

*Policy for  
Marriage*

*Diocese of  
Owensboro*



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## DIOCESE OF OWENSBORO

Catholic Pastoral Center

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November 12, 2011

Dear People of the Diocese of Owensboro,

I hereby establish the following updates to the policy for marriage preparation in the Diocese of Owensboro, effective November 1, 2011 which were originally published in 1986. Because of the immense seriousness of this matter, I am asking that all concerned adhere to the policy in its every detail.

There is nothing more beautiful to observe or be a part of than a happily married couple and a happy family. The love a married couple has for each other is a sign of the love the Lord Jesus has for His people, the Church.

I pray that this policy will help you as a couple to lay the foundation of good preparation upon which you can build a life together and help you reach your eternal salvation.

My prayers, love and support go with you as you continue to prepare for marriage and to enter into the vocation of married life.

Yours in Christ,

Most Reverend William F. Medley  
Bishop of Owensboro

## Introduction

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has experienced a renewal of her sacramental life. In response to this renewal, the Diocese of Owensboro has reviewed and revised its marriage policy.

While this period of history in the American Catholic Church is witnessing a surfeit of values, pressures and “alternate life style” which weaken the fabric of family life, a deeper understanding and appreciation of marriage is also emerging. It is a profound responsibility of the Church to proclaim the “good news” of marriage, to be a beacon of hope for engaged couples, and to offer continuing love and support to married couples.

This marriage policy seeks to present the ideal of Christian marriage. It offers assistance to the priest and other pastoral ministers in the area of marriage preparation. It provides engaged couples the education and formation that will allow them the best chance to succeed at marriage. The policy does not intend to make it more difficult to marry in the Church but rather to make it more possible to stay married and to find the mutual happiness and sanctification, which are God’s plan for marriage.

The policy of the diocese, in marriage preparation, is that the couples will attend an Engaged Encounter Weekend, a Pre-Cana or Sponsor Couple Sessions for first marriages or Once More With Love for second marriages. (In extraordinary cases such as long distances or military couples, an approved on-line program may be used.) These programs reflect a serious commitment on the part of priests, married couples and others in pastoral ministry, to share the responsibility for marriage preparation within their faith communities as specified in the Code of Canon Law. (C1063)

The policy also addresses the specific needs of marriages with special circumstances. Particular care and concern for these couples are essential.

1. Cohabitation
2. Delay of Marriage
3. Interfaith Marriages
4. Marriage Between a Catholic and a Non-Baptized Person
5. Marriage Preparation for Those Previously Married
6. Pregnancy Prior to Marriage
7. Validation

## **The Sacrament of Matrimony**

The beauty of God's plan for marriage is captured in the book of Genesis where God, having created man and woman in His image and likeness, charges them to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it and to cling to each other and become one flesh. (Gen 2:24) Christ reaffirmed the sacredness and permanence of this age-old covenant of love and raised it to the dignity of a sacrament. St. Paul elaborated on this sacramental nature of marriage when he described the mutual love and submission of husbands and wives as the sign of the unity of Christ with His Body, the Church (Eph 5:21-33). Throughout Church history, marriage has been honored as a vocation, a grace-filled call from God. More recently, Church documents have urged further development of the theology of marriage, a greater understanding of human sexuality and a deeper exploration of the meaning of sacramentality and spirituality in marriage.

Marriage as a sacrament is a unique channel of redemptive grace, a call to form a community of life and love. More than the ceremony, it is the lifelong committed relationship of husband and wife. The married couple makes present the sacrament or "sign" that, by their life together, are called to manifest the unity and love between Christ and His Church. The love of the married couple, characterized by selfless giving, communion, compassion, understanding, faithfulness and readiness to forgive, mirrors God's love for His people and the ideal of Christian community. Not merely a contract, Matrimony is a covenant; that is, a solemn commitment to form a uniquely intimate union characterized by permanence and fidelity and to give witness to a fully Christian life of intimacy and belonging.

"And the two shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24) is believed by many Scripture scholars to be a statement which strongly affirms the sacredness of the sexual reality of married love as established by the Creator. This love, though passionate, is not self-centered but other-centered. Being sensitive to the spouses' needs becomes more important than self-fulfillment. Responsiveness, openness, tenderness, vulnerability and absorption in the other, free married lovers to experience an ecstasy in their mutual self-giving in the act of love.

