

# Archdiocese of Indianapolis

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## **GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY MATRIMONY**

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,  
and they will become one flesh. Genesis 2:23-24*

## Section 1: Overview of the Purpose and Goals

Marriage is a most sacred covenant by which, according to the *Code of Canon Law*, “A man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life... [and which] has been elevated by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a Sacrament between the baptized” (canon 1055). The matrimonial covenant, which “derives its force and strength from creation,”<sup>1</sup> expresses the love and unity of Christ the Bridegroom and His Bride, the Church, and as such it constitutes a profound and mysterious vocation. This precious Sacrament is a conduit of the efficacious grace of God into the lives of the couple, the Church, and the whole world. Therefore, the Church ought to afford great care for the formation and preparation for this sacred union.

Marriage preparation and formation programs provide the Church with the opportunity to be instruments of God’s grace and minister to those seeking to join one another in married life. A program of marriage preparation is an important opportunity to encounter engaged couples and to provide an opportunity to grow in appreciation for the sacred covenant they are seeking to enter and the Church family entrusted to its care. For many who contact the Church to get married, this may be yet another important step in their journey of faith. For others, this may be their first encounter with the Church. For still others, this may be the beginning of a process of conversion, or a journey back to the life of faith. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has wisely noted, “Young adults approach the Church to be married for a number of reasons, including parental pressure, the desire to have a church wedding, or to reunite themselves with the Church. Regardless of why they come, the Church and its ministers need to welcome them as Christ welcomes them, with understanding, love, and acceptance, challenging them with the gospel message, and giving them hope that a lifelong commitment is possible.”<sup>2</sup> Great care should be taken to provide each and every couple with the opportunity to encounter Christ and His Church throughout the preparation, formation, and celebration of their wedding celebration and marriage.

### Goals of these Guidelines:

1. To encounter and serve all couples seeking to marry, regardless of religious background or place in their faith journey.<sup>3</sup>
2. Promote and produce higher quality and more intensive programs for marriage formation that integrate the couple into the parish community, explore expectations of marriage, and provide a “renewed proclamation of the kerygma” that will “help couples live the rest of their lives together.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, par. 1

<sup>2</sup> See USCCB, *Sons and Daughters of Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults*, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/who-we-teach/young-adults/sons-and-daughters-of-light.cfm> (11/12/96)

<sup>3</sup> Bishops’ Committee for Pastoral Help for Marriage Preparation, National Conference of Catholic Bishops; *Faithful to Each Other Forever: A Catholic Handbook of Pastoral Help for Marriage Preparation* (Washington, D.C.:U.S Catholic Conference), 58.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 207

## Section 2: Marriage Catechesis as Lifelong Process

Marital formation begins in the family, “the first and vital cell of society.”<sup>5</sup> The home is the domestic church; it is the first and primary place in which the Faithful gather, where they seek to grow in holiness and where Christian Spouses cooperate “wholeheartedly with the love of the Creator and Savior.”<sup>6</sup> As such, the family is the first place where one comes to learn about marriage. The family has the responsibility of forming and preparing the next generation in marriage. We, the Faithful, are challenged to see that marriage preparation goes beyond the proximate and immediate stages of preparation, and is instead, a lifelong process. As Pope Francis reminds us, “Those best prepared for marriage are probably those who learned what Christian marriage is from their own parents, who chose each other unconditionally and daily renew this decision.”<sup>7</sup>

“Pastors of souls are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the Christian faithful the assistance by which the matrimonial state is preserved in Christian spirit and advances in perfection” (c. 1063) The Church encourages Pastors to do this especially by “preaching, catechesis adapted to minors, youth, and adults, and even the use of instruments of social communication, by which the Christian faithful are instructed about the meaning of Christian marriage and about the function of Christian spouses and parents” (c. 1063 §1).

The Church is charged with the task of providing ongoing formation, aiding parents in their vocation to educate children. This should take shape as a collaboration between priests, youth ministers, directors of religious education, pastoral associates, medical and psychological experts, and young adults. Just as the family is the church of the home, the parish is the church family. Ongoing sacramental formation should explore and emphasize an ever clearer understanding of *discernment*, *vocation*, and *mission*. The idea of vocation, understood as a personal call from Christ and in light of our “universal call to holiness,”<sup>8</sup> is to be fostered and nurtured by the Church and all its members. This happens when each couple is offered the opportunity to encounter the One who calls us, Jesus Christ. Ongoing emphasis on discernment of this path is integral in forming people who are called to the vocation of the Sacrament of Marriage.

When a man and woman begin dating, and engagement becomes a serious possibility, more formal education and preparation is necessary. “Religious formation of young people should be integrated, at the right moment and in accordance with the various concrete requirements, with a preparation for life as a couple...it will encourage those concerned to study the nature of conjugal sexuality and

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11: AAS 58 (1966), 848.

