute greatly to the good of the parents themselves. God himself said: “It is not good that man should be alone,” and “from the beginning [he] made them male and female”; wishing to associate them in a special way in his own creative work, God blessed man and woman with the words: “Be fruitful and multiply.” Hence, true married love and the whole structure of family life which results from it, without diminishment of the other ends of marriage, are directed to disposing the spouses to cooperate valiantly with the love of the Creator and Savior, who through them will increase and enrich his family from day to day (GS 50, 1; cf. Gen 2:18; Mt 19:4; Gen 1:28)

1653 The fruitfulness of conjugal love extends to the fruits of the moral, spiritual, and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children by education. Parents are the principal and first educators of their children.¹⁶⁴ In this sense the fundamental task of marriage and family is to be at the service of life.

1654 Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice.

VI. THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

1655 Christ chose to be born and grow up in the bosom of the holy family of Joseph and Mary. The Church is nothing other than “the family of God.” From the beginning, the core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers “together with all [their] household.”¹⁶⁶ When they were converted, they desired that “their whole household” should also be saved. These families who became believers were islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world.

1656 In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are “by word and example . . . the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation.

1657 It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way “by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity.” Thus the home is the first school of Christian life and “a school for human enrichment.” Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous - even repeated - forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one’s life.

1658 We must also remember the great number of single persons who, because of the particular circumstances in which they have to live - often not of their choosing - are especially close to Jesus’ heart and therefore deserve the special affection and active solicitude of the Church, especially of pastors. Many remain without a human family often due to conditions of poverty. Some live their situation in the spirit of the Beatitudes,

servicing God and neighbor in exemplary fashion. The doors of homes, the “domestic churches,” and of the great family which is the Church must be open to all of them. “No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who ‘labor and are heavy laden.’”

IN BRIEF

1659 St. Paul said: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church . . . This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church” (*Eph* 5:25, 32).

1660 The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament (cf. CIC, can. 1055 § 1; cf. *GS* 48 § 1).

1661 The sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life (cf. Council of Trent: DS 1799).

1662 Marriage is based on the consent of the contracting parties, that is, on their will to give themselves, each to the other, mutually and definitively, in order to live a covenant of faithful and fruitful love.

1663 Since marriage establishes the couple in a public state of life in the Church, it is fitting that its celebration be public, in the framework of a liturgical celebration, before the priest (or a witness authorized by the Church), the witnesses, and the assembly of the faithful.

1664 Unity, indissolubility, and openness to fertility are essential to marriage. Polygamy is incompatible with the unity of marriage; divorce separates what God has joined together; the refusal of fertility turns married life away from its “supreme gift,” the child (*GS* 50 § 1).

1665 The remarriage of persons divorced from a living, lawful spouse contravenes the plan and law of God as taught by Christ. They are not separated from the Church, but they cannot receive Eucharistic communion. They will lead Christian lives especially by educating their children in the faith.

1666 The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family home is rightly called “the domestic church,” a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity.

APPENDIX III

GENERAL PROCESS FOR MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Below is a generalized walkthrough of the process for marriage preparation as described in the main document. It also covers other points and situations that may arise in preparing a couple for the sacrament of matrimony.

1. Initial Interview – To ensure adequate time for marriage preparation, couples planning to enter into the sacrament of holy matrimony need to contact the parish at a suitable time before the provisional date for the wedding. Each engaged couple is to have an initial interview with the pastor, pastoral administrator or clergy representative as soon as feasible at or after the first contact. The interview is for the purpose of:

- a. Determining the eligibility of the engaged couple according to civil law.
- b. Determining eligibility according to the (Code of Canon Law).
- c. Explaining the Diocesan Marriage Preparation process.
- d. Setting a provisional date for the wedding.

**Please note: the setting of the date for the wedding should not be seen as permanent, but can change if necessary.*

The marriage preparation offered by the pastor, pastoral administrator, or clergy representative should include the administration of a diagnostic inventory instrument to facilitate greater mutual understanding. The instrument is to be administered as soon as conveniently possible after the initial interview.

Where canonical permission has been obtained for the marriage to take place in another parish, that pastor, pastoral administrator or clergy representative will conduct the initial interview. Where a visiting minister from outside the diocese is coming to officiate, the pastor, pastoral administrator or clergy representative is responsible for the initial interview. After the initial interview, communication between ministers is needed for a clear understanding on where the prenuptial forms will be completed and who will do further preparation with the engaged couple.

