

## **MARRIAGE PREPARATION POLICY**

### **Diocese of Sacramento**

### **2005**

**Canon 1055:**

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

In support of its ministry to marriage, the Diocese of Sacramento promulgated the first “Marriage Preparation Policy” in 1978. On the feast of the Holy Family, December 30, 1994, Bishop William K. Weigand approved and promulgated the second “Marriage Preparation Policy.” In the fall of 2004, following the Diocesan Synod, Bishop Weigand formed an ad hoc Marriage Preparation Committee to update the 1994 policy. This update includes the following:

- “Provide and foster opportunities for sacramental catechesis at all levels of church life in order to deepen the awareness among the people of God that it is in and through the sacraments that they worship God, are sanctified, built up as the Body of Christ and sent forth to proclaim and live the Good News of salvation (Synod Pastoral Initiative, 4)
- Adopt general guidelines for marriage preparation that were articulated in “Faithful to Each Other Forever.” This document was compiled by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) in 1989.

These guidelines are meant to assist engaged couples in making the best possible decision regarding their marriage. They are also meant to assist them to prepare well for the Sacrament of Matrimony and to fully understand their commitment to living out their vocation in and for the community of the Church. Specific canons are cited in the areas where they are appropriate so that the origin of each section will be clear. These canons are guiding principles of the Catholic Church.

#### **I. SPIRITUAL VISION OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE**

Noting Canon 1055, this self-giving love of husband and wife represents the mutual love of Christ for his bride, the Church, and the love of the Church for her bridegroom, Christ.

The plan of God for Christian marriage begins with a vision of the wholeness of the human person. As Genesis states: *“In the divine image God created them, male and female.”* (Gen. 1:27) With all the dignity and sacredness of life and sexuality, man and woman witness to the wonder and graciousness of God. Entering into marriage is a response to God’s call or vocation for the man and woman to become *“one flesh”* (Gen. 2:24) in a mutual self-giving. The couple then becomes the symbol of the covenant that binds God and humankind together in a permanent and faithful covenant. Pope Benedict XVI in his Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, states *“love between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an apparently irresistible promise of happiness.”*<sup>1</sup>

Marriage is not a peripheral issue in the Christian life. It finds itself right at the heart of the Christian mystery and serves to illuminate it. Pope John Paul II goes so far as to say that we cannot understand the Christian mystery unless we keep in mind the “great mystery” involved in the creation of man and female and the vocation of both to conjugal love.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> God is Love, Pope Benedict XVI, February 2006, no. 2

<sup>2</sup> Letters to Families, Pope John Paul II, 2/2/94, no.19

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“Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being... Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person, in its entirety, to love: Marriage, and virginity or celibacy. Either one is in its own proper form an actuation of the most profound truth of humanity, of being ‘created in the image of God.’<sup>3</sup>

The Second Vatican Council states that “... *the married partners have their own proper vocation; they must be witnesses of faith and the love of Christ to one another and their children. The Christian family proclaims aloud both the present power of the kingdom of God and the hope of the blessed life.*”<sup>4</sup>

By virtue of their baptism, the marriage of Christians is a *sacrament*. It is a *living sign* that truly communicates and participates in the love of Christ and the Church.

Hence, Baptism is described as a “nuptial bath,”<sup>5</sup> and the Eucharist is understood as the sacramental consummation of the marriage between Christ and the Church. When we receive the body of Christ into our own, just like a bride we conceive new life in us – life in the Holy Spirit. It is the same Holy Spirit that forms the bond that unites spouses in the Sacrament of Marriage. This is the “profound mystery” in which marriage participates.

The Eucharist, then, is the very source of Christian Marriage. “In the Eucharistic gift of charity the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its ‘*communion*’ and its ‘*mission*,”<sup>6</sup> that is, to love as God loves.

## **II. THE IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION:**

Although these Marriage Preparation Guidelines address the time “immediately” preceding a couple’s marriage, it is important to understand that the church can play a central role in all the stages of marriage preparation.

Marriage Preparation is not a one time event that occurs in the time period immediately preceding the wedding, but rather a process that takes place over the course of a number of years. Pope John Paul II expanded our vision of marriage preparation as a gradual and prolonged process (*Familiaris Consortio*). That process includes three main stages: remote, proximate, and immediate, together with aftercare efforts to sustain and nurture the marital bond:

Remote Preparation begins in early childhood and includes all family and environmental factors that influence the person in positive and negative ways regarding marriage. It is through “family of origin” that role models, values, traditions, attitudes, communication styles, etc. play a major part in a person’s formation. The Church’s support of family life during the formative years is critical to building strong families in which children can grow and learn (*Faithful to Each Other Forever*, pp. 10-20).

Proximate Preparation begins at a suitable age, usually around the time of puberty. It involves, through age-appropriate catechesis, a more specific preparation for and rediscovery of the sacraments. It is the responsibility of parents and guardians, along with pastoral ministers, to provide integration here of the

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<sup>3</sup> Familiaris Consortio, n. 11, Pope John Paul II.

<sup>4</sup> Lumen Gentium, #35

<sup>5</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1617

<sup>6</sup> Familiaris Consortio, n. 57, Pope John Paul II.

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religious formation of young people with their preparation for life as couple. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are “by word and example... the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children.

*They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child...*” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). It is critical to also address the role of media and the importance of media education during this stage of today’s young people. (*Faithful to Each Other Forever*, pp. 23-54).

Citing again from Pope John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* #66, ‘Faithful to Each Other’ notes that “the immediate preparation for the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony takes place in the weeks and months immediately prior to the wedding, with the hope that it will give new meaning, context, and form to the prenuptial investigation required by canon law (1063). Immediate Marriage Preparation must be a special experience for those engaged couples who choose to come to the Catholic Church to be married! It is a time in which engaged couples can be helped to:

- Experience a sense of welcome and involvement with
- Evaluate their readiness to live married life
- Gain insights of themselves individually and as a couple
- Obtain a deeper understanding of the Sacrament of Matrimony
- Understand the mission of a married couple both in Church in society
- Develop a greater appreciation of their faith

For those involved in ministry to the engaged, it is an important pastoral opportunity for evangelization as can be seen in our third Diocesan Synod of the Sacramento Diocese, 2004 (cf. Pastoral Initiatives # 1 and # 4). Today’s engaged couples present both a challenge and an opportunity for those involved in immediate marriage preparation. Some realities include:

- The average age of couples preparing for marriage is 27.6 years of age (CARA Study).
- The ratio of couples entering Ecumenical/Interfaith Marriage is 39% and growing (CARA Study).
- Many couples do not regularly practice their faith and the majority has not had any formal exposure to Matrimony as a Sacrament.
- It is estimated that 60-80% of the couples are cohabiting (US Bureau of Census, 1995) and the average length of cohabitation has been 15.6 months (NCCB, 1999).