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651118\\_apostolicam-actuositatem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html)

<sup>6</sup> Introduction to *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, par. 10

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 208

<sup>8</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium*,

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) (11/21/64), Chapter V

responsible parenthood, with essential medical and biological knowledge connected with it.”<sup>9</sup> Further formation and preparation is of the utmost importance for those preparing for marriage so that they may come to understand the importance of the sacraments in their lives as disciples of Jesus and in the life of His Church. Programs should aid the couples “not only to deepen their love, but also to overcome problems and difficulties.”<sup>10</sup> Preparation for marriage should also call engaged couples to see their immanent marriage in light of a greater purpose and meaning in their lives, to realize that their marriage is not only for them, but for the good of the world. Indeed, “The entire Christian community should cooperate to bear witness to the faith and to be a sign to the world of Christ’s love.”<sup>11</sup>

### Section 3: Preparation Guidelines

In the *National Directory for Catechesis*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops identifies several key areas that should be addressed in preparation for Christian marriage which are listed below. Specifically, the directory states that dioceses and parishes should present catechesis and preparation on the Sacrament of Matrimony that:<sup>12</sup>

1. Encourages the care and concern of the whole Christian community for married couples by public recognition of couples planning marriage, modeling by couples in successful marriages, and support of couples in challenged marriages.
2. Stresses marriage as a distinct and dignified vocation in the Church.
3. Explains the effects of the Sacrament of Matrimony: the establishment of a perpetual and exclusive bond between the spouses that is sealed by God himself, the perfection of mutually exclusive and permanent love of the couple, the strengthening of their indissoluble unity, and the experience of a foretaste of the Kingdom of God.
4. Teaches that marriage is a covenant of love in which God participates as an active member
5. Acknowledges that it is in the love and struggles of marriage that a couple attains the holiness of their vocation.
6. Teaches that in Christian marriage the unity of the couple is a unity founded in an equal personal dignity and expressed in an unreserved mutuality of self-giving.
7. Teaches that the family is the first and essential center of faithful living, the domestic Church.

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<sup>9</sup> St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 66

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 211

<sup>11</sup> *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, par. 26

<sup>12</sup> This is an excerpt, and not a complete list, taken from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), 142-145.

8. Teaches that the home is the first school of Christian life and human enrichment.
9. Teaches that a couple's marriage in Christ is a sacred relationship that is supported for the length of their lives by the grace to love each other with the love Christ has for the Church.
10. Teaches that fidelity, indissolubility, and openness to children are essential to Christian marriage.
11. Teaches that Christian marriage is for the mutual support of the spouses, their growth in love, and the procreation and education of their children.
12. Includes a clear presentation of the Church's teaching on the morally acceptable methods of regulating birth and the immorality of artificial birth control, of sterilization for that purpose, and of abortion.
13. Emphasizes the couple's personal responsibility to protect the human life that they co-create with God from the moment of conception to natural death.
14. Includes a clear presentation of the Church's teaching on mixed and interreligious marriages.
15. Includes instruction on the Rite of Marriage.
16. Teaches that the couple themselves are the ministers of the Sacrament of [Matrimony] and that their consent is made manifest in their vows before a priest or deacon (or a delegated witness authorized by the Church) and two witnesses, ideally in the presence of an assembly of the faithful.
17. Assists the couple in deepening their understanding of the nature of Christian marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman whereby the spouses establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life that is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children.

### **Guiding Principles**

Condensed from the above key areas, the following are guiding principles that any marriage preparation program should strive to communicate to those couples seeking marriage in the Church:

1. **Catholic Vision of Love and Marriage:** Sacramental marriage is a permanent and exclusive covenant in which husband and wife enter into a partnership of the whole of life.
2. **Catholic Understanding of Sexuality:** The gift of sexual intimacy in marriage is to be fully unitive and radically open to the gift of life.
3. **Skills of Love and Marriage:** The necessity of continual development of healthy relationship skills, such as open communication, conflict resolution, self-awareness, financial planning,

stewardship, prioritization, and an awareness of the role that career, education, family history, and extended family play in marital life.

## Section 4: The Process

*“The Church’s role as well as the primary task of clergy and others in marriage preparation ... is to assist the couple in making a judgment about their relational readiness and personal faith, not to make those judgments for or about them.”<sup>13</sup>*

### Discernment and Assessment

Discernment is actively listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit; it is an ongoing discussion with Our Lord to determine how one is called to holiness through their specific vocation and mission. A formal marriage preparation process is a crucial discernment tool for those who wish to enter into the bond of marriage, with sufficient time required for suitable preparation.<sup>14</sup> Pastors and parish ministers are encouraged to see this process as such, and closely accompany couples through this period of discernment and preparation.

Outlined below is our proposal for a thorough schedule of marriage preparation. This process should be initiated when a couple presents themselves to their pastor and requests to be married in the Church. The following is a list of the steps in this process and a suggested timeline for completing each step:

Steps:	Timeline:
1. The Initial Interview	9-12 months prior to the wedding ceremony
2. Completion of Inventory	6-12 months prior to wedding ceremony
3. Preparatory Marriage Formation program	Ideally 6-8 months prior to wedding ceremony
4. Catholic Sexuality Course	Ideally 6 months prior to wedding ceremony
5. Additional meetings, final meeting (optional)	As needed
6. Sacrament of Penance	At least once during marriage preparation
7. Ongoing Marriage formation program	Within the first year of marriage

#### Step 1.) The Initial Interview: Meeting with priest, deacon, or parish life coordinator (PLC)

“It is appropriate that the same Priest who prepares the engaged couple should, during the celebration of the Sacrament itself, give the Homily, receive the spouses’ consent, and celebrate the Mass.”<sup>15</sup> The Initial Interview is intended to help facilitate this ongoing journey. This face to face meeting with the priest or deacon (or delegated representative responsible for premarital

<sup>13</sup> See USCCB, *Faithful to Each Other Forever*, 63.