The total intimacy of the sacramental couple, expressed in their sexual union and rooted in their total commitment to each other, ideally calls the rest of the Church into communion with one another. The holiness of married couples flows from their oneness in life, the special bonding of lives, hearts, and spirits, and must be understood to include their sexual union. Married love, then, is ordered to the mutual sanctification of the spouses as well as to the procreation and education of children. Through the presence of Christ in the sacrament, the spouses may be strengthened in their self-sacrificing love and will be enabled to nourish their children in a community of love.

Recognizing marriage as a true vocation then, the Church desires to address the need for preparation with depth, concern and guidance. This Policy for Marriage in the Diocese of Owensboro has been promulgated in order to provide guidelines toward that end.

## Remote and Proximate Preparation for Marriage

### **Remote Preparation**

1. The primary school of education for marriage is the family. The most basic form of remote preparation, then, is the development of better “schools” of marriage by enriching and strengthening existing marriages and family life and by addressing the needs of single-parent families.
2. Special concern should also be shown to Catholic spouses and children born of interfaith marriages so that they do not lack spiritual assistance and aid in helping to foster the unity of conjugal and family life. (C.1128)
3. The development of self-esteem, self-discipline, inter-relational skills, and spiritual and moral values depends on good parenting skills. Therefore, Christian parenting courses provide another essential phase of remote preparation.
4. In early childhood education, teachers should reinforce the efforts of parents to enhance a child’s self-esteem and encourage behavior which may influence the ability to enter into successful marriages later in life. They should stress the effect of behavior on others, communication skills, problem resolution, reconciliation, sharing and cooperation.
5. Building family-centered sacramental preparation programs for Baptism, Penance, Eucharist, and Confirmation lays the groundwork for the preparation of young couples for the sacramental life of Matrimony.
6. Among children raised in families of interfaith marriage, family-centered sacramental preparation may not be easily accomplished, if at all. The parish must help provide this preparation and include the Catholic parents in such a way that they are encouraged to do the best they can without putting guilt feelings on them in a difficult task.

## **Proximate Preparation**

1. The high school years are one of the most critical stages in life. The formation of strong character and personal identity will contribute to the ability to succeed in marriage.
2. Marriage and family courses should attempt to address the specific skills needed for marriage that are included in formal programs. Attention should be given to the Church's teaching about interfaith marriage, with its special areas of concern and the particular care needed in preparation.

## **Immediate and Formal Preparation**

### **Role of the Priest or Pastoral Minister**

#### 1. Responsibility for Preparation

- A. The pastor of the Church of either party, if both are Catholic, or of the Catholic party in an interfaith marriage, has the responsibility to fulfill all canonical requirements, to secure adequate preparation of the couple in compliance with this policy and to assist the couple to make a prayerful and mature judgment regarding marriage.
- B. If a priest other than the parish priest will witness the marriage, he should contact the pastor. In particular circumstances, the pastor may delegate to him the responsibility for assessment and preparation of the couple as stipulated in diocesan policy. He then must furnish proper documentation to the pastor for the sake of record keeping required by canon law.