**The Diocese of Sacramento strongly recommends an ecclesial team approach to sacramental preparation.**

The Diocese strongly recommends an ecclesial team approach to sacramental preparation. Today, priests and deacons are working side by side with married couples and individuals from the parish faith community to provide engaged couples with a rich variety of experiences and exposure. These team members share their special gifts in a variety of ways such as teaching marriage preparation classes, being sponsorship couples, assisting in administration, facilitating the premarital inventory, coordinating the rehearsal, etc.

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In this ecclesial team model of collaborative ministry and shared responsibility (Synod Pastoral Initiative # 3), the priest's/deacons active involvement is central to the process. He is the person responsible for the initial interview, completing the Prenuptial Inquiry, deciding whether to postpone or proceed, witnessing the marriage, etc.

### **III. THE MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROCESS**

#### **A. Hospitality**

The couple's first contact with the parish is crucial for the effectiveness of this stage of sacramental preparation. They have made a decision to come forward and ask to be married in the Church. Preparation for one's wedding is a significant event in a person's life. Many of these couples have not been active in Church for quite sometime and even regular churchgoers have many questions about their upcoming wedding and marriage. How we handle the teachable moments during the marriage preparation process is a good opportunity for evangelization and will say much to the couples about who we are as a Church. The pastor and his delegates must welcome the couple as Christ would, that is, with "a warm and caring, positive and joyful attitude of hospitality" (*Faithful to Each Other Forever*, p. 59). Pope John Paul II's teaching in *Familiaris Consortio*, #68, states that while "the faith of person(s) seeking marriage can exist in varying degrees, it is the primary duty of pastors to facilitate a rediscovery of this faith, nourishing it and bringing it to maturity."

**Engaged Couples desiring to be married in the Catholic Church must contact the parish at least six months prior to the anticipated wedding date. Nine to twelve months is ideal.**

#### **B. Six Month Marriage Preparation Period**

To ensure that the engaged couple have adequate time to prepare in a serious way, this contact must be made at least six months in advance of the couple's wedding date, and conclude no closer than eight weeks prior to the date. *Nine months to one year is ideal.* This preparation time is not just a "waiting period" for the ceremony, but rather an important, teachable moment in preparation for the lifetime journey on which the couple is about to embark. Each faith community is advised to publish this requirement in their bulletin on a regular basis.

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### **C. Responsibility of the Priest/Deacon Performing the Ceremony (Canon 1063, 2 and 1066)**

Immediate marriage preparation begins when the engaged couple contacts the parish. This is a time for the couple and pastor (or his delegate) to engage in assessment and education for a lifetime commitment to family living with the Church. The priest or deacon, after being contacted by either party residing within the parish or Newman Community to which he is assigned, is the one responsible to see to it that:

- 1) The couple has personal preparation for entering marriage so that through such preparation the parties may be predisposed toward the holiness and duties of their new state (canon 1063, §2).
- 2) Before marriage is celebrated, it is evident that nothing stands in the way of its valid and licit celebration (canon 1066).

### **D. Responsibility in the Case of a Visiting Cleric (Canon 1111)**

Whenever a priest or deacon is invited from outside the parish or Newman Community to witness the wedding ceremony, the pastor of the parish or a local ordinary must delegate the visiting cleric. The celebrant must be in good standing in accordance with diocesan statutes. This delegation is more than giving permission; it is the granting of authority (faculty) to witness the exchange of vows in the name of the Church. The delegation is required for validity. **Note:** A record of that delegation is to be included in the Prenuptial Documents and entered in the marriage registry. **Note:** It is permissible for the visiting cleric to handle the marriage preparation, but the pastor retains the responsibility to see that this is completed appropriately.

### **E. Setting of a Tentative Wedding Date (Canon 1066)**

**The wedding date is not to be finalized until the assessment process has been completed. Under no circumstances is the date to be scheduled by anyone other than the priest or deacon.**

Discussion of a tentative wedding date may take place during the initial contact with the priest or deacon. Note: This date is not be finalized until the assessment process has been completed. Under no circumstances is the date to be scheduled by anyone other than the priest or deacon who has accepted the responsibility of the assessment process.

### **F. Place of Wedding (Canons 1115, 1118, §1 and 1127), and,**

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### **Codes of Canon Eastern Churches (Canons 831, § 2, 835, 838)**

The Catholic tradition recognizes and cherishes an incarnational spirituality, one that appreciates the importance of symbol, gesture, sacred space and ritual. Within the Diocese of Sacramento, a number of values are at issue and must be reflected in our policy on the place of the celebration of weddings involving Catholics. Among some of these values are the following:

- There is a need to witness to the sacred nature of marriage in a secular society.
- There is a need to witness to the communal and ecclesial dimension of marriage. The Christian community has a stake in the marriage of its members and the couple has a vocational responsibility to the community.
- There is a need to respect the conscience and religious practices of people from other faith traditions who are entering marriage with a Catholic.
- There is a need to welcome people with genuine hospitality, understanding and appropriate flexibility.

#### (1) MARRIAGES BETWEEN TWO CATHOLICS OF THE LATIN CHURCH:

The marriage between two Catholics of the Latin Church is to take place in the parish of either the bride or the groom (canon 1115). The pastor may permit the wedding to be held in another Catholic oratory (ex: a rectory chapel or convent chapel) within the parish boundaries (*canon 1118, §1*).

#### (2) MARRIAGES BETWEEN A LATIN CATHOLIC AND EASTERN CATHOLIC:

The marriage between two Catholics, one of whom is a member of one of the Eastern Catholic Churches, is to take place in the parish of the groom (CCEO, canon 831, §2). Permission may be sought by a delegate of the Bishop for this ceremony to take place in the parish and ritual tradition of the bride.

#### (3) MARRIAGE BETWEEN A CATHOLIC WITH A BAPTIZED CHRISTIAN:

The marriage of a Catholic with a baptized Christian who is not Catholic is to take place in the parish of the Catholic party (canon 1115). The pastor may permit the wedding to be held in another Catholic oratory (ex: a rectory chapel or convent chapel) within the parish boundaries (canon 1118, §1).