<sup>14</sup> Introduction to *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, par. 15

<sup>15</sup> Introduction to *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, par. 23

preparation), covers the preparation process, determines freedom to marry in accordance with civil and Church law, establishes rapport with the couple, and addresses any other pertinent issues.<sup>16</sup> During this meeting, the appropriate forms are completed,<sup>17</sup> and if not done beforehand, a date for the wedding may be set.

## Step 2.) Marriage Readiness: An Inventory & Sponsor Couple

Each couple ought to be given the opportunity to evaluate their relationship through a marital inventory. The inventory is not intended to be an evaluation of whether a couple should marry, but rather it is an opportunity for open dialogue and interpersonal discovery of the strengths, weaknesses, and issues a couple will be encountering in the marital relationship. The inventory may be administered by the priest, PLC, deacon, or delegated representative. In addition, a sponsor couple, or perhaps better understood as a Marriage Witness, process is also highly recommended. A Sponsor Couple allows for a deeper connection to the Church community, and invites the engaged couple, if even in subtle ways, into the life of the Church. The inventories recommended by the Archdiocese of Indianapolis are PREPARE/ENRICH, FOCCUS, or Fully Engaged. For sponsor couple programs FOCCUS or Fully Engaged are preferred (see below for more information).

### Recommended Inventories:

#### 1.) FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study)

FOCCUS is published by Family Life Office, Omaha NE. It is a thorough inventory which will help facilitate discussion between the priest, PLC, sponsor couple and engaged couple. In addition to English, it is offered in Spanish, French Canadian, Chinese, Korean, and Portuguese. FOCCUS is also offered in an adaptive English edition, written at a lower reading level.

For additional catechesis, FOCCUS offers a workbook titled *Engaged Couple Guide for Catholic Marriage Preparation* (FOCCUS, Inc.). This workbook is intended for use with the FOCCUS© Pre-Marriage Inventory, and provides a thorough, but not exhaustive, program for covering each of the three Guiding Principles (Catholic Vision of Love and Marriage, Catholic Understanding of Sexuality, and Skills of Love and Marriage) outlined on page five. The workbook contains the Imprimatur. A Spanish translation of the workbook is available.

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<sup>16</sup> Bishops' Committee for Pastoral Help for Marriage Preparation, National Conference of Catholic Bishops; *Faithful to Each Other Forever: A Catholic Handbook of Pastoral Help for Marriage Preparation* (Washington, D.C.:U.S Catholic Conference), 59.

<sup>17</sup> "Bride and Groom Form" should be completed. Other forms available as needed include the Application for Matrimonial Dispensation and/or Matrimonial Permission, Application for Dispensation from Observance of the Canonical Form of Marriage, and Investigation Guides for Freedom to Marry in Cases of Lack of Canonical Form. These forms may be accessed here: <http://www.archindy.org/clergyplc/marriage.html> or by clicking the "Marriage Forms" link on the homepage of the Archdiocesan website.

(It is our experience that the data collected through the FOCCUS inventory is more user-friendly for those without formal training or extensive experience. Therefore, we recommend it over PREPARE/ENRICH for use when sponsor couples are evaluating the data and initiating the follow-up discussions.)

### 2.) *Fully Engaged*

Fully Engaged is published by the Office of Marriage & Family, St. Cloud, MN. It is an additional inventory for the discernment period of marriage preparation.

The *Fully Engaged* program has an optional workbook to facilitate sponsor couple meetings, which includes more in-depth catechesis for marriage preparation. This workbook is titled *Fully Engaged: Growing Toward Lasting Fidelity Couple's Workbook* and provides a 13-part sponsor couple program, with the option for three additional sessions on Ecumenical Marriage, Second Marriages, and Blended Families. This covers each of the three Guiding Principles (Catholic Vision of Love and Marriage, Catholic Understanding of Sexuality, and Skills of Love and Marriage) outlined on page five.

### 3.) *PREPARE/ENRICH*

This inventory has two versions. The paper-pencil version is based out of Oklahoma, while the online version is based out of Minnesota. Both instruments are very similar, and identify a couple's strengths and growth areas in Idealistic Distortion, Marriage Expectations, Personality Issues, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Financial Management, Leisure Activities, Sexual Relationship, Children and Parenting, Family and Friends, Role Relationship, Spiritual Beliefs, and Family of Origin. The online version is offered in 12 different languages including Spanish, Vietnamese, and French.

(As this inventory is very-data rich, it may not be very user-friendly for those without extensive experience or formal training. However, for those involved in marriage preparation that have a great deal of familiarity with this inventory and/or clinical training, the data collected by this inventory can be very illuminating.)

Important note: Other inventories and sponsor couple programs may be reviewed for approval by the Office of Pro-life and Family Life (see Approved Programs on the Pro-Life and Family Life marriage preparation page: [www.archindy.org/marriageprep](http://www.archindy.org/marriageprep)). Several meetings, ideally with a sponsor couple, which thoroughly cover the entire contents of either, the "Engaged Couple Guide for Catholic Marriage Preparation (FOCCUS, Inc.) or "Fully Engaged: Growing Towards Lasting Fidelity," fulfill Guiding Principles 1 & 3 (which can be found on page five).



### Step 3.) Preparatory Marriage Formation

Marriage formation programs contribute to the marriage preparation process by catechizing, building marital skills, and facilitating ongoing dialogue between the couple. Marriage formation programs may take varying forms depending on location, available retreats and workshops, etc. However, each couple's formation process should cover the three Guiding Principles listed above on page five. Below is a list of all the programs currently offered in the Archdiocese, along with a brief description of each program.