2. Marriage Catechumenate and Formation

- a. The Marriage Catechumenate is to be experienced by both parties, preferably together. It in no way replaces the instructions by the pastor, pastoral administrator, clergy representative, and certified catechists both before and after Marriage Preparation.
- b. Marriage Catechumenate includes a Marriage Formation Day (Pre-Cana), a parish Sponsor Couple program (Fully Engaged) and, Natural Family Program (Full Course).
- c. The Marriage Catechumenate phase is to be completed 60 to 90 days before the wedding.

d. Refusal to participate in a Marriage Catechumenate raises several pastoral concerns. It warrants a re-evaluation of readiness for marriage for the couple and a meeting with the Pastor to determine the condition and state of the engaged couples desire to marry.

e. Exceptions to participation in a Marriage Catechumenate may include validation of a long standing civil union and marriages of the elderly or widowed.

3. Final Preparation: Pastoral Follow Up Interview – After the proximate preparation, the 60 to 90-day period of time permits the pastor, pastoral administrator or clergy representative and the couple to discuss, in a series of interviews, what they discovered about themselves and their relationship during the preparation. After these follow-up interviews, if the pastor, pastoral administrator or clergy representative is unable to reach a conclusive assessment re-garding the couple’s readiness for marriage, he/she should seek immediate consultation with qualified resource personnel, including medical or psychological experts, if such seems appropriate.

4. Marriages of Young People – If, at the time of the wedding, either of the parties will be under 19 years of age, then:

- a. At least six months should elapse after the completion of the Primary Marriage Preparation.
- b. Parental consultation and completion of the canonical free state form must take place.

5. Pregnancy – if a couple had not planned to marry, pregnancy, in it–self, is not considered sufficient reason to enter marriage or shorten the marriage preparation process.

POLICY: OHIO LAW

In the State of Ohio, civil law mandates that a man must be 18 years old to marry. Ohio civil law further requires that if the woman is at least 16 but not yet 18 years old, the consent of the parents or legal guardian must be given on behalf of the minor; this is to be in writing, and sworn to before a Church notary or notary public. A minor under 16 years of age may not marry in Ohio without a court order.

Priests, deacons, and lay ministers are required to observe all the requirements of the Ohio Revised Code relating to marriage. In like fashion, all priests and deacons are also obliged to function in accordance with the marriage license issued to them by the State of Ohio. The marriage license issued by the State of Ohio also obliges the recipient of the license to function in accordance with the laws of the Church to which the minister belongs. It is the responsibility of the minister to be familiar with these civil legal matters.

6. Non Practicing Catholics – Request for marriage in the Catholic faith is a unique opportunity for the evangelization and reconciliation of Catholics who do not practice, or strongly identify with their faith. The non-practicing Catholic person should be given an opportunity to return to the active practice of the faith. Such a person should receive special catechesis in the Catholic faith as well as the Primary Marriage Preparation.

7. *Mixed Marriages* – Marriage between a Catholic and a person who is not Catholic presents religious issues of major importance. The Church calls on parties to examine these issues by requiring that:

- a. The Catholic party reaffirms his/her faith in Jesus Christ and His church by adhering to the teachings of the Catholic Church, and, with God's help, intends to continue living that faith in the Catholic Church
- b. The Catholic party promises to do all in his/her power to authentically witness the faith with the children by having them baptized, exposed, and instructed in the Catholic Church.
- c. The Catholic party must respect the faith position of his/her spouse.
- d. The non-Catholic party must be informed of the reaffirmation and promises of the Catholic party i.e. renewal of Baptismal promises, and profession of the Apostles Creed.
- e. The priest, deacon or pastoral administrator must be morally certain that the reaffirmation and promises have been sincerely made i.e. not cohabitating, not engaged in contraceptive practices, carefully know and understand the moral teachings of the Catholic Church.

8. *Validation or Sanatio* – Persons who marry outside the Catholic Church and wish to validate their union will participate in the normal assessment and preparation process, including, for example, Today...Tomorrow... Forever, Marriage Encounter, Jesús Te Invita al Sacramento Del Matrimonio, Jornada Familiar, Fully Engaged with a sponsor couple/group or other parish based enrichment programs.