**Note:** The minister of the non-Catholic party may be invited to attend and to participate in the ceremony. However, the Catholic priest or deacon must be the one who asks for and receives the exchange of consent (*Rite of Marriage, #14, #17; canon 1108*). **Note:** When serious ecumenical or family reasons exist, the priest or deacon assisting the couple to prepare for marriage may petition from the local ordinary for a dispensation form, the canonical form of marriage in accord with canon 1127, §§2-3.<sup>7</sup> Such a dispensation may be granted only for serious reason and when the Catholic party has a genuine commitment to continue active practice of Catholicism.

#### (4) MARRIAGE BETWEEN A CATHOLIC AND A PERSON WHO IS NOT BAPTIZED:

The marriage of a Catholic with a person who is not baptized is to take place in the parish of the Catholic party (canon 1115). The pastor may permit the wedding to be held in another Catholic oratory (ex: a rectory chapel or convent chapel) within the parish boundaries (canon 1118, §1). **Note:** If the religious convictions of the non-baptized person or members of his or her family create difficulties for celebrating

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<sup>7</sup> When marrying in one of the Orthodox or other Christian churches of the east, Catholics are bound to the canonical form only for lawfulness, not for validity (canon 1127, §1; also see CCEO, canon 834§2). Nonetheless, a petition for dispensation from canonical form should be submitted for Catholic-Orthodox weddings.

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the wedding in the parish church or oratory, the priest or deacon preparing the couple may consult the Diocesan Bishop only to discuss the possibility of another “suitable place” (e.g. parish hall) in accord with the provisions of canon 1118, §3.

**Note:** The rabbi, clergy person or other recognized official of the non-Catholic party may be invited to attend and to participate in the ceremony. The “Rite for Celebrating Marriage between a Catholic and an Unbaptized Person” is to be used, and the Catholic priest or deacon must be the ones who asks for and receives the exchange of consent (*Rite of Marriage*, #14, #17, #55-66; canon 1108).

#### **(5) MEMBERS OF THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY:**

The priest or deacon should refer members of college communities to their appropriate campus ministry center, especially if the couple is not registered, does not attend the local church or is inactive in the practice of the faith. ‘*Faithful to Each Other Forever*’ (54) stresses the importance of close communication between parish and campus ministers and encourages efforts to preserve and support the couple’s links with the parish back home.

#### **(6) OUTDOOR WEDDING:**

The Diocese of Sacramento generally does not approve of outdoor weddings or any ceremony conducted in a setting other than that of the Catholic Church. Rarely are exceptions made and written permission must be granted by the Diocesan Bishop. The marriage ritual presumes that the parish church is the setting for the celebration of marriage, although it makes provision for a ceremony in “another appropriate place” when a Catholic marries a non-baptized person (*Rite of Marriage*, #55).

## **IV. MARRIAGE PREPARATION DOCUMENTS: Commonly Used Documents and Additional Permissions and Dispensations**

**Required Documents:**  
Prenuptial Witness Forms  
Baptismal Certificate  
Confirmation Certificate  
Petition for Dispensation from Disparity of Worship  
Record of Permission for Mixed Marriage  
Petition for Dispensation from Canonical Form  
Request for Testimonial Letters (Nihil Obstat)

### **A. Prenuptial Inquiry:**

The completion of the Prenuptial Inquiry (Form A) is required to establish freedom to marry and identify any impediments to the proposed marriage (*canons 1066-1067*), as well as to assure the Church that the bride and groom freely wish to marry one another at this time. It also explores the engaged couple’s understanding of the Catholic teaching on marriage.

The bride and groom must be interviewed separately by the priest or deacon. This is a confidential church document and should be kept in a secured file with other such documents.

### **B. Baptismal Certificate:**

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A Catholic Baptismal Certificate is needed to verify the fact of baptism and to facilitate the post-marital registration and notifications required by canon law (*canons 1121-1122*). This certificate is to be obtained from the parish of Baptism. A recent certificate with complete marginal notations (i.e. one issued in the last six months) is required. The reason the certificate must be current is that the marginal notations may reveal an impediment due to a prior valid bond, sacred orders or religious profession (*canons 1085, 1087, and 1088*).

#### **C. Confirmation Certificate:**

Catholics who have not yet received the Sacrament of Confirmation are to receive it before they are admitted to marriage if it can be done without grave inconvenience (*Canon 1065*). The parish issuing the current Baptismal Certificate should include the notations for First Eucharist and Confirmation. If this is done there is no need to secure a separate copy of the Certificate of Confirmation. This certificate is available from the parish of Confirmation.

#### **D. Prenuptial Witness Form (Letters of Freedom) "FORM B: Witness"**

Each party must provide two witnesses to attest to their freedom to marry. The Prenuptial Witness Form is to be used to: (1) Verify freedom to marry; (2) Investigate the attitude of both parents when a party is under twenty-one (21) years of age; (3) Investigate stability of the proposed marriage when either party is under eighteen (18) years of age; and (4) Assist in proving baptism, when a certificate is unavailable. Parental testimony is preferred and should only be omitted for grave reasons.

#### **E. Recorded Petition for Dispensation from Disparity of Worship**

Petition for Dispensation from Disparity of Worship is used to request authorization for a Catholic to marry a non-baptized person. It is also used when a Catholic marries a doubtfully baptized person, either because the fact of the baptism is doubtful or the validity of the baptism is in doubt. This form contains a statement by the Catholic party that he-she understands the expectations of the Church regarding continued practice of the faith and handing on the faith to the children of the marriage. The form also contains a statement by the other party that he-she is aware of the Catholic's obligations. Failure to obtain a dispensation from disp of worship renders a marriage invalid.

#### **F. Record of Permission for Mixed Marriage**

Record of Permission for Mixed Marriages is used when permission is needed for a Baptized Catholic to marry a person baptized in another Christian faith. This form contains a statement by the Catholic party that he/she understands the expectations of the Church regarding continued practice of the faith and handing on the faith to the children of the marriage. The form also contains a statement by the other party that he/she is aware of the Catholic's obligations.

#### **G. Petition for Dispensation from Canonical Form**

A petition for Dispensation from Canonical Form is used when a Catholic wishes to marry someone of another religious tradition in their place of worship and before the authorized minister of that religion (e.g. Catholic to Jew). A petition for Dispensation from Disparity of Worship or the granted Permission for Mixed Marriage is to be attached .