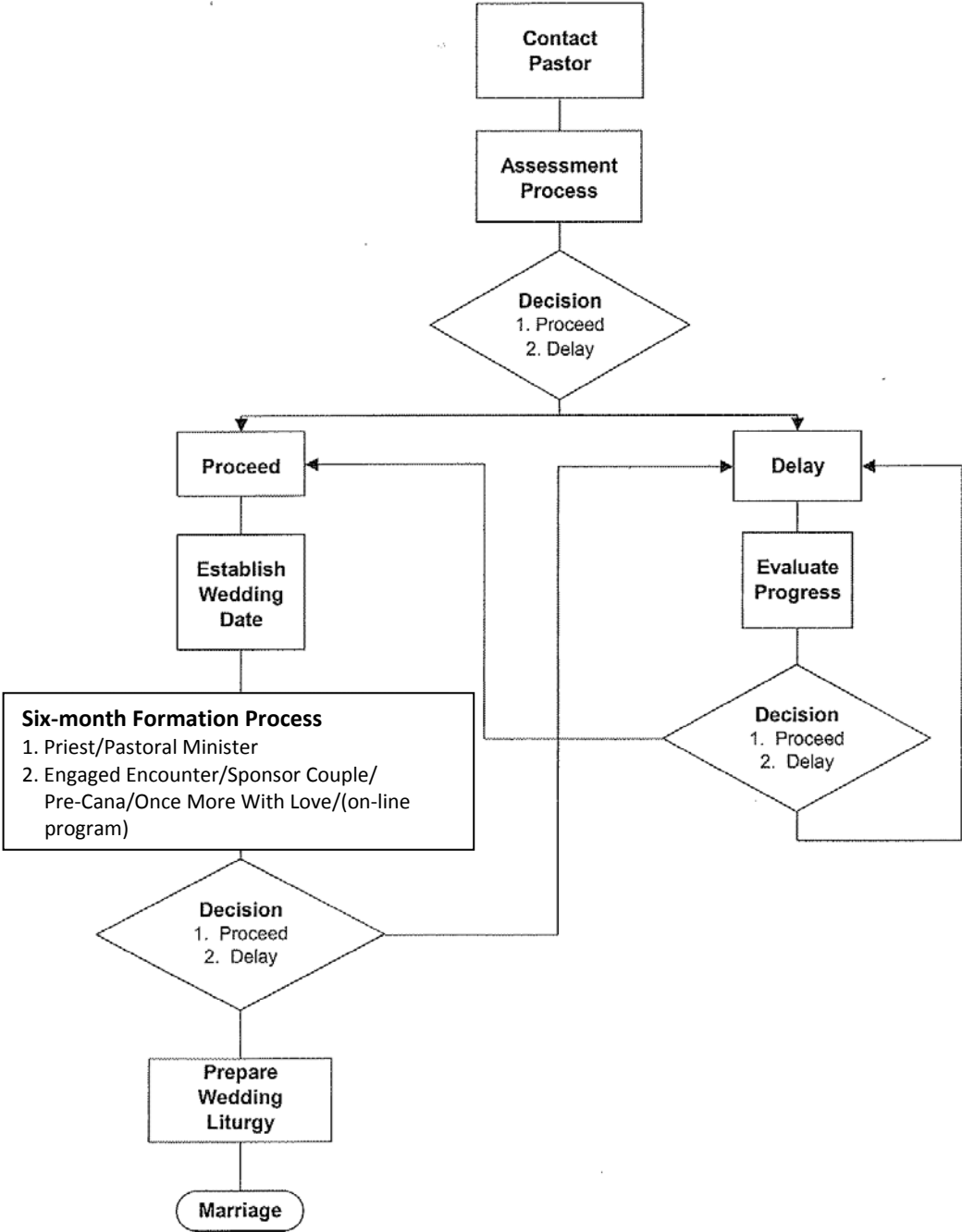
#### 2. Procedure

- A. Pre-nuptial investigation as required by canon law and explanation of the diocesan marriage policy.
- B. Assessment process of determining suitability and readiness of the couple to enter the sacrament of matrimony in light of spiritual attitudes as well as emotional, psychological, financial, and familial factors.
  - 1) The process of assessment requires the cooperation of the priest and the couple and will include the use of the PMI, FOCCUS, PREPARE or similar instrument.
  - 2) Consultation with the parents is integral to the assessment process. An interview will therefore be recommended in all cases and required for those under 21. Special tact will be required in the case of interfaith marriages. Pastoral judgment may indicate the inadvisability or impossibility of this procedure.

- 3) If the priest and couple make a decision to proceed, they continue through the preparation process and will finalize the wedding date at this time.
  - 4) If, during the assessment process, the priest has serious question about the readiness of the couple, he should refer the couple for evaluation, which is a formal procedure provided by a counselor who is properly trained and certified. The counselor will administer and interpret an instrument, discuss the results with the couple and the priest and make a recommendation to proceed or to delay. The priest, not the counselor, retains the responsibility for the decision.
  - 5) The priest must be morally certain that the couple has the right intention and sufficient stability and maturity to enter into Christian marriage. If any reasonable doubt persists after assessment and evaluation, he must recommend delay of the marriage. He would then proceed as follows:
    - a) Develop a plan with the couple to deal with the reason for the delay; e.g., pre-marital counseling.
    - b) Inform the couple of their right to appeal and the proper procedure.
    - c) Inform the pastor of the other party, if Catholic.
- C. The priest/pastoral minister will refer the couple to an approved formal program, i.e. Engaged Encounter, Sponsor Couple, Pre-Cana, (on-line program in extraordinary cases) or Once More With Love.
- D. Instructions with the priest/pastoral minister will include Church teaching on marriage, adult faith development, morality in marriage, prayer and other areas of particular interest or need.