Couples who marry outside the Church must wait at least six months before having the marriage validated.

For validations following annulments or dissolutions, appropriate pastoral care should be given.

Sanatio (Sanatio In Radice, the “healing of the marriage in its root”) cases involve the validation of a marriage attempted without sacramental form when the non-Catholic party refuses to go through another ceremony before a priest or deacon and two witnesses, or the couple truly believe they committed at the time of the civil marriage. It is also referred to as a retroactive validation. Contact the Tribunal for more information and the procedure.

9. *Nihil Obstat* – The priest, deacon, or lay minister may also be required to submit the pre-nuptial file to the Chancery Office for examination and receipt of the Nihil Obstat. The circumstances in which a Nihil Obstat is required are:

1. a previous marriage of at least one of the parties in cases when a declaration of nullity has been granted for a previous attempted marriage or the death of a spouse;
2. a marriage to be validated according to canonical form;
3. permissions required by Canon 1071 §1 that include:
 - a. a marriage of transients (people without an established residence in this or any other diocese);
 - b. a marriage which cannot be recognized or celebrated according to the norm of civil law;

- c. a marriage of a person who is bound by natural obligations toward another party or children arising from a previous union (alimony and/or child support obligations);
- d. a marriage of a person who has notoriously rejected the Catholic faith (if the person does not intend to return to the practice of the Catholic faith; if the person has formally defected from the Catholic Church, a petition requesting permission for mixed religion marriage must be included);
- e. a marriage of a person who is under a censure;
- f. a marriage of a minor child when the parents are unaware or reasonably opposed (in the Diocese of Columbus, the Nihil Obstat is required when one of the parties is under the age of 20);
- g. a marriage to be entered into through a proxy as mentioned in can. 1105.

9. Places where marriage may be celebrated – Wedding ceremonies in the diocese are to be celebrated in a sacred place, normally a Catholic church. Weddings may also take place in college chapels. A Catholic ceremony may also take place for good reasons in a non-Catholic church, but special permission must be sought. Permission will not be given for weddings in homes, gardens, beaches or similar places.

10. Planning for the ceremony should follow the liturgical norms set forth by the Church. Under certain circumstances consideration to ethnic customs that are in harmony with the spirit of the liturgy are allowed e.g. lazo rosary etc. A meeting with the Pastor and or his appointed liturgical representative should take place soon after the Initial Interview so the couple knows the options available in liturgy and music.

11. Appeal – Since the right to marry derives from natural law, a couple has the right to appeal a decision which delays or prevents their marriage. This appeal is sent to the Bishop's office.

12. Dispensations/Permissions – In some cases, the couple will require special permissions or dispensations. It is the responsibility of the priest, deacon, or lay minister preparing the couple for marriage to examine whether or not dispensations or permissions are needed. Petitions for dispensations/permissions must be submitted to the Chancery Office no later than one month prior to the wedding in order to allow enough time for consideration of and response to the request. Permissions and dispensations include the following:

1. Dispensation from Impediment of Disparity of Cult (Catholic marrying an unbaptized person- c.1086)
2. Dispensation from Impediment of Disparity of Cult ad Cautelam (Non-Catholic is not certain he/she was baptized or cannot provide documentation of baptism).
3. Dispensation from Impediment of Consanguinity in the 4th degree of collateral line. (e.g.1st cousins- c. 1091)
4. Dispensation from Impediment of Affinity. (e.g. Mother-in-law/step daughter- c. 1092.)
5. Permission for Mixed Religion. (Catholic marrying a baptized non-Catholic and documentation of baptism has been provided- cc.1124-1125)
6. Permission for marriage to a person who has formally defected from the Catholic Faith. (c.1071)
7. Dispensation from the Catholic Form of Marriage

APPENDIX IV

CIRCUMSTANCES AND IMPEDIMENTS TO MARRIAGE

In the inquiry phase, there can arise specific, identifiable circumstances that may be present which indicate a need for further assessment and growth before the final decision is made to proceed with the marriage.

Some impediments (such as the impediment of Disparity of Cult for a Catholic to marry a non-baptized person or someone whose baptism is doubtful) are resolved simply by obtaining the proper dispensation from the local ordinary. Other impediments (such as a previous marriage), can take months or years to resolve. In all cases of special circumstance, increased pastoral care is warranted, so that the marriage can be as strong as possible.