#### **H. Request for Testimonial Letters (Nihil Obstat)**

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Request for Testimonial Letters is used when the priest or deacon is mailing premarital documents to another diocese where the wedding will take place. The documents are reviewed and sealed by the delegate or the Diocesan Bishop, forwarded to the Chancery of other diocese, and then delivered to the parish where the marriage will take place. This procedure, with all pre-marital documents and permission of the pastor, assures the authenticity of the documents from diocese to diocese and their acceptance at the parish.

## **V. MARRIAGE LICENSE REQUIREMENTS**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Marriage License Requirements</b> Application Age of Marriage Proof of Age Divorce/Annulment Divorced &amp; Widowed Application</p>
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### **A. Application**

In the State of California, you may apply for a marriage license at any county clerk office. These offices, within the twenty counties of our diocese, are usually located in the county probate court or circuit court. The marriage license fee is \$50.00 to \$80.00 dollars. Your marriage license will expire ninety (90) days from the date it is issued. Accepted forms of payment are cash. It is recommended that you call the office and set up an appointment to obtain your marriage license. This saves time and walk-ins may wait as long as two hours to obtain a license.

### **B. Age of Marriage**

A man must be at least sixteen (16) years of age, and a woman at least fourteen (14)<sup>8</sup> in order to validly contract marriage. Although the level of maturity rather than the chronological age is the issue, as a general rule, the Diocese of Sacramento requires that a professional evaluation by a competent, certified counselor or psychologist be administered to a couple (or a party) under the age of twenty (20). You may contact the Department of Catholic Faith Formation at (916) 733-0123 for a referral list. The Catholic Church cannot forbid marriage under the age of twenty, however, the Church can place special requirements and conditions on those who seek marriage preparation sessions. Due to the ethnic diversity of the diocese, all church ministers need to consider the cultural influences, mores and traditions which may enhance readiness and maturity and which may assist a married couple to have a stable marriage. A couple whose marriage preparation is delayed by the pastor or deacon should not be encouraged to look for the easiest and least painful way of getting married in the Church. Further information on concerns about the couple's readiness for marriage is further elaborated on in 'Faithful to Each Other Forever' (pp. 60-63).

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<sup>8</sup> Code of Canon Law, 1072

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### **C. Proof of Age**

A valid California I.D. driver's license, passport or alien resident card must be presented as proof of age. A certified birth certificate of baptismal record and a picture form of identification issued by a government agency will also be accepted for that purpose. Documents must be in English. If the document is in another language, it must be accompanied by a certified English translation. Documentation which has expired is not acceptable. California state law requires you must be eighteen (18) years old or older to marry without parental consent. A birth certificate may be necessary to show proof of age. If either partner is under eighteen (18), one parent or legal guardian must be present. If a parent cannot be present, due to death, separation, divorce or other circumstances, proper evidence must be presented for verification. You will need a certified copy of your birth certificate. The couple must schedule an appointment with a counselor and then appear before a superior court judge. When one or both of the applicants are under the age of eighteen (18), special requirements must be met before a regular marriage license can be issued. Please ask for the "Minor Marriage Information" packet from the clerk's office.

### **D. Civil Divorce/Civil Annulment**

In applying for the marriage license, all persons previously married must present a copy of the civil divorce or civil annulment decrees if the event occurred within two years.

### **E. Divorced and Widowed Application**

If previously married, the date of divorce or date of spouse's death must be provided. If the divorce or spouse's death had taken place within the last ninety (90) days, bring a certified copy of the divorce decree or death certificate. A copy of your divorce records or spouse's death certificate can be ordered online.

## **VI. ASSESSMENT AND ASPECTS OF READINESS FOR MARRIAGE**

Canon law states that ordained ministers may not refuse the Sacrament to those who ask for them under suitable circumstances, who are properly disposed, and who are not prohibited by law from receiving them (canon 843, §1). At the same time, ministers have the duty to see to it that those who seek the Sacraments are prepared to receive them (canon 843, §2). The canons on Marriage further state that all persons are able to contract marriage unless they are prohibited by law (canon 1058). Before a marriage is celebrated, it must be evident that nothing prevents its valid or licit celebration (canon 1066).

There are several purposes of the Marriage Assessment Process: (1) to discern if any impediment or obstacles exists that would prevent a valid or licit celebration; (2) to the extent possible, assist in overcoming any such impediments or obstacles; and (3) to begin the process of preparing the couple for the Sacrament of Matrimony.

The pastor or his delegate are encouraged to facilitate and complete the assessment process within the first month after his initial contact with the engaged couple. Given the circumstances, one of the first facts to ascertain is if there are any previous marriages. These must be addressed before any re-marriage begins. A decision to proceed with or delay the wedding is made by the priest or deacon with the couple following the assessment process. The wedding date is finalized only at this time, after the decision to proceed has been made.

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If a couple is asked to delay their wedding, whether it be for one or more of the special circumstances outlined in these guidelines or for any other serious reason(s), it is the responsibility of the pastor or his delegate working with them to help find a way to overcome the impediments or other obstacles if it is at all possible.

This area surveys the four dimensions of the Diocesan Marriage Preparation Program: (1) the engaged couple interview with the priest, deacon, or pastoral minister; (2) the use of approved premarital assessment or inventory to facilitate dialogue between the couple and between the couple and the priest, deacon or pastoral minister; (3) the formal marriage preparation program; and, (4) the participation of the couple in the overview session of the Natural Family Planning seminars. These four dimensions are described below.

#### **A. ENGAGED COUPLE INTERVIEW:**

When a request is made to schedule a wedding, the pastor or his delegate first arrange an appointment to meet with the engaged couple. The assessment process begins with the initial contact between the priest or deacon and the engaged couple. To evaluate the readiness of the couple to be married in the Catholic Church, the priest or deacon will interview the couple sufficiently so that he becomes acquainted with them.

In the recommended ecclesial approach, a marriage preparation ministry team or wedding coordinator could be utilized to assist the priest or deacon with the third and fourth meetings. Sponsorship couples or other team members can also assist with any additional preparation, such as facilitating the approved instrument (ex: Prepare Enrich, PMI, or FOCCUS), teaching NFP classes, etc.