# Steps in Preparing for Marriage



## **Role of the Engaged Couples**

1. The engaged couple has a right to expect adequate preparation for their most sacred and serious vocation. They can expect to receive assistance in assessing their readiness to marry and the level of compatibility in their relationship. With the priest or his pastoral minister, they will explore ways to identify and cultivate their strengths and to deal constructively with the difficult areas in their relationship.
  
2. In addition, they have the responsibility to:
  - A. Participate actively and sincerely in assessment and preparation
  
  - B. demonstrate sufficient maturity and stability to accept the responsibilities of Christian marriage
  
  - C. recognize that marriage is essentially characterized by unity, fidelity, permanence and openness to life
  
  - D. verify that both parties will be at least 19 years of age or one year past high school at the time of the proposed marriage
  
  - E. contact their pastor when they decide to marry and at least six months before the proposed wedding date
  
  - F. be willing to confirm the wedding date only after the assessment process has been completed
  
  - G. arrange to receive the sacrament of Confirmation if not previously received
  
  - H. demonstrate the freedom to consent willingly to the marriage
  
  - I. participate in required sessions with the priest/pastoral minister
  
  - J. attend a formal preparation program; i.e. Engaged Encounter, Sponsor Couple, Pre-Cana, Once More With Love (or on-line program in extraordinary cases)
  
  - K. participate actively and sincerely in pre-marriage evaluation and counseling when recommended.

## Role of Parents

1. The Church recognizes the unique and vital role of parents in the psychological, social, moral and spiritual development of their children. Renewal in the life of the Church has included attempts to make sacramental preparation more family-centered. The following principles apply to the family dimension of marriage preparation:
  - a. Since a person's family is truly the primary source of education for marriage, it seems fitting and proper to involve the parents actively when possible in the assessment and preparation for marriage.
  - b. The purposes of the interview with the parents during the assessment process is:
    - 1) To gain insights into the relationship of the couple through their parents or an understanding of the family structure in a single-parent situation. These insights should aid the priest and the engaged couple to better analyze their own perceptions and expectations of marriage.
    - 2) To insure that the parents of both bride and groom are informed about the marriage policy of the diocese and can be given suggestions about how they may share in the preparation of their children for marriage.
    - 3) To become aware of any tensions in the families related to the proposed marriage. By being alerted to these problems, the priest may be able to offer pastoral care to those concerned.
2. In a very special way, a priest/pastoral minister must be concerned with helping the parents of both parties in an interfaith marriage to feel comfortable.
  - a. This period between the engagement and the wedding can cause much tension, especially when parents of both parties have strong religious convictions themselves. Pastoral care should be offered to address possible needs for understanding or healing.
  - b. The wedding ceremony which takes into consideration the feelings of both families and yet preserve the religious motif of marriage can do much to ease the tension.
  - c. Pastoral judgment may indicate the inadvisability or impossibility of involving the parents of the non-Catholic party in the marriage preparation.

### **Role of the Community**

1. The faithful in each parish share the pastoral responsibility to provide support and enrichment for married couples. Since the primary “school” of marriage is the family, parishes should provide means of strengthening and enhancing existing marriages, while demonstrating particular sensitivity to couples in an interfaith marriage; promoting good parenting skills and healthy family life; and ministering to single-parent families.
2. The faith community also shares the responsibility to encourage engaged couples and to help them prepare for their life together. Married couples have a particular responsibility to witness the holiness of their sacramental life of love and commitment. They may, therefore, be invited to participate actively as sponsor couples in the marriage preparation of engaged couples in their parishes.

## Liturgical Celebration

1. Because marriage is a sacrament, the place, the music, and entire wedding celebration must reflect the sacred character of marriage. The place of the ceremony shall be chosen according to the following guidelines:
  - A. The parish church of either the bride or the groom if both parties are Catholic
  - B. The parish church of the Catholic party in an interfaith marriage
  - C. The church of the non-Catholic party after proper dispensation has been granted
  - D. Another Catholic Church if size, renovation or sentiment is a factor, after proper permission is granted
2. The celebration should reflect the faith life of the couple and of the community in which they are married.
3. Diocesan Liturgical Guidelines for marriage further supplement the general norms for wedding celebrations.