For clarification regarding proceeding with the preparation for marriage of couples presenting unusual or complicated circumstances/impediments, contact the Chancery Office.

The following is a partial list of special circumstances that may characterize couples presenting themselves to be married in the Church:

ISSUES IMPACTING FREEDOM TO MARRY

If one or both individuals demonstrate serious readiness issues, the priest or deacon should refer the couple to a professional for assessment and treatment while addressing less serious readiness issues through his pastoral work. The professional's role is to advise the couple and the priest or deacon, not to make a final decision on whether or not the marriage should be delayed. The burden of that decision rests solely with Church authority.

Abuse

Issues involving abuse of any kind warrant serious attention, with the safety of the abused party being the highest priority. Even bringing up the subject in front of both partners puts the abused party at risk. In addition, it is not uncommon for a one-on-one conversation with either/both party(ies) to result in the denial of its presence in the relationship. Once safety is assured, therapy can be helpful (there are often other issues that create an environment ripe for abuse) – but as always, ministers should exercise care in referring (not “recommending”) a competent therapist. Once married, an abused partner is never to be encouraged to remain physically present in the relationship to “save the marriage.”

Addiction

Issues involving addiction of any kind (i.e. alcohol, drugs, gambling, Internet, pornography, etc.) demand professional attention. Treatment can involve individual, couple, and/or group therapy, as well as support groups. Twelve-step programs can be effective, and are widely available. Various specialties exist within the counseling professions; as always, ministers should exercise care in referring (not “recommending”) individuals to a competent therapist.

“Age” as it involves freedom to marry usually refers to young couples where at least one partner is a teenager. Currently in the State of Ohio, the minimum legal age for marriage with parental consent is 18 for males and

16 for females; the minimum legal age for marriage without parental consent is 18 for both males and females. Although state laws vary as to the legal age for marriage, maturity varies with the individual.

The preparation process should be age-appropriate. Special attention should be given to the preparation of couples in which even one of them is younger than the age of 21. Many couples just past their teenage years are not ready to take on the commitment and responsibilities of marriage, and would likewise benefit from similar extra pastoral attention. Discussion facilitated by a premarital inventory can help these couples recognize a need for more time before entering a lifelong relationship.

“Age” can also apply to older couples. Despite the tendency to believe they need less preparation because of their presumed maturity and experience, there are many special issues unique to older couples that merit discussion, such as previous relationships – especially for divorced or widowed men and women; finances; transition from a single lifestyle to a marriage partnership; and obligations to family members.

Pregnancy

Pregnancy should always be treated as a caution to marriage as opposed to a reason to speed up a wedding because it can interfere with a person’s ability to give free consent. If the couple’s first consideration of marriage followed discovery of the pregnancy, the possibility of pressure to marry needs to be carefully explored. Regardless, 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.

FAITH ISSUES

Interchurch, Interfaith, or Interreligious Marriages

Couples are urged to learn about their future spouse’s faith – not for the purpose of conversion, but for understanding, mutual respect, and family harmony.

Despite the complexity of combinations of Catholic partner and the profession/lack of profession of faith of the other partner, canon law and liturgical rites are specific about what dispensations and rites are needed.

In an interreligious marriage, the Catholic partner must make the following promise to be faithful to the Catholic Church and raise his or her children in the Catholic faith (Canon 1125):

“I reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ and, with God’s help, intend to continue living that faith in the Catholic Church. At the same time, I acknowledge the respect I owe to the conscience of my partner in marriage. I promise to do all that I can to share the faith I have received with our children by having them baptized and educated as Catholics.” (Diocese of Columbus Application for Marriage Dispensation Form)

The non-Catholic partner is to be informed of the promise, so that he or she is aware of the promise and obligation the Catholic partner has made. The non-Catholic partner does not need to make a promise or sign a statement. The “Decree on Ecumenism,” (n. 3) clarifies that “to do all in one’s power” recognizes the religious convictions of the non-Catholic party and implies that a decision is reached that respects those beliefs. It does not mean an absolute promise at the risk of jeopardizing the marriage itself.