Discussion points may include: any previous marriages, individual maturity, faith experience, suitability as a couple, current religious practices, and views on Christian marriage. The goals of this initial interview include:

- Establishing a good rapport with the couple that will facilitate the rest of the preparation process
- Reinforce the sacred nature of marriage for the couple
- Emphasize the focus of preparation process on the whole of married life, not just the ceremony
- Identify any special circumstance that need to be addressed during the preparation process

#### **B. PREMARITAL ASSESSMENT OR INVENTORY:**

The use of approved marriage preparation instruments or inventories is required of the couple because they help facilitate the crucial dialogue through which the couple explores the significant issues that affect marriage. Further, they allow the priest, deacon, or pastoral minister to tailor marriage preparation to the couple's specific strengths and weaknesses. Finally, the use of the instruments can support the effectiveness of the couple's experience in the formal educational programs which are the third requirement in the marriage preparation program. Because the instruments support the overall purpose of marriage preparation, they should be administered and the date compiled as early as possible in the couple's interaction with the priest, deacon, or pastoral minister. The instruments approved for use in the Catholic Diocese of Sacramento are: FOCCUS, PREPARE/ENRICH, and PMI.

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### **FOCCUS:**

[www.foccusinc.com](http://www.foccusinc.com)  
[focus@foccusinc.com](mailto:focus@foccusinc.com)  
877-883-5422

### **Prepare/Enrich**

[www.prepare-enrich.com](http://www.prepare-enrich.com)  
[cs@lifeinnovations.com](mailto:cs@lifeinnovations.com)  
800-331-1661

### **PMI:**

[www.intercompub.com](http://www.intercompub.com)  
[sales@intercompub.com](mailto:sales@intercompub.com)  
800-999-0680

### **C. FORMAL MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM:**

**Formal Marriage Preparation Programs include:**

Regular Marriage Preparation Conferences  
Engaged Encounter Weekends  
Evenings for the Engaged  
Convalidation Marriage Preparation Conferences  
Remarriage Preparation Conferences (NOVA)  
Natural Family Planning Sessions

All couples wishing to be married in the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Sacramento must participate in a formal diocesan-approved marriage preparation program. This is to be completed during the first four months of the preparation. Since the last months prior to the date of the wedding are filled with so many practical details, it is important that quality time be spent early on by the engaged couple in the process of preparing themselves for the Sacrament of Matrimony.

No couple should be turned away from a marriage preparation program because of the inability to pay, and care must be taken not to discourage couples who may be in special circumstances.

While it is possible that couples who are insecure financially may not be ready to take on the responsibilities that marriage requires, the priest, deacon, or pastoral coordinator can use this opportunity to bring financial priorities, including considerations about the wedding budget, to the attention of the couple.

There are different types of marriage preparation programs available to engaged couples in the Diocese of Sacramento. The pastor or his delegate is responsible for discussing with the engaged couple the program that best meets the criteria of the couple. Listed below are descriptions of these programs:

#### **1. ENGAGED ENCOUNTER WEEKEND:**

This is a weekend experience presented by two married Catholic couples and a priest. It is designated to stimulate the engaged couples to reflect on self-knowledge, communication, sexuality, etc. The main

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thrust of the weekend is personal reflection and dialogue. It may take place at a retreat center-overnight experience, or at a parish-commuter experience. ([Http://SacEE.org](http://SacEE.org) or [www.engagedencounter.org](http://www.engagedencounter.org))

#### **2. EVENINGS FOR THE ENGAGED:**

This experience is a parish-based, six to seven week program highlighting Matrimony as a vocation to love. The process is usually carried out by leader couples in their homes. Topics include: Marriage Together, Communication, Images of God and Married Love, Sexual Expression of Married Love, Sacrament of Matrimony and the Journey Ahead. (Sadlier Publishing Co., 800-221-5175, [www.sadlier.com](http://www.sadlier.com))

#### **3. REGULAR MARRIAGE PREPARATION CONFERENCES:**

These one-day, two day or evening sessions are recommended for engaged couples who are being married for the first time. Engaged couples who attend these sessions have not been married previously to each other civilly nor have they been previously married to another party. The diocesan one day conference has traditionally been called "Pre-Cana" and incorporates the Archdiocese of Chicago, 'Marriage in the Lord' program ([www.familyministries.org](http://www.familyministries.org); 312-751-8201). A number of parishes have also designated and initiated their own programs that are tailored to the needs of the community.

#### **4. CONVALIDATION MARRIAGE PREPARATION CONFERENCES:**

These sessions are for couples who "have been married previously in a civil ceremony" and are now making a commitment in the sight of the Catholic community to enter into a conventional relationship, not just with each other, but also with God, God's people, and the Church. These couples have been married anywhere from a few months to many years and may already have children. This type of preparation can also be beneficial for the couples who have lived together for an extended period of time. This conference incorporates the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, 'Picture of Love' program ([www.morehousegroup.com](http://www.morehousegroup.com)).

#### **5. REMARRIAGE PREPARATION CONFERENCES**

This preparation session is designed to assist couples who are sacramentally ready to engage in a subsequent marriage within the Catholic Church. By sharing personal stories and describing the practical elements of a sound Christian marriage, the goal is to inspire engaged couples to discover God's presence in their commitment to each other and to other involved family members. This conference incorporates the Diocese of Erie, 'Remarriage in the Church' program ([www.erieRCD.org](http://www.erieRCD.org)).

#### **6. NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING**

**The Natural Family Planning Component is to be a full  
one hour of information & discussion provided by a  
trained instructor.  
A certificate of completion must be submitted.**

In Natural Family Planning, the couple understands, accepts, and uses their God-given phases of fertility and infertility for the purpose of achieving or avoiding pregnancy. In this way, the unitive and procreative, the love and life meanings of sexual intercourse are maintained together in a responsible way (*Familiaris Consortio*, Nos. 11, 32).

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The Natural Family Planning component for Marriage Preparation is to be a full one hour of information and discussion provided by an individual or couple with specific training and expertise in natural family planning. A certificate of completion must be submitted to the pastor or his delegate (refer to appendix).

Ideally, every parish (or cluster) should have its own certified NFP instructor or teaching couple. With a unified effort on the part of deans, pastors and the lay faithful to promote NFP, this is an achievable requirement. However, in the event that there is not such an instructor available, then the marriage preparation program will obtain and present to their couples the diocesan-approved “*Introduction to Natural Family Planning*” video or DVD available through the Diocesan NFP Coordinator (916-733-0140).