### **Specifications of Formal Programs**

1. Programs should not only offer educational opportunities but also formational experiences that enable couples to explore the various facets of their relationship before they exchange their vows.
2. Approved programs in the diocese include: Engaged Encounter, Sponsor Couple, Pre-Cana, Once More With Love and an approved on-line program in extraordinary cases such as long distance or military couples.
3. Approved marriage preparation programs address the following issues:
  - A. The nature of exclusive and permanent commitment, i.e. marriage as a covenant
  - B. The spirituality and sacramentality of marriage
  - C. Praying and worshiping as a couple
  - D. Communication skills: openness, expression of feelings, conflict resolution
  - E. Reconciliation and forgiveness
  - F. Role expectations in marriage
  - G. Intimacy, sexuality, and natural family planning
  - H. Children and family life, parenting skills
  - I. Relationships with in-laws, other relatives, and friends
  - J. Values and goals
  - K. Home and finance management

## Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples

Today almost half of the couples that come for marriage preparation in the Catholic Church are in a cohabiting relationship. Cohabitation, in a commonly understood sense, means living together in a sexual relationship without marriage. Living together in this way involves varying degrees of physical and emotional interaction. Such a relationship is a false sign. It contradicts the meaning of a sexual relationship in marriage as the total gift of oneself in fidelity, exclusivity, and permanency.

Only 53% of first cohabiting unions result in marriage. The percentage of couples marrying from second and third cohabitations is even lower. It would appear that when a couple chooses cohabitation over marriage, they might be denying the probability of existing problems which one or both would prefer not to deal with. Some of the reasons why couples may cohabit include:

- Fear of or disbelief in long-term commitment, and a desire to avoid divorce (particularly for those who have experienced disruption in their parents' marriages or a previous marriage of their own.)
- Desire for economic security;
- State of personal development, escape from home, "rite of passage";
- Desire for stability for raising of children;
- Pressure to conform to current mores that having cohabiting partner is measure of social success, personal desirability, adult transition;
- Desire to test the relationship;
- Rejection of the institution of marriage and desire for an alternative to marriage.

In spite of the reasons, current statistics indicate that cohabitation is not a wise choice! Cohabiting couples still divorce at a rate 50% higher than couples that have never cohabited.

### **Some of the risks of cohabitation are:**

- Cohabitors as a group are less committed to the institution of marriage and more accepting of divorce. As problems and issues arise to challenge the marriage, they are more likely to seek divorce as the solution.
- "Sexual exclusivity" is less an indicator of commitment for cohabiters than for non-cohabiters. In this regard, cohabitation is more like dating than marriage. After marriage, a person who cohabited before marriage is more likely to be sexually unfaithful than a person who had not cohabited before marriage.
- Cohabitors identify themselves or the relationship as a poor risk for long-term happiness more often than do non-cohabiters.
- Cohabitors tend to hold individualism as a more important value than partnership. These values do not necessarily change just because a cohabiting couple decides to move into marriage.

- Cohabitors may feel pressure to marry from family and others or pressured to provide a stable home for children, if any. While family and friends are often right to encourage marriage for a cohabiting couple, a marriage made under such pressure is problematic unless the couple chooses it for more substantial reasons.
- Cohabitors often have inappropriate high expectations of marriage that can lead them to be disillusioned with the ordinary problems or challenges of marriage. There is danger that they think they have “worked out everything and that any further challenges are the fault of the institution of marriage.
- Cohabitors are at greater risk for domestic violence, conflict over money, and control issues.

The church teaches that the proper way to prepare for marriage is living chastely and separately; therefore, cohabiting couples are encouraged to separate and refrain from sexual relations until they celebrate their marriage.

The wisdom of our Christian tradition teaches us that sexual intercourse in marriage is meant to be a sign to the husband and wife that their love for each other is fully committed, faithful and life giving, and that God’s love remains the same for them. The Bible condemns not only adultery but also premarital sex. Marriage is much more than just “a piece of paper.” It is only in marriage that husband and wife publicly give themselves to each other, belong to each other, and are responsible for each other, “in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, all the days of our lives.”