Non-practicing Catholic(s)

While some evidence of faith is required for the reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony, the level of faith is not the question. Engaged couples must be accepted and instructed at their actual level. “As for wishing to lay down further criteria for admission to the ecclesial celebration of marriage, criteria that would concern the level of faith of those to be married, this would above all involve grave risks. The faith of the person seeking marriage in the Church can exist in varying degrees. It is the primary duty of pastors to facilitate a rediscovery of this faith, nourishing it and bringing it to maturity.” (*Familiaris Consortio*, n. 68).

The issue here is differentiating ignorance and/or non-practice of the faith from a direct rejection of the faith. “Rejection of the faith” means that someone sees no value in the faith, does not believe – and does not wish to believe.

Previous Marriage/Children

One of the first steps in marriage preparation (after hospitality) is to determine the couple’s freedom to marry so that the process can continue. In the vast majority of cases, for whatever the length of marriage, age of partner, and whether or not there were children, the couple’s attendance at remarriage preparation best serves their needs in addressing issues unique to their situation. It is not necessary for an annulment to be granted for a couple to attend. Many times the program is helpful in the discernment process for the couple.

Because of the increased risk of divorce, more rather than less preparation is beneficial. Special attention is warranted to help the couple understand how the dynamics of a previous marriage will impact their new marriage. In addition to typical issues, marriage ministers should also address resolution of grief from the previous relationship(s), freedom to marry, role shifts and step-parenting, as well as establishment of new familial traditions.

Divorce and annulment

In accordance with the previously stated policy, no wedding date (not even a tentative one) may be set for couples if one or both parties is/are still bound by a previous marriage bond not yet declared null by ecclesiastic tribunal. It is wise to urge an appropriately long period of engagement in order to discourage couples from marrying on the rebound or without having understood responsibility for and/or contribution to the difficulties of the previous marriage.

Policy: Vetitum or Commendatio

The priest or deacon is to be sure to investigate as to whether there is a vetitum (prohibition) or commendatio (recommendation) attached to an annulment, which might require further counseling prior to entering into marriage in the Church. The vetitum can only be lifted by the issuing Tribunal.

Policy: Death

The priest or deacon is required to collect documentation of the former spouse’s passing in order to properly establish freedom to marry. This documentation should be entered into the couple’s permanent marriage file.

The form of marriage preparation can be adapted to the age and circumstances of the couple, but abbreviating preparation for couples who had happy marriages before the death of a spouse is not advisable. Mentor couples can help the engaged couple discern where they are in the grief process, and how they will deal with issues such as merged finances and obligations to children from the previous marriage.

Validation of an invalid marriage

Validation occurs in instances in which an invalid marriage is validated in accordance with the canons of the Church. Invalidity often occurs when one or both of the couple is/are Catholic, and they failed to have their vows received by a Catholic priest or deacon (such as being married by a non-Catholic minister or before a civil authority without proper dispensation). There are two paths that can be followed to validate an invalid marriage: convalidation and radical sanation. A convalidation is a new exchange of the marriage vows before a priest or deacon, and requires a whole new act of will on the part of the couple. Radical sanation renders retroactively valid a marriage that was invalid from its origin without the renewal of consent by either party, provided that both the man and woman were free to marry at that time and that their mutual consent continues from the invalid wedding ceremony. Priests and deacons may contact the Chancery if they are in need of additional guidance.

Children from this or a previous marriage

Children from a current or previous relationship are in and of themselves neither a reason to marry nor to refrain from marrying. Of primary concern is that the parent recognizes his or her responsibility to support children from a previous relationship financially, emotionally, and spiritually. Because of the strain on the couple and the children, special counseling is especially important, including remarriage preparation if appropriate.

MORAL ISSUES

Abortion

Abortion is one of the most traumatic experiences a woman can have. Even so, it should not be presumed that the mother alone deals with post-abortion trauma. Should the acknowledgment of an abortion during the current or a prior relationship be made during marriage preparation, take the opportunity to pastorally demonstrate how the Church is loving and forgiving by reaching out with concern and utmost sensitivity. The issue can be a complicated one: rape or incest might have been involved; hence great care should always be used in extending Christ-like compassion.