The NFP video can be used in one of two ways. First, viewing the video can be incorporated into one of the regular meetings that you have with the couple. Secondly, engaged couples can be gathered for a group viewing of the video and the pastor (or his delegate) can lead the sharing and answer questions.

It is strongly recommended that the pastor or his delegate encourage the couple to pursue further training.

At the very least, contact the Diocesan NFP Coordinator for a complete list of NFP instructors in your area. For additional resource information, you may contact *Mercy Women’s Center* at (916) 733-6300; the *California Association of Natural Family Planning* at [www.canfp.org](http://www.canfp.org), the *Couple to Couple League* at 800-745-8252, [www.ccli.org](http://www.ccli.org); *Northwest Family Services* at 503-215-6377, [www.nwfs.org](http://www.nwfs.org); *Family of the Americas Foundation* at 800-443-2279, [www.familyplanning.net](http://www.familyplanning.net), *Billings Ovulation Method* at [www.woomb.org](http://www.woomb.org); and *Pope Paul VI Institute* at 402-390-9168, [www.popepaulvi.com](http://www.popepaulvi.com). For further information and extensive bibliographical resources, refer to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website at [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org).

## **VII. WEDDING LITURGY**

### **A. Introduction:**

Liturgy, the public prayer of the Church, is by its very nature communal. Catholic weddings, therefore, are celebrations of the whole Church, as well as of the individual couple, and are thus governed by the principles and directives of the Church as is any other liturgical celebration. A given parish’s celebration of Sunday Eucharist should be looked to as the model for celebrating a wedding or indeed any other Sacrament in that community. “Since the parish church is the spiritual home of the family of God and the heart of sacramental life and ministry, Catholics are expected to marry in the parish church of either the bride or the groom or in some other church.

Marriages are not to be celebrated outside a church or oratory in the Diocese of Sacramento except in exceptional circumstances and with the permission of the Diocesan Bishop.” [Diocese of Sacramento, Diocesan Statutes]

It is important that the parish or Newman Community and the couple recognize the relationship that they share, The couple preparing for marriage should be given thorough catechesis on the rite, prayers, and scripture readings, in order that they might receive the greatest possible benefit from the celebration of the Sacrament (see the *Rite of Marriage*, #5).

It is also important for the couple to understand that while the Wedding Liturgy is the most important element in the celebration of their Marriage, it is not the only opportunity for them to express certain

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things about themselves and their relationship. The Wedding Liturgy is the celebration of a Sacrament, and is therefore above all else an encounter with Jesus Christ, in the presence of his Body, the Church. Therefore, it is most appropriate to focus on the true nature of the experience, and reserve more personal and individual expressions for the wedding reception or other celebrations with friends and family. Goals are:

- To encourage the participation of the assembly in the Wedding Liturgy
- To express the faith commitment of the couple and of the assembly
- To pray as a faith community for the couple, thereby offering them promise of support in their married life.

### **B. Ministries of the Liturgy:**

Within each liturgical celebration there are a variety of ministries (servers, reader, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, etc). Some roles can only be filled by a Roman Catholic minister (e.g., ordinary or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion); however, other ministries (e.g., reader) can be fulfilled by qualified persons of other faith traditions. Sometimes there is a desire to include the participation of a clergy person from another faith tradition in a wedding celebration; it is possible to do this in certain limited ways, but it must always be perfectly clear that the reception of the consent and the exchange of vows is heard by the presiding Catholic clergy member. The priest or deacon assisting the couple to prepare that Wedding Liturgy can give additional information.

The Wedding Liturgy is for all present an opportunity for an encounter with God in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. The signs, symbols, words and actions of the liturgy are the means by which this encounter is brought about. Therefore, any person selected to perform a role in the wedding must have the experience, skills, and spiritual gifts necessary to fulfill the ministry in a way that will facilitate a truly spiritual experience for all. The desire to honor a friend or family member by giving them a “part” in the liturgy is insufficient cause to assign them a liturgical role, unless they possess the appropriate qualifications.

The couple should not feel any pressure to provide individuals to fulfill liturgical roles, if such are not readily available to them. The parish or Newman Community should be prepared to provide ministers from among those who regularly serve that community. Likewise, all ministries in the Wedding Liturgy should never be assumed by any one person, such as the priest or deacon.

The assembly too has a ministerial role to perform at the Wedding Liturgy and every attempt should be made to encourage their participation to the fullest extent possible.

### **C. The Rite:**

The Church provides three different rites for marriage:

- A sacramental rite during the Eucharist, which is the usual, but not mandatory, form when both parties are Catholic;
- A sacramental rite outside the Eucharist, which is the usual, but not mandatory, form when one party is baptized but not Roman Catholic; and
- A non-sacramental rite between a Catholic and an unbaptized person

There are certain days in the year on which the Nuptial Mass is not permitted; on some of these days the Marriage Rite may be celebrated within a Mass of the Day, or outside of Mass. In these circumstances, the selection of available readings is affected as well. The priest or deacon officiating at the wedding should help the couple to be aware of such considerations.

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### **D. Entrance Rite:**

The procession may include the liturgical ministers and the presider, as well as the bride and groom, family members, and attendants. There are many ways to plan the entrance rite (e.g., a procession of the ministers followed by the procession of the wedding party, the wedding party included in the liturgical procession, attendants entering as couples rather than bridesmaids alone, incorporation of parents and grandparents with the bride and groom, and even the bride and groom entering as a couple with the rest of the wedding party), and each couple should discuss with their officiant the practices of that parish and what will be most expressive of their own understanding of the liturgy they are about to celebrate.

The couple should be able to participate fully along with the entire assembly in the complete Wedding Liturgy, and therefore should be able to adopt the same postures as the assembly; e.g., sitting during the Liturgy of the Word, kneeling during the Eucharistic prayer, etc. The custom in some places of the couple either kneeling or standing throughout the entire liturgy is not appropriate.

### **E. Liturgy of the Word:**

Readings may be selected from the many options given in the *Revised Lectionary for Mass* for the *Ritual Mass of Marriage* or from other appropriate Scripture. Non-scriptural readings are absolutely not permitted as part of the Wedding Liturgy. Care is to be taken that the readings selected follow precisely the same form as that found in the Revised Lectionary; no other translation is allowed for use at Liturgies in the United States.

The Psalm is normally to be sung, following the familiar format of refrain and verses found in the Lectionary, and allowing for the participation of the assembly in the singing of the refrain. Likewise the Alleluia (or in Lent one of the alternative acclamations) with an appropriate Gospel verse is to be sung by all.