## Delay of Marriage

1. The Diocese of Owensboro recognizes that it is a natural right of people to marry. This right is not absolute, however, nor is the right to receive a sacrament. Accordingly, both the Church and the state have established legitimate restrictions if the proposed marriage is shown to be in conflict with the sacramental practice of the Church or the common good of society.
2. Some conditions that may constitute just cause for delay include, but are not limited to the following.
  - A. Non-practice of the Catholic faith by both parties, if Catholic, or by the Catholic party entering interfaith marriages, with no intention of returning to the practice of the faith
  - B. Substantial lack of appreciation for the spiritual, sacramental aspects of marriage on the part of the Catholic party(ies)
  - C. Lack of readiness for marriage; i.e., insufficient stability, maturity and dating
  - D. Refusal of the parties to take part in or complete the marriage preparation programs or refusal to participate actively and sincerely in premarital assessment, evaluation or counseling.
  - E. Lack of time for sufficient premarital assessment, evaluation, counseling and preparation.
  - F. Pregnancy
  - G. Chemical dependency or mental illness
  - H. Refusal to have children
3. All canonical requirements must be observed regarding impediments and their dispensations.
  - A. Dispensation from Disparity of Worship (C.1086 & 1125)  
(For marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person)
  - B. Canonical Form (C.1108 & 1127, #2, #3)
  - C. Other Impediment: Age, Impotence, Abduction, Consanguinity, Open Concubinage, Adoption (C. 1083-1094)

Often times a prior marriage which has been declared invalid through a Church tribunal process receives from the Church Court a *Monitum* (which means warning) or a *Vetitum* (which means prohibition) regarding a future marriage. These words are printed on the certificate of nullity. *Monitum* refers to some problem condition or element which existed in the prior union. A *Vetitum* refers to an extremely serious condition, e.g., substance abuse, a psychological problem, violent behavior, etc., which caused havoc in the previous union. When a *Monitum* has been imposed, by the Tribunal, psychological counseling or treatment is almost always demanded - with verification from the psychologist that the serious condition has been arrested or cured, e.g., sobriety has been attained, anger management has been learned, etc. The Tribunal is to be informed in writing by the psychologist or professional that the former problematic area has been treated and now poses no serious threat to a new marriage. The Tribunal Judge may then lift the *Vetitum* prohibition. Then, and only then, can plans for a wedding begin to take place with the pastoral minister.

## Sacramentality and Interfaith Marriage

At the same time that the Church experiences a deepening awareness of the importance and significance of the Sacrament of Matrimony, she recognizes that aspects of this teaching on sacramentality can be a cause for concern to those who are preparing for a interfaith marriage. While the norm for marriage in the Catholic Church and in this Policy regards marriage between two Catholics, the Church recognizes that many of the marriages in the diocese do not reflect that norm.

The Church wishes to promote unity within interfaith marriages and respect for the conscience of the non-Catholic party, to avoid insensitivity to these couples in parish life and to help prepare them for a wholesome and fruitful marriage. Care will be taken to offer a preparation that stresses their common beliefs, emphasizes the teachings of Scripture, and underscores the essential properties for permanence and fidelity. Differences of belief will be discussed openly without compromising Catholic doctrine.

The *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* states that an interchurch marriage “celebrated according to the Catholic form ordinarily takes place outside the Eucharistic liturgy.” (#159) Consequently, this is a universal norm for the Catholic Church and is to be observed everywhere. The bishop may permit the wedding to be celebrated at a Eucharistic liturgy, but permission must be requested. Whether or not the party who is not Catholic receives the Eucharist should be determined according to the norms for intercommunion.

## Marriage Between Catholic and Non-Baptized

**#1. Canon 1086 - A marriage between two persons, one of whom has been baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it and has not defected from it by a formal act and the other of whom is not baptized, is invalid.**

**#2. A person is not to be dispensed from this impediment unless the conditions mentioned in Canon 1125 and 1126 have been fulfilled.**

**#3. If at the time the marriage was contracted one party was commonly held to have been baptized or the baptism was doubtful, the validity of the marriage must be presumed according to the norm of Canon 1060 until it is proven with certainty that one party was baptized but the other was not.**

The Church has long recognized that marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics pose particular dangers to the Catholic's continued practice of the faith and to the Catholic baptism and formation of children. The Church's concern is especially grave when a Catholic proposes to marry a non-Christian. As an expression of this concern, ecclesiastical law has established the impediment of disparity of worship, which invalidates marriages between Catholics and unbaptized persons.

Although marriages between Christians and pagans were prohibited by several early councils, disparity of worship was established as an invalidating impediment for the Eastern churches at the Council of Trullo in 692. Although the canons of Trullo were not received by the Church in the West, the impediment spread throughout the West between the seventh and the eleventh centuries and ultimately obtained the force of a universal custom. It was finally incorporated into church legislation in canon 1070 of the 1917 code.

As an ecclesiastical law impediment, disparity of worship binds not only Catholics but also those who marry them. Exempt from the impediment are baptized non-Catholics and those who have left the Catholic Church by a formal act.