Feelings of guilt, fear, anxiety, and panic are common for someone who has experienced an abortion, or who has encouraged or coerced a partner to do so. There may also be additional layers of guilt and/or regret if the mother made and acted on the decision without consulting the father, or if she proceeded against the father's wishes. In addition, every relationship can be gravely impacted: besides the baby's father, grandparents, extended family members, and the parents' friends can also suffer. The pain of abortion may be intensified by a sense of alienation from God and the Church. It is possible that shame may cause the parent(s) to keep the matter to him/herself, even for many years.

Invite the woman who has been involved in an abortion to participate in Project Rachel (a national post-abortion counseling program provided locally through Catholic Social Services) or Bethesda Post-Abortion Healing Ministry. Generally, these processes include counseling, prayer, and Scripture reflection. At the appropriate time in the healing process, invite reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as an experience of God's forgiveness and grace.

Policy: Cohabitation

The Church strikes a balance on the issue of cohabitation. On the one hand, clergy should be welcoming and see this as an opportunity for evangelization, yet at the same time they must uphold in absolutely clear terms the Church's teaching that sexual intimacy is only made authentically in the context of valid marriage.

The following steps are to be used when dealing with cohabiting couples:

Approach the couple with patience and concern.

- Explore with them why they are cohabiting, and discuss the sociological and psychological ramifications of their situation. Address the problems cohabitation causes married couples. Help them understand that cohabitation can and does touch on issues of fear and fidelity. There are ample resources on these issues available, and clerics may turn to the Marriage and Family Life Office in order to access such materials.
- Explore with them the reason that they are now approaching the Church for marriage (as with pregnancy, the risk of divorce is lessened if the decision to marry was made prior to the cohabitation).
- Help the couple to understand the wisdom behind the Church's teaching on sexual intimacy within the Sacrament of Marriage.
- Encourage the couple to live separately and chastely before their marriage as a spiritual preparation for marriage (exceptions are made for those with children).

"Today many couples are living together in a sexual relationship without the benefit of marriage. Many cohabiting couples believe that their desire for each other justifies the sexual relationship. This belief reflects a misunderstanding of the natural purpose of human sexual intercourse, which can only be realized in the permanent commitment of marriage... Couples offer various reasons for cohabiting, ranging from economics to convenience. Frequently, they have accepted the widespread societal belief that premarital cohabitation is a prudent way to determine whether they are truly compatible. They believe they need a trial period before proceeding to the lifelong commitment of marriage. Social science research, however, finds that cohabitation has no positive effects on a marriage. In some cases, cohabitation can in fact harm a couple's chances for a stable marriage. More importantly, though, cohabitation involves the serious sin of fornication. It does not conform to God's plan for marriage and is always wrong and objectively sinful... Clearly, there is no substitute for the binding lifelong commitment of marriage, and by definition, there is certainly no way to 'try it out.' Only the public and legal commitment of marriage expresses the complete gift of self that is the basis of marriage. To refuse the full commitment of marriage expresses something distinctly less than the unconditional trust required of complete self-giving. At the heart of cohabitation lies a reluctance or refusal to make a public, permanent commitment. Young people need to develop the virtue required for sustaining such a lofty commitment."

Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan, pp. 25-26.

Two extremes are warned against: (1) immediately condemning the couple's behavior; and (2) ignoring the cohabitation. As Pope John Paul II stated: "Pastors and the ecclesial community should take care to become acquainted with such situations and their actual causes, case by case. They should 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, n. 81

The following are core questions and partial responses given in "Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples," found at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' web site (www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/cohabiting.shtml).

(1) If a couple is cohabiting, can marriage be denied or delayed?

Cohabitation and/or premarital sex are not canonical impediments to marriage. A couple may not be denied a wedding for these reasons alone, although additional time might be needed to address the issues raised by cohabitation such as the impact of cohabitation on the couple's freedom to marry and their understanding of the Church's teachings on marriage and sexuality...

(2) Should cohabiting couples be encouraged to separate prior to the wedding?

Yes, but the couple is not to be refused marriage if they fail to separate.

Policy: Intention to be childless

A decision by the couple or one party to permanently exclude children invalidates a marriage. If such a statement is made to the priest or deacon, he must inform them of the seriousness of their decision, and strive in a pastoral manner to bring the couple to the point where they understand the Church's teaching toward their agreement on openness to children. If, after this good faith effort, either/both party/parties still refuse/s to be open to children, the priest or deacon must inform the couple that they cannot be married in a Catholic Church.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Cross-Cultural/Interracial Marriages

It is wise for the priest or deacon to help couples identify cultural assumptions that may not be apparent to one another.