The General Intercessions are to include prayers for the Church, civil society, those in special need, and the sick and the dying, as well as prayers more specific to the individual couple, their family and friends.

### **F. The Rite of Marriage:**

The Ritual for Marriage includes alternate forms for the giving of consent, the exchange of vows, and the blessing and exchange of rings. While it is ultimately up to the presiding minister to determine which form will be employed, he may wish to discuss with the couple which speaks most clearly and richly to them.

Often cultural expressions are included in the Rite of Marriage, such as the lasso, the coins, or other symbols. The use of these items is welcomed if they truly hold meaning for the couple being married. Their use, if included, should be carefully planned for, and if they may not be familiar to all present, it might be appropriate for the officiant to offer some words of explanation with regard to the meanings they symbolize.

### **G. Liturgy of the Eucharist:**

The priest and/or deacon is the Ordinary Minister of Holy Communion at the Wedding Mass as at any other time; he may be assisted if necessary by trained and approved Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion; in some parishes it might be a good idea if the Wedding Coordinator is trained as an

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Extraordinary Minister to assist when needed. The couple should not serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion at their Wedding Mass.

The reception of Holy Communion at the Wedding Mass is limited to those Catholics who are prepared to receive; it is not possible under present circumstances for non-Catholics to participate in the reception of Holy Communion. It is recommended that the statement of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on reception of the Holy Eucharist be printed in the worship program; a condensed version may be used. Alternatively, if there is any concern that there may be some confusion among those present for the wedding, the presiding priest should kindly and respectfully give a brief explanation of who may receive the Eucharist.

#### **H. Music:**

The parish, through its music ministry, is to be prepared to offer assistance with the preparation and presentation of music for the Wedding Liturgy. All music associated with any Liturgy of the Church is to be appropriate, sacred, and of a liturgical nature. Secular or popular music is not to be admitted, either during or before the celebration. Those parts of the liturgy which are sung should provide the opportunity for participation by the entire assembly. As mentioned above, the parish's Sunday Eucharist is generally the best model for planning the music for the Wedding Liturgy. Couples are to be aware that all music for the wedding is subject to approval by the pastor or those to whom he has entrusted this responsibility.

#### **I. Music Ministers:**

It is the responsibility of parish music ministers to assist couples in the planning and preparation of the music for their wedding. In most places, it will be the policy of the parish or Newman Community that the music for the wedding be provided by their own musicians or musicians with whom they have made arrangements; policies will vary from place to place, and the couple is to ascertain at an early stage what the parish's expectations are, and to abide by the policies with which they are presented.

The participation of a qualified cantor/song leader from the parish can do a great deal to foster the musical participation of the assembly, and is encouraged.

#### **J. Worship Aids:**

In order to encourage the participation of the assembly in the Wedding Liturgy, it is helpful to provide a worship aid of some kind. It may be possible to use whichever hymnal or resource is already in the pews of the parish church, or the couple may wish to arrange to have a special worship program produced, including music that will be sung and other prayers and responses. When such a booklet is produced, it is necessary to obtain copyright permissions for musical selections, and to include proper copyright notices; the parish music minister should be prepared to advise the couple on this issue.

#### **K. Environment:**

The environment for the wedding should take into consideration the particular liturgical season in which the wedding will occur, as well as cultural considerations. For example, while the Church permits marriages during Lent, specific mention is made that the Wedding Liturgy is to reflect the unique nature of this time of the Liturgical Year.

Quality and appropriateness should always be the primary consideration when planning the liturgical environment. The arrangement of flowers, kneelers, candelabra, and other decorations must neither obscure the view of the assembly nor inhibit their participation, nor should it restrict movement within the

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sanctuary.

No item is ever placed upon the Altar of the church except those specifically needed for the celebration of the Eucharist.

The policies of each individual church are to be respected by all preparing the Wedding Liturgy, including florists and photographers or videographers, and any outside wedding coordinator that may be involved. The parish in turn is expected to articulate clearly such policies and to enforce them in a uniform manner.

It is always a good idea for the couple to discuss with the parish what the specific environment will be in the church at the time of their wedding; for example, during Advent will there be an Advent wreath, and where will it be located? Will there be Christmas trees or a crèche during Christmas Season? Where will the Paschal Candle be during Easter? Will there be a large amount of red decoration for Pentecost? Generally, these items cannot and may not be moved to accommodate the wedding decorations, so it is best to know ahead of time what to expect.

### **L. Parish and Newman Community Policies:**

Parish and Newman Community policies for wedding liturgies are extremely helpful to all, and are strongly encouraged. They are always to be presented in a positive, welcoming, and hospitable tone. Written policies or guidelines which state clearly what is allowed or not allowed in the celebration can assist the couple in making initial preparations; such policies typically cover the areas of music, environment, and photography.

Marriage policies of the parish or Newman Community should be made readily available to all interested parties, perhaps by posting on the parish website. A clear understanding at the beginning can help avoid disappointment, frustration, and sometimes even expense down the road. Written policies or guidelines also maintain consistency as the couple consults with various parish representatives (clergy, musicians, wedding coordinator, environment ministers, etc.).

**Note:** While policies or guidelines may be particular for each parish or Newman Community, they cannot impose restrictions or requirements which are contrary to those found in the general law of the Church or Diocesan policies.

## **VIII. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

### **A. Marriage of non-practicing Catholics**

In the case of non-practicing Catholics who request to be married in the Diocese of Sacramento, the pastor or his delegate needs to ask the couple to articulate clearly the reasons for their request. While the Church does admit to the sacrament those who are imperfectly disposed, mere social convention, parental pressure, or preference for setting provide no justification for marriage in the Catholic Church. Thus, the pastor has an obligation to officiate only at those weddings where faith has been personally appropriated by the couple, even if that faith is imperfect.

It is proper to expect that couples attend Mass regularly and are in the state of grace, particularly at the time of the celebration of marriage. If they are not attending Mass regularly, they should be warmly invited to do so. They should also be offered further instruction in the life of faith beyond what is required by the policies set forth in the norms. Whether and how couples are approached in this regard can mean the difference between continued alienation from the Church or renewed involvement.

### **B. Marriage of Minors (Canon 1071, §6)**

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The Code of Canon Law states that without special permission of the local ordinary, no one is to assist at a marriage of a minor (a person under the age of eighteen (18) when the parents or guardians are unaware of the marriage or are opposed to it for reasonable cause.