#### a.) *Pre-Cana Conference/The Joy-Filled Marriage Program*

This program from Ascension Press is used by the Pre-Cana Conferences offered by the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. However, several parishes and deaneries use this program, or components of it, in their formation for engaged couples preparing for marriage. It has two components which together cover the three Guiding Principles. The two components of the program are:

- 1) *God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage* presents couples with the teachings on Sacramentality and Sexuality of marriage, rooted in St. Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body (this portion is also offered in Spanish).
- 2) A virtue-based life skills program that provides the "know-how" and the habits that build up a lifelong, joy-filled marriage. This program is a companion program to *God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage*.

#### b.) *One in Christ*

This program is seminar-based marriage preparation that takes place over the course of one weekend with a one-day follow-up session that includes a medical/NFP panel for Q&A. *One in Christ (OIC)* provides a comprehensive approach to marriage preparation that meets or exceeds the each of the Guiding Principles. Along with use of clergy, all witnessing married couples sign an Oath of Fidelity to the Magisterium and the program includes a required course in NFP. OIC offers a Spanish option.

#### c.) *Tobit Retreat*

The Tobit Marriage Preparation Weekend was designed and started in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis in 1974. This weekend offers time away from the tensions and demands of daily life to relax in a place of beauty and peacefulness. It gives couples a unique opportunity to grow in the knowledge and love of one another while focusing on healthy communication in all aspects of the marital relationship. A teaching Mass is included during the retreat. Tobit fulfills the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guiding Principle as outlined on page five.

#### d.) *Fully Engaged: Growing Toward Lasting Fidelity Couple's Workbook*

This is a companion workbook to the Fully Engaged Inventory and provides a 13-part sponsor couple program, with the option for three additional sessions on Ecumenical Marriage, Second

Marriages, and Blended Families. This covers each of the three Guiding Principles (Catholic Vision of Love and Marriage, Catholic Understanding of Sexuality, and Skills of Love and Marriage) outlined on page five.

e.) *Engaged Couple Guide for Catholic Marriage Preparation (FOCCUS, Inc.)*

This workbook is intended for use with the FOCCUS© Pre-Marriage Inventory, and provides a thorough, but not exhaustive, program for covering each of the three Guiding Principles (Catholic Vision of Love and Marriage, Catholic Understanding of Sexuality, and Skills of Love and Marriage) outlined on page six. In addition, the workbook includes a section on planning the order of the service. The workbook contains the Imprimatur. A Spanish translation of the workbook is available.

Please note: Visit [www.archindy.org/marriageprep](http://www.archindy.org/marriageprep) for an updated list of approved courses with special considerations for various languages and formats, as well as special needs.

#### Step 4.) Catholic Understanding of Sexuality

It is recommended that each couple take an introductory course on either the Theology of the Body or Natural Family Planning. Couples may attend one of the above comprehensive programs or participate in the following ways:

1.) *Natural Family Planning (NFP)*

An introductory course on NFP, taught by a certified NFP educator, is one option that fulfills this step. It does not matter which method the couple learns, as long as it is taught by a certified NFP educator/instructor. The *One In Christ* program requires an NFP course and fulfills this requirement. For a complete list of teachers and NFP learning formats, please visit [www.archindy.org/nfp](http://www.archindy.org/nfp).

2.) *Theology of the Body (TOB)*

An introductory course based on St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body presented by a trained TOB presenter. This course may be completed at the parish level, deanery level, or through the Archdiocesan offices. There are courses in Theology of the Body offered regularly at the local, state, and national level. The *God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage* portion of the Pre-Cana Conference would fulfill this requirement, but others may be considered. Please visit the marriage prep resources page mentioned previously or contact the Office of Pro-Life and Family Life for more information.

#### Step 5.) Additional Sessions offered by priest, deacon, PLC, or lay minister

This is an opportunity for follow-up to the Formational program and discussion about preparation for the wedding liturgy. The number of additional sessions needed is left up to the discretion of the PLC or clergy responsible for the marriage preparation. The wedding rehearsal would also be considered a part of this phase of marriage preparation.

## 6.) Participation in the Sacrament of Penance prior to wedding day.

“Inasmuch as it is a sacramental action of sanctification, the liturgical celebration of marriage...must be, per se, valid, worth, 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.”<sup>18</sup> It is recommended that the couple be encouraged during marriage preparation to make participation in the Sacrament of Penance a habit for the entirety of life.

## 7.) Participation in Marriage Formation Program (Within One year post wedding celebration)

Marriage is a permanent and perpetual commitment. As such, ongoing post-marital formation is highly encouraged. Some suggestions include retaking their marriage preparation class, attend any of the above suggestions that were not previously taken during their engagement, or participate in programs offered at the parish, deanery, or archdiocesan level for marriage formation and enrichment (See Chapter 7 for more information).

*Another great challenge of marriage preparation is to help couples realize that marriage is not something that happens once and for all. Their union is real and irrevocable, confirmed and consecrated by the sacrament of matrimony. Yet in joining their lives, the spouses assume an active and creative role in a lifelong project. Their gaze now has to be directed to the future, that, with the help of God’s grace, they are daily called to build. For this very reason, neither spouse can expect the other to be perfect. Each must set aside all illusions and accept the other as he or she actually is: an unfinished product, needing to grow, a work in progress. ~ Pope Francis<sup>19</sup>*

## Section 5: Frequently Asked Questions

### 1). What is the minimum age for marriage canonically?

The Code of Canon Law instructs that a man and a woman be 16 and 14 years of age, respectively, to marry validly (c.1083). However, canon law also emphasizes the need for marriages to conform to the age requirements of civil law (c.1071 §2, c. 1072) Indiana State Law requires that “two individuals may not marry each other unless both individuals are at least eighteen years of age.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it is expected that the sacrament of marriage is reserved for those of or above the age of 18.