A dispensation can be granted to permit a Catholic to marry an unbaptized person if there is sufficient assurance that the proposed marriage will not pose a threat to the Catholic's ability to continue the practice of his or her faith and to hand on the Catholic faith to their children. This assurance is given the Catholic party in the form of promises. He or she must declare a readiness to remove all dangers of lapsing from the Catholic faith and promise to do all within his or her power to ensure the Catholic baptism and formation of all children. The unbaptized party is not required to make a promise, but must be made aware of what the Catholic party has promised. If this declaration and promise are not made, a dispensation from the impediment of disparity of worship cannot be granted.

If at the time a marriage was celebrated, one of the parties was generally reputed to be baptized or doubts have arisen about his or her baptism or its validity, the validity of the marriage is to be upheld until it has been proved that one party was baptized and the other was not. However, if the doubts about the baptism of one party or its validity surfaced prior to the marriage, the impediment of disparity of worship can be dispensed conditionally if the doubt cannot be resolved.

### **Marriage Preparation For Those Previously Married**

1. Because the trauma of divorce or the death of a spouse usually requires a grief and recovery process of two to seven years, priests will encourage a two year waiting period and require one year before remarriage.
2. Preparation should generally follow the guidelines of this policy, including notification, assessment and formal preparation.
3. Remarriage after the death of a spouse:
  - A. Special pastoral consideration will be given the couple according to their ages, the length of previous marriage and their experience of the grief process.
  - B. It is particularly important to consider the couple's expectations for marriage in the light of the previous marriage(s). The uniqueness of each marriage should be stressed to prevent the disillusionment which might occur if either party expects to duplicate the first marriage.
4. Remarriage after divorce or declaration of nullity
  - A. The priest/pastoral minister must be reasonably assured that the difficulties which appeared in a previous marriage will not exist in the proposed one.
  - B. Pre-marital counseling and evaluation are recommended in all cases and required when stipulated by the Marriage Tribunal.
5. The effect of a second marriage on children deserves particular attention. A step-family program or family counseling may be recommended.

### **Pregnancy Prior to Marriage**

1. Pregnancy of itself does not constitute an exception to this policy for marriage preparation. It may, in fact, indicate a reason not to marry.
2. Since a large percentage of divorce and declaration of nullity cases occur in marriage where pre-marital pregnancy was a factor, counseling is strongly recommended in such cases.
3. If the decision to marry was made known prior to the pregnancy, plans for the marriage may proceed if the priest assesses that the couple is sufficiently prepared for marriage, and after all applicable steps of this policy, including the normal waiting period, have been completed. Counseling may be indicated in these cases because of the particular strain which pre-marital pregnancy places on a relationship and in order to prevent future recriminations which can erode trust in a marriage.

If the decision to marry was not made prior to the pregnancy, special counseling and evaluation will be obtained from a diocesan approved counselor or other trained person. These couples will be encouraged to delay or reconsider the marriage.

## Validation of Marriage

1. When a couple who has married outside the Church desires that their union be validated, the priest/pastoral minister who arranges for the validation must provide the couple with adequate preparation for the sacrament.
2. Among other concerns, the priest will explore such questions as the stability and health of their marriage, the spiritual dimensions of marriage in the Church, the implications of marriage as a covenant, the faith and prayer life of the couple and their reasons for requesting validation.
3. The following guidelines apply to the preparation process:
  - A. Ordinarily, one year shall elapse between the time of a marriage outside the Church and its validation. Sometimes, it may be appropriate to wait a longer time if the couple does not give evidence of maturity and stability or an understanding of the marriage covenant.
  - B. When the couple has been married for only one or two years, they will participate in one of the approved diocesan marriage preparation programs; i.e., Once More With Love.
  - C. When the couple has been married for a greater length of time, they are to fulfill one or more of the following requirements as deemed appropriate for their circumstances:
    - 1) Participation in one of the approved marriage preparation programs; i.e., Sponsor Couple or Once More With Love
    - 2) Participation in pre-marital counseling and evaluation
  - D. If there are marital difficulties, the couple may be asked to participate in evaluation and/or counseling; i.e., Retrouvaille. It must be emphasized that validation is not a cure for a troubled marriage.
  - E. When validation concerns an interfaith marriage, the following guidelines will be considered:
    - 1) Genuine concern should be shown for the non-Catholic party as for the Catholic party. The non-Catholic party may feel uncomfortable with the whole process of validation since he or she often comes from a background that views the attitude of the Catholic Church in this matter as unreasonable and contrary to his or her own beliefs about religion and remarriage.