MISCELLANEOUS

Policy: Sexual Identity

For a sacramental marriage to be possible, the presumption is that a man and a woman asking to marry must understand themselves as a 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 adequately with this issue, further assistance from a counseling professional is strongly recommended before proceeding with the wedding.

“Marriage is a unique union, a relationship different from all others. It is the permanent bond between one man and one woman whose two-in-one-flesh communion of persons is an indispensable good at the heart of every family and every society... Male-female complementarity is intrinsic to marriage. It is naturally ordered toward authentic union and the generation of new life. Children are meant to be the gift of the permanent and exclusive union of a husband and a wife. A child is meant to have a mother and a father. The true nature of marriage, lived in openness to life, is a witness to the precious gift of the child and to the unique roles of a mother and father...”

Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan, p. 21

Citizenship Status

Situations that may affect a couple’s ability to contract a marriage include: (1) marrying in order to remain in the U.S. or to gain citizenship (which impacts consent); and (2) couples who freely want to marry but one or both are in the U.S. illegally. Consult with the Chancery and/or civil legal counsel for legal clarification. *All priests and deacons of the Diocese of Columbus are reminded that they are not to knowingly witness a marriage that violates civil law.*

Impotence and/or Infertility

While infertility is not an impediment to marriage, if known in advance it should be discussed by the couple with openness and candor. Although antecedent impotency is an impediment to marriage, it must also be remembered that medical technology means some forms of impotence are treatable or curable. The priest or deacon must explore carefully and thoroughly when this issue is disclosed. Permanent inability to have intercourse nullifies marriage, but where there is doubt, the marriage is not be impeded on that ground (Canon 1084).

Long-distance marriage preparation

Long distance preparation or attendance at a marriage preparation program as individuals (rather than as a couple) is sometimes necessary. Couples may reside in separate cities or at a great distance from the city where they will be married. Military or college chaplains can often provide independent preparation, but the presiding minister needs to coordinate the process. The couple should meet with him at least once, even if most of the preparation will be done long distance.

If the couple is unable to attend a marriage preparation program together, the priest/deacon or designated trained lay minister(s) can instruct and facilitate it one-on-one during a window of time that is opportune. If the bride and groom are prepared independently by different individuals (the least advisable option), care should be taken that they use the same marriage preparation program curriculum. The couple should be encouraged to thoroughly discuss when they are together whatever self/couple discovery emerges, as well as the material presented in the program. Separation is a challenge, but not a reason to omit completion of a marriage preparation program.

Non-registered Catholic(s)

Canon Law does not make parish registration a prerequisite for marriage in the Catholic Church (Canon 1115). Consequently, parishes are discouraged from requiring the couple’s registration and/or prior/ongoing financial support. Each situation is to be handled separately and delicately.

The presumption of the Church is that people have a natural right to marry. The Church, therefore, is to provide a welcoming presence regardless of whether or not the couple is registered as parishioners.

Person(s) with Disabilities

Disabilities can be physical or mental. As with questions of readiness, the priest or deacon should utilize the counsel of professionals who are knowledgeable about the particular disability if he has questions or reservations regarding the wisdom of proceeding toward marriage. Physical disability itself is not an impediment to marriage. With regard to mental disabilities, the priest or deacon needs to assess the couple's ability to give consent and to assume the essential obligations of marriage. (See also "Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities," USCCB, 1995).

Preuptial Agreements

A sacramental marriage is based on an enduring committed love and partnership for the whole of life – which implies a comprehensive sharing of both spiritual and temporal goods. Because prenuptial agreements commonly provide for the division of property in the event a couple divorces, they can potentially invalidate marital consent. However, a prenuptial agreement is not automatically a cause of invalid marital consent. An evaluation of such an agreement is necessary to determine if there are any conditions limiting consent. Particularly for remarriages, the difference between prenuptial agreements and wills is to be understood: a will provides for the management of one's estate upon death.

Sexually transmitted/communicable diseases

The Church understands Christian marriage to be a covenantal relationship based on openness and honesty. Therefore, both people entering a marriage have a right to information that has major ramifications for their marriage. Being a carrier of a sexually transmitted and/or communicable disease is something that needs to be disclosed to one's future spouse.