While age does not guarantee a certain maturity or level of faith, research and experience demonstrate that most teenagers are not ready for the commitment and responsibilities of marriage. Their emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and financial development impacts this situation.

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<sup>18</sup> Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 2nd ed. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000. Print. #1622

<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 218

<sup>20</sup> IC 31-11-1-4 Sec. 4

A pastoral consideration for particularly young couples: In addition to the typical preparation process, extra time may need to be devoted to discernment. In certain situations, it may even be advisable to include the parents or trusted family members in the discernment process.

## **2) What happens if the bride is pregnant?**

While there is often an innate tendency to treat pre-marital pregnancy as a reason to speed up the marriage preparation process, it is not recommended. While the couple typically has the best of intentions in mind, namely the future of their child, it is important that the couple properly discern the best possible decision for their relationship, and their child. One of the greatest goods a couple can give their child is a healthy, well-discerned marital relationship, and that only comes about through a process of discernment, formation, and preparation. Regardless, the choice to embrace the child, the pregnancy, and the dignity of life should be affirmed.

## **3) What about Ecumenical, Interfaith, and Inter-religious Marriages?**

A marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic does not inhibit the validity of a marriage. However, there are some canonical and pastoral considerations that should be addressed. Firstly, Catholics are bound by the requirement of canonical form, unless proper dispensation from canonical form has been granted (See canons 1108-1124). Secondly, canon 1124 states that mixed marriages require the express permission of the competent authority. This effects the liceity of the celebration of marriage, and it is expected that the Catholic party is prepared to remove dangers of defection from the faith and promises to do all in their power to baptize and raise their children as Catholic, as well as notify the non-Catholic party of these promises (c.1125-1126). Pastors and parish ministers should also grant due consideration to potential challenges mixed religion may create within the marital household, and should guide and encourage the couple in communicating about these challenges.

Marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person poses a greater challenge. Such a marriage, known as “disparity of cult,” is invalid unless proper dispensation has been granted. Dispensation from disparity of cult is not to be granted unless the requirements of c.1125-1126 (aforementioned) have been fulfilled. Furthermore, such marriages can pose even greater challenges within the household, and pastors and parish ministers should recognize these potential challenges and be especially diligent in guiding and encouraging the couple in open communication.

Nevertheless, religious differences are not necessarily detrimental to the health of a marriage. The conversion of the non-Catholic is not necessary, and though inviting them into the Catholic faith is encouraged, it should not be coerced. These marriages can provide opportunities for conversation, mutual learning, and a unique form of family unity, harmony and shared spirituality. If possible, it is recommended that a sponsor couple that has dealt with similar situations and challenges be assigned to mentor the couple.

In regards to the marriage ceremony, a collaborative effort can be made between clergy of both faith communities, including involvement of non-Catholic clergy in the formation and liturgy planning period, provided that canonical requirements are otherwise satisfied.

#### **4) What if the Bride or Groom has a previous marriage?**

If the prior marriage has ended due to the death of the former spouse, there is no impediment to marriage. Pastorally, couples who have experienced the death of a spouse may have unique considerations. These include, but are not limited to: grief and loss, adjusting to married life with someone new, merged finances, parenting (including parenting adult children), adjusting to married life after being single again, the complexities that children can bring, and other potential issues. Pastors and ministers should provide care, aid in the healing process, and promote open communication about the dynamics that re-marriage after widowhood brings. A referral to professional counseling may be appropriate in these circumstances.

If, however, the prior marriage ended in civil divorce and the former spouse is still living, there is very likely an impediment preventing the validity of a new marriage. In order to marry validly, both parties must be free in the eyes of the Church from any prior bond of marriage. The individual circumstances of a prior marriage determine whether or not it can be dissolved or declared null, and questions regarding this matter should be directed towards the Metropolitan Tribunal. Pastors and parish ministers should inform couples in this situation that they cannot marry in the Church unless their freedom to marry can be established through dissolution or annulment, and that there is no guarantee of this occurring.

Pastorally, this creates extremely difficult situations. Some couples may find themselves free to marry after the necessary processes are fulfilled, while others simply cannot. A great deal of pastoral care should be given to these couples. The Church's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage should be shared, as should the Church's great love for both parties even in the midst of their difficult situation. Couples in this situation often feel as though they are being judged on the basis of their personal worthiness, or punished for the sin of divorce, when in reality, neither are true. Those who minister in the name of the Church should strive to clarify these misconceptions and demonstrate the love of Christ.

#### **5) What if the Catholic party is non-practicing?**

As when the Prodigal Son returned home to his father, the Church should run forward to welcome those who may have fallen away from the practice of the faith and yet return to seek the Sacraments. There is no reason, nor any authority, to deny any baptized Catholic their natural right to marriage. Therefore, if a Catholic is non-practicing and seeks marriage in the Church, it is best to treat it as an opportunity for evangelization and invite them into discipleship.