- 2) It will frequently be expecting too much of the non-Catholic party to have him or her participate with dignity in those pre-marital assessments and programs which could reasonably be required of two Catholics seeking a validation.
- 3) The priest must rely heavily on the goodwill, motivation and testimony of the Catholic party in the whole process of validation.
- 4) The priest may sense much difficulty or embarrassment on the part of the non-Catholic party in the usual marriage validation process or in the requirement of the formal expression of consent in a marriage ceremony. In such circumstances, for the sake of alleviating tension, or in order to prevent undue ridicule of the Church's teaching concerning marriage, the priest should seriously consider requesting from the bishop a Radical Sanation according to the norms of Canons 1161 to 1165.

### **Appeals and Exceptions**

#### **Appeals**

If a marriage is delayed, the couple may submit a written Appeal to the bishop who will consult with a board of review appointed by him.

#### **Exceptions**

1. Exceptions will normally be submitted by the priest in writing to the bishop where the same procedure is followed as for Appeal.
2. In some cases and only for a serious reason, the priest may make a pastoral judgment to allow an exception to the policy.

NOTE: Forms will be made available through the Family Life Office to facilitate these procedures.



## Formal Diocesan Programs

**PARISH BASED PROGRAM** (Information is available in the parishes where these are offered.)

**SPONSOR COUPLE PROGRAM** pairs an engaged couple with a trained married couple in a series of private sessions, usually in the sponsor couple's home. The couples consider many practical aspects of married life. There is time for the engaged couple to share their reflections privately and with the sponsor couple. The relationship of trust and caring that may develop during preparation often continues after the wedding, thus providing on-going support for the couple.

**ENGAGED ENCOUNTER** is a weekend experience where the engaged couple has an opportunity to concentrate exclusively on each other, free from the tensions and pressures of daily life. It is a very quiet weekend specifically designed to give the couples planning marriage an opportunity to dialogue honestly and intensively about their prospective lives together. It is specifically designed for communication between the couple. A team of married couples and a priest presents ideas regarding essential issues of married life and guides the engaged couples through a process of private dialogue about their relationship. Weekends are offered three times a year. Although the Engaged Encounter is Catholic in origin and orientation, it is open to all couples of any faith searching for enrichment in the quality of their life together.

**ONCE MORE WITH LOVE** is a marriage preparation program for couples preparing for marriage after one or both persons have experienced a divorce or death of a former spouse. This program is designed to address the critical issues of remarriage and to offer an opportunity to establish a solid foundation for a new intimate relationship. This is offered three times a year or as needed.

**PRE-CANA** is a one-day marriage preparation program for engaged couples entering their first marriage. This program is offered on a Saturday and includes prayer and Mass. The topics covered are: Personality/Character, Marriage as a Sacrament, Theology of the Body, Natural Family Planning, Budgeting/Finances, and Communication & Spirituality as a couple. Engaged couples are given time to dialogue after each talk. Although a one-day program is not ideal, nor meant to be the sole means of preparation, it provides a solid foundation for further preparation and discussion.

**CATHOLICMARRIAGEPREPCLASS.COM** is an on-line video program approved by the USCCB and endorsed by many dioceses. It includes a pre-marital inventory, which could be used in lieu of Prepare & Enrich or FOCCUS and covers all the topics in the other diocesan programs and more. This course offers a marriage preparation alternative **only** for those engaged couples in extraordinary circumstances such as those living far apart or where one or both parties is a member of the military. Couples must receive their pastor's approval to use this program.

**RETROUVAILLE** begins with a weekend experience in which husbands and wives are helped to reestablish communication and to gain insights into themselves as individuals and as a couple. This part of the program is presented by a priest and three married couples who have experienced disillusionment, pain, anger, and conflict. They offer hope as they share their personal stories of struggle, reconciliation and healing. This is offered three times a year.

### **Closing Statement**

The Church desires to bless her people with the love of God made real and present to us in Jesus Christ. The Church longs to support her people within a community of right relationships. We pray that all of God's people will trust the church's wisdom endowed to her by God Himself: chastity before marriage; unity and love expressed and celebrated fully within a covenant that is brought about by marriage; sex as a precious gift offered to another within the bounds of married life; children as the fruit of married love and supported and nurtured within a family that is committed and faithful.

This is the Christian Vision - we wish you God's Blessings in your marriage preparation process.