Unwillingness to participate in a Marriage Preparation Program

Unwillingness to participate in a marriage preparation program can be considered a sign of a lack of commitment to marry in the Church. However, the Church has a responsibility to provide adequate and varied options so there is no reasonable obstacle to participation (Canon 213).

APPENDIX V MARRIAGE AND FAMILY RESOURCES

This list of resources provided in this appendix are separated by different categories to support the various areas of marriage and family. For more information, descriptions of these resources, other downloadable files of additional resources, and up to date resources, please visit the Office of Marriage and Family webpage: www.columbuscatholic.org/marriage-family.

MARRIAGE RESOURCES

Building a Eucharistic Marriage – www.eucharisticmarriage.org

For Your Marriage – www.foryourmarriage.org

Marriage Unique for a Reason – www.marriageuniqueforareason.org/

Married Love and the Gift of Life – www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/love-and-sexuality/married-love-and-the-gift-of-life

Three Secrets to Holiness in Marriage: A 33-Day Self-Guided Retreat for Catholic Couples – www.avemariapress.com/products/three-secrets-to-holiness-in-marriage

Worldwide Marriage Encounter - www.wwme.org

FAMILY RESOURCES

Beloved – <https://sacraments.augustineinstitute.org/courses/beloved-mystery-and-meaning>

Cana Family Institute – www.canafamilyinstitute.com

Catholic Brain – www.catholicbrain.com

Catholic Mom – www.catholicmom.com

Fathers for Good – www.fathersforgood.org

Ruah Woods Institute – www.ruahwoodsstitute.org

Teaching Catholic Kids – www.teachingcatholickids.com

VidAngel – www.vidangel.com

Welcome His Heart – www.welcomehisheart.com

FAMILY SEXUAL INTEGRITY AND HEALING

Angelic Warfare Confraternity – www.angelicwarfareconfraternity.org
Bloom for Catholic Women – www.bloomforcatholicwomen.com
Castus Society – www.castussociety.org
Courage/Encourage Ministries – www.couragerc.org
Covenant Eyes – www.covenanteyes.com
Faith and Safety: Technology Safety Through the Eyes of Faith – www.faihandsafety.org
Fight the New Drug – www.fightthenewdrug.org
Integrity Restored – www.integrityrestored.com
Person & Identity – www.personandidentity.com
Reclaim God's Plan for Sexual Health – www.reclaimsexualhealth.com
Strive – www.strive21.com

MARRIAGE STRUGGLE, DIVORCE, LOSS AND HEALING

Back in His Arms Again – www.backinhisarmsagain.com
Bethesda Healing Ministry – www.bethesdahealing.org
Catholic Therapists – www.catholictherapists.com
Cornerstone of Hope – www.cornerstoneofhope.com
Divorced Catholic Columbus – www.divorcedcatholiccolumbus.org
Life-Giving Wounds – www.lifegivingwounds.org
Red Bird Ministries – www.redbird.love
Restore – www.restorecatholicmarriage.com
Restored – www.restoredministry.com
Retrouvaille – www.helpourmarriage.org
Seasons of Hope – www.northhighdeanery.org/seasons-of-hope
Smart Loving – www.smartloving.org
Spirit of Peace Clinical Counseling – www.spiritofpeaceclinicalcounseling.com
St. Raymond Nonnatus Foundation – www.nonnatus.org
Tribunal Process for a Decree of Nullity – www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/annulment

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING AND FERTILITY AWARENESS

Methods:

Billings Ovulation Method – www.billings.life/en/

Couple to Couple League – www.ccli.org

SymptoPro – <https://www.symptopro.org/>

Creighton – www.fertilitycare.org

Marquette – www.marquette.edu

**Please visit the diocese website (www.columbuscatholic.org/marriage-family/nfp) for a list of NFP instructors and doctors in the diocese.*

Cherry Blossom Buds – www.cherryblossombuds.com

My Catholic Doctor – www.mycatholicdoctor.com/womens-health/

Pearl and Thistle's – <https://pearlandthistle.com/>

Springs in the Desert – www.springsinthedesert.org

Springs of Love – <https://springsoflove.org/>