However, pastoral consideration should especially be given to ensuring the couple is aware of the Church's teachings and practices on marriage. Accompanying the continual invitation to renew one's practice of our Catholic faith, should be realistic and honest communication about what that faith is, particularly in regards to the sacrament being sought, and in light of evangelization and the path of discipleship.

#### **6) What about children from previous relationships?**

Pastorally, it is recommended that significant attention to be given to the consideration of the children's experiences throughout this process. It may be that the children have witnessed previous partners or marriages. In other circumstances they have experienced the death or divorce of parents, all of which bring issues of grief, loss, and trust as well as other difficulties both for the children and the entire family. Even though children from previous marriages are not illegitimate, in some situations, they may be struggling with this feeling. Here we recommend that their dignity as a child of God, and the love God has for them be reaffirmed and emphasized. Here too, as part of marriage preparation, a discussion of parenting roles and responsibilities, particularly if the biological parents are still involved in the children's lives, would be beneficial.

#### **7) What about cohabitation?**

Here, as with every couple approaching the Church for marriage, the first expression should be that of welcome! Pastorally, it is encouraged that the couple explores the reason that they are now approaching the church for marriage. As with pregnancy, the risk of divorce is diminished if the decision to marry was made prior to cohabitating. It may be helpful to assist the couple in understanding the wisdom behind Church teaching, including the difference between cohabitation and a valid marriage in the Church. Additionally, it may be appropriate to discuss the beauty of the Sacrament of Penance, and Our Lord's mercy. Research indicates that couples who live together prior to marriage have a higher risk of divorce. The risk of divorce may be minimized when couples take the time to explore the following: commitment, covenant, marital expectations, goals, and mission for their marriage.

#### **8). Can the couple refuse to be open to children?**

The matrimonial covenant is ordered by its nature to the procreation and education of offspring (c. 1055). Therefore, if it becomes quite apparent that one or both of the parties is adamantly and unwaveringly opposed to be open to children, they cannot be married in the Church as they are not actually pursuing the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Those who minister to persons in this circumstance should strive to communicate the Church's understanding of the inseparable connection between marriage and openness to children, with the hope that the party will experience conversion of heart. Should the obstinate party express a change of heart, it should be presumed that they are truthful and marriage preparation should continue.

## **9). What about intercultural marriages and local customs?**

The Church is universal, and within her embrace the customs and cultures of many can be celebrated. When it comes to the liturgical celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony, some cultural practices can be incorporated. It is recommended that the *Order for Celebrating Matrimony* be consulted for a more in depth exploration of incorporating local customs.

With intercultural marriages, attention must be given to the role that culture plays in the marital household, and how the cultural differences of the spouses will affect their relationship. While cultural differences are usually non-problematic, couples that recognize and communicate about their differences tend to have healthier and happier marriages than those that might ignore or forget their differences.

## **10) Can a person who is mentally handicapped enter into marriage?**

In order to marry, one must be able to exchange consent, which requires the capacity to use reason (c. 1057, 1095 §1). When this capacity is in question, it is recommended that each situation be assessed on an individual level. Consultation of trained and competent professionals: therapists, counselors, and/or legal advisors should be considered where appropriate. A determination should be made only after consultation with the couple, family, and professionals who can assess their levels of independence, their abilities to make a permanent commitment to one another, and any financial or legal ramifications.

"Realizing the unique gifts handicapped individuals have to offer the Church, we wish to address their need for their fuller integration into the Christian community and their fuller participation in its life."<sup>21</sup>

Persons with mental or physical disability have the right to marry. The need for love and intimacy is intrinsic to all people, with or without disability. Marriage preparation for persons in this circumstance should include exploration of their reasons for marriage, their ability to carry out the responsibilities of marriage, their ability to make a permanent commitment, and their ability to live independently or in homes with supportive assistance.

Accommodations should be made to meet the needs of the couple. For example, persons who are deaf should be offered the opportunity to express their matrimonial consent in sign language. Marriage preparation should be offered using an engaging and easy-to-understand method. For instance, the FOCCUS inventory offers an adaptive English form for those who have special needs.

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<sup>21</sup> See USCCB, *Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities* <http://www.ncpd.org/views-news-policy/policy/church/bishops/pastoral> (11/16/78), no. 1

### **11) What if the couple refuses to participate in marriage preparation?**

While unwillingness to participate is a sign of a lack of commitment to marry in the Church, open dialogue with the couple as to why there is unwillingness is critical. There could be several challenges or difficulties which make the program difficult to participate in, and past traumas and experiences could be playing a role in their decision. The first step in evangelization is building trust, and this is a moment of evangelization where trust is critical. The Archdiocese has the responsibility of providing adequate and varied options so there is no reasonable obstacle to participation. Collaboration between the parish and the Archdiocese Office of Pro-Life and Family life is highly recommended. Additional ministries and offices should be called upon as needed.

It should be kept in mind that all persons not prohibited by law have a natural right to marriage. (c. 1058) Thus, even the adamant refusal to participate in marriage preparation does not give reason to permanently impede a couple's path to marriage. So long as the interrogatories and pre-marital paperwork are completed, the pastor cannot prohibit the marriage.

### **12) How would I help military or long distance couples prepare for marriage?**

Long distance preparation is not ideal. However, in a global world, it is a reality for many that needs special attention. Due to a variety of factors including relocation for employment, military, school, and other potential factors, alternate accommodations may be made. Military or college chaplains can often provide independent preparation, but this should be done in coordination with the presiding minister. Second, there are many online programs offered in a variety of dioceses or independent organizations which may be considered. Collaboration with the Office of Pro-Life and Family Life is recommended. There are also several NFP courses that can be taken online or through home-study which may be considered. Finally, online marriage preparation inventories can be considered. While separation is a challenge, it is NOT a reason to omit marriage formation programming. Special circumstances such as deployment may impact the timeline of marriage. Even in shortened timeline situations, the marriage preparation should not be rushed, and the decision to delay marriage may be considered. Please consult the Chancery and/or Tribunal for counsel in difficult circumstances. Finally, military personnel are to conform to the directives of the Archdiocese for the Military Services.

### **13) What if the couple is experiencing infertility or impotence?**

With regards to infertility, all that is necessary to validly marry is the openness to the procreation and education of children. The biological capacity to conceive children is irrelevant when determining a couple's ability to marry. As always, pastoral consideration should be given to the unique challenges infertility might pose within married life. Should a couple present itself for marriage and the infertility of one or both parties become known, ministers should encourage open and ongoing communication about how this affects their married life.



Impotence is a separate matter, however. When either party suffers from antecedent and perpetual impotence (meaning at the time prior to the marriage they are incapable of having sexual intercourse and there exists little medical reason to suggest they shall develop the capacity to have sexual intercourse), they are incapable of marriage, as marriage by its nature requires consummation (c. 1084). With that being said, this is only a consideration if the impotence of a party becomes a known and established fact prior to the bond of marriage. The sexual potency of both parties should be presumed until they themselves make any impotency known.

#### **14) What if the marriage affects the citizenship of the parties?**

Marriages entered into through fraud perpetuated to obtain consent are contracted invalidly (c. 1098). Parties who enter into marriage while excluding, by positive act of the will, marriage itself or some essential element or property of marriage also contract invalidly (c. 1101) Both of these should be kept in mind when the marriage affects the citizenship of the parties. While it is to be presumed that a couple who present themselves for marriage are doing so for the right reason, marriages that affect citizenship status of the parties can be sought for insufficient and invalidating reasons. Therefore, pastors and parish ministers should invite couples in this situation to discuss their motivations for wanting to marry, and in the most pastoral way possible ensure there is no ulterior reason for the marriage.

#### **15). Can couples who make a prenuptial agreement enter into a marriage freely as the Church envisions?**

Prenuptial agreements do not invalidate a marriage, provided they do not amount to a positive act of the will excluding an essential element or property of marriage, particularly the indissolubility of the marital bond. Prenuptial agreements that contain clauses preparing for the possibility of the dissolution of the marriage typically amount to such an exclusion, as they indicate the parties believe their bond to be dissoluble. However, some prenuptial agreements, such as those that set forth instructions for the distribution of inheritances to children of prior marital bonds, offer no indication that the parties believe their bond dissoluble, and therefore offers no cause for concern.

#### **16). How should marriage preparation for the convalidation of a civil marriage be approached?**

When a couple present themselves to the Church for the convalidation of their non-sacramental marriage, marriage preparation and formation will have a different approach. The husband and wife are not “uninitiated”, and should not be treated as such. They have been married civilly, and are now asking to be married sacramentally. This affords the couple and those involved in their marriage formation an opportunity to examine the relationship, to communicate about its strengths and weaknesses, and to thus enter into sacramental union with a chance to grow more closely together. Thus, the marriage preparation process should be used to examine a marital relationship that already exists, rather than one that is about to begin. Pastors and parish ministers should respect the work

and love that has forged the current relationship, and seek to strengthen it in preparation for the sacramental bond.

It should be noted that some couples may see convalidation as a remedy for marital troubles. This sort of thinking misunderstands the grace of the sacrament, and pastors should be attentive to it, encouraging and guiding couples to communicate and work on any difficulties in their relationship. Pastors and parish ministers should also seek to ensure that couples seeking convalidation recognize the dignity of the sacramental marriage they seek, as well as understand the Church's teachings on sacramental marriage.

## Section 6: Formation & Best Practice Considerations

*“In order that the family may be an ever more true community of love, it is necessary that all its members should be helped and trained in their responsibilities as they face the new problems that arise in mutual services and in active sharing family life.”<sup>22</sup>*

Throughout this process, it is important to remember that active and ongoing discernment is essential in Christian living. Our God is not a distant God, or a being disconnected from our lives, but is a personal God who desires an intimate relationship with us. Therefore, the wedding day is not the end of the formation process, but instead, part of an ongoing journey of Christian, and specifically marital, formation. Vocational formation should take place throughout the lives of all Christians, as we all have a specific path to holiness which God is calling us to. “For God, who has called the couple to Marriage, continues to call them to Marriage.”<sup>23</sup> As such, ongoing support and formation for married couples is necessary.

We live in a cultural climate that is harsh to marriage, and there are many ongoing obstacles to living married life faithfully. We know from research that couples are particularly vulnerable to divorce early in marriage. Pope St. John Paul II writes: “This holds true especially for young families, which, finding themselves in a context of new values and responsibilities, are more vulnerable, especially in the first years of marriage, to possible difficulties such as those created by adaptation to life together or by the birth of children.”<sup>24</sup> John Gottman points to research that suggests that half of all divorces occur within the first seven years of marriage.<sup>25</sup> More can and should be done to support marriage. Immediate marriage preparation only has an immediate effect, as the perceived value of marriage

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<sup>22</sup> St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 69

<sup>23</sup> St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 51

<sup>24</sup> St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 69

<sup>25</sup> John M. Gottman, Robert W. Levenson, “The Timing of Divorce: Predicting When a Couple Will Divorce Over a 14-Year Period,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62 (August 2000): 737-745.

preparation goes down as the length of marriage goes up.<sup>26</sup> Marital enrichment is a virtual necessity for fostering good, faithful, holy marriages.

There are several ways of promoting and fostering ongoing formation. As was stated in the introductory statements of these guidelines, cross-ministry collaboration is vital for successful ministry to marriages and families. Possible suggestions at the parish level include: support for marriage through General Intercessions, specific prayer intentions during Exposition of the Holy Eucharist, bulletin inserts, specific homilies on marriage, parish programs such as date nights or nights of reflection, small couple and family communities, promotion of marriage enrichment programs such as World Wide Marriage Encounter, promotion of ministries for struggling marriage such as Retrouvaille, parish-based and/or apostolate-based marriage retreats, and retreats for young families. This list is by no means exhaustive, but provides a framework for the diverse options available for serving marriages and families.

At the Archdiocesan level options include, but are not limited to: marriage retreats, marriage enrichment events, celebration of World Marriage Day, Archdiocesan Golden Wedding Jubilee celebrating marriages of 50 years, occasional marriage talks or workshops, and referrals to pro-marriage counselors.

The family is the first and vital cell of society. Therefore, marriage preparation and formation is good for marriage, it is good for society, but most importantly, it is good for life. Let us rejoice in Our Lord and His wonderful gift of life which He gives to us through the love of husband and wife!

### **Best Practice Recommendations**

The following provides best-practice recommendations for individual meetings of marriage preparation. Formats for consideration include a three-, four-, and six-meeting format, as well as a parish-based program. The three and four meeting formats presume that the inventory and any additional catechesis that the priest suggests takes place in meetings not facilitated by the priest, and the instruction outlined below is followed. In the parish program format, roles are more specifically defined.

#### ***Questions to consider with each married couple:***

There are several ways of exploring the intent, values, and marital expectations of those preparing for marriage. The following questions are recommending for beginning those discussions:

1. How did the two of you meet?
2. What do you love about the other person?
3. Why do you want to get married?

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<sup>26</sup> See USCCB, *Getting It Right: Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church: A Study of the Value of Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church for Couples Married One Through Eight Years*, Center for Marriage and Family, Creighton University (November 1995) <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/marriage-preparation/getting-it-right-marriage-preparation-in-the-catholic-church.cfm>

4. Why do you want to marry your fiancé?
5. Why do you want to get married in the Catholic Church?
6. What is going to change about your relationship after you get married?

### ***Three Meeting Format:***

During the first meeting, preferably at least 9-12 months before the desired wedding date, the priest discerns if there are any impediments to marriage, discerns with the couple the freedom to marry, and gathers all necessary paperwork and documentation. In addition, this meeting offers an introduction to the Church's teaching on marriage as Sacrament. During this meeting an inventory is administered at the parish office and a sponsor couple is assigned. The second meeting takes place after the sponsor couple process is complete. A review of the sponsor couple program is completed and further discussion of the results of the inventory takes place. Additional meetings are considered if there are concerns. If there are no further concerns, and if the engaged couple completes a catechetical program offered by the Archdiocese or parish, the final meeting takes place before the rehearsal followed by the rehearsal on the night before the wedding celebration.

### ***Four or Five Meeting Format:***

The first meeting is a completion of all necessary paperwork and formal introductions, as well as rapport building. The Second meeting covers the Church's teachings on marriage. The Third meeting covers the skills of marriage. The fourth meeting is a rehearsal for the engaged couple only, so that the expectations of the wedding celebration are clear. All concerns and questions are cleared up during this meeting so that the priest and couple are on the same page. The final step in the process is the rehearsal at the Church.

### ***Parish-Based Program Format:***

The initial meeting reviews the process of the marriage preparation program. In addition, this meeting includes an explanation of the wedding ceremony coordinator's role and the parish staff's role. Baptismal certificates are needed for this meeting and are the couple's responsibility. Finally, rapport building and any other specifics that the priest wishes to discuss with the couple are discussed here. The remainder of the program is outlined by the priest at this meeting. The program includes a Sponsor Couple program which is at least two sessions based on review of the inventory administered, an NFP class facilitated at the parish or offered in the community, five one-hour long catechetical meetings facilitated one-on-one by different couples from the parish based on Ascension Press' *God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage* program, a follow-up meeting with the priest, a meeting with the wedding ceremony coordinator, and the rehearsal at the parish.

## Section 7: Additional Resources

### Inventory & Formation Resources

[www.archindy.org/marriageprep](http://www.archindy.org/marriageprep) - the Archdiocese of Indianapolis' official website for marriage preparation (click on "Approved Programs" for additional programs and recommendations for marriage preparation)

[www.archindy.org/marriageandfamily](http://www.archindy.org/marriageandfamily) - list of books, articles, inventory information, and small group study programs for additional marriage preparation resources as well as ongoing formation resources.

[www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org) – additional resources on dating, engagement, marriage, and family life from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

### Spanish Resources

En Las Buenas Y Para Siempre – Spanish version of "For Better & For Ever" -

<http://marriagepreparation.com/>

Movimiento Familiar Cristiano Catolico - <http://www.mfc-fe.org/>

### NFP

For more information and list of teachers in the Archdiocese please visit – [www.archindy.org/nfp](http://www.archindy.org/nfp)