Because sacramental marriage is a lifelong commitment, the Diocese of Sacramento has a responsibility to ensure that engaged couples understand its sacred nature. Many teenagers are not sufficiently mature to bear successfully the obligations and responsibilities of marriage in our society today (*canon*

1072). Age clearly does not guarantee maturity, but time is required for a person to achieve the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual development and balance necessary to make the commitment to married life. Clear evidence of immaturity, particularly when reinforced by parental opposition, demands that the parish coordinator counsel the couple to delay their marriage. The pastor and his delegates are challenged to demonstrate utmost respect and sensitivity.

### **C. Pregnancy**

In the case of pregnancy, a request for marriage in the Diocese of Sacramento will only be considered following completion of recommended counseling, and (if either person is under eighteen years of age) consultation with the parents/guardians of both parties. In any case, the couple should be strongly advised to delay the wedding until *after* the birth of the child.

Premarital pregnancy, although it understandably creates a sense of urgency in the minds of the couples and their parents, constitutes of itself adequate justification neither for marriage nor for abbreviation of the marriage preparation process. Statistics indicate that the majority of marriage involving a premarital pregnancy end in divorce.

Factors that need to be considered include the couple's maturity and readiness for marriage, their freedom from parental and social pressure, capacity to manage the financial responsibilities of a family, and the possibility of adoption. A premarital inventory is valuable in assessing the maturity of young couples in these difficult circumstances. In many cases, pastors and their delegates find it appropriate to recommend counseling. Parents and guardians should be invited to participate in the discernment process in order to assist the couple evaluate their motivation and readiness for marriage. Regardless of the ultimate decision, both parents must be strongly advised of their continued moral responsibility to each other and their child.

### **D. Marriage after a Previous Union**

Particular pastoral concern is required to meet the special needs of couples requesting sacramental marriage in the Diocese of Sacramento following a previous union. The pastor must be careful to ascertain that both parties are canonically free to marry *before* proceeding with the marriage preparation, and that all responsibilities towards children of the previous union have been satisfied (*canon 1071, §1, 3*). Marriage preparation may not begin, nor a date be set for a future marriage until *after* these obligations have been satisfactorily discharged. In the case of a proposed marriage following the death of a spouse, care should be taken that the person has recovered from the grief of separation.

The Church desires to strengthen the faith and devotion of divorced and remarried Catholics, particularly when they have endured painful personal experiences that increase their desire for unity with the Church community. *"Towards Christians who live in this situation, and who often keep the faith and desire to bring up their children in a Christian manner, clergy and the whole community must manifest an attentive*

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*solicitude, so that they do not consider themselves separated from the Church, in whose life they can and must participate as baptized persons.*<sup>9</sup>

### **E. Marriage of the Disabled**

Catholics with disabilities have the right to participate in the sacraments as full functioning members of the local ecclesial community. *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* (NCCB) stresses the importance of all the sacraments and provides general catechetical guidelines for celebrating the sacraments with persons with a variety of disabilities.<sup>10</sup>

All forms of the liturgy should be completely accessible to persons with disabilities, since these forms are the essence of the spiritual tie that binds the Christian community together.<sup>11</sup>

The pastor and his delegates must demonstrate particular care and sensitivity when a disabled person requests marriage in the Diocese of Sacramento. Each situation must be assessed individually and a determination made only after consultation with both family and professionals who can assess the person's level of independence and his or her ability to make a permanent commitment...

*For matrimonial consent to be valid, it is necessary that the contracting parties possess a sufficient use of reason; that they be free of any grave lack of discretion affecting their judgment about the rights and duties to which they are committing themselves; and that they be capable of assuming the essential obligations of the married state (canon 1095). It is also necessary that the parties understand that marriage is a permanent union and is ordered to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children (canon 1096).*

### **F. Marriage of the Deaf**

Catholics who are deaf are to be offered the opportunity to express their matrimonial consent in sign language, if sign language is their primary means of communication (*canon 1104, §2*). Marriage may also be contracted through a sign language interpreter who is known to the pastor or diocesan office (*canon 1106*).

### **G. Marriage of Older Couples**

Special consideration should be given during the process of marriage preparation to engaged couples over the age of thirty-five (35) when both persons are requesting marriage for the first time. The pastor or his delegate is to invite them to proceed with the normal marriage preparation process, but offer whatever modifications may be appropriate to address their specific needs. Older couples, by virtue of their longer and richer life experiences, have different needs than the majority of engaged couples who enter marriage at a younger age. During the preparation period, the pastor or his delegate should evaluate their emotional stability, capacity to enter a permanent and exclusive relationship, and ability to relinquish their prior financial and social independence. It must never be assumed that a couple is ready for marriage in the Church simply because they are older.

### **H. Convalidation**

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<sup>9</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1651

<sup>10</sup> Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, n.367

<sup>11</sup> National Directory for Catechesis, 3b-3, p.130.

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When a Catholic party(ies) has already exchanged vows in a civil ceremony outside the Catholic Church and seeks to regularize their union within the Church, the priest or deacon needs to make an assessment of what is motivating the request. In the case of a couple who marries contrary to the laws of the Church, convalidation is permitted after the couple has completed the preparation steps of these guidelines. A convalidation is not simply the renewal of the consent previously exchanged in another setting, but the exchange of genuine consent and the creation of a true marriage. It is important to note that a convalidation is not simply a “blessing” of an invalid union. It is a commitment and an exchange of vows in the sight of the Christian community. It calls for a full and complete preparation and one that takes into consideration the different needs for a couple in this circumstance.

If the invalid marriage has taken place recently, the priest or deacon will want to determine the motivation of the couple to get married in the Church at this time. Possible concerns to address are whether the couple married “out of the Church” because another priest wanted to delay their marriage, or if there is pressure from the family to get married in the Church now. The marital relationship will need to be assessed and determined by the couple’s needs and experience, and determination made about the reasons why they desire to have their union validated. The priest or deacon needs to discover whether a good appreciation of the sacramental dimensions of Christian marriage is present. If the marriage is already of long duration and seems to be stable, it is unlikely that detailed personal instruction or counseling will be needed. What is needed is a proper understanding, emphasizing the new sacramental dimension of the union. However, in addition to personal meetings with the priest or deacon, formal preparation is still expected. Here are some common questions and answers:

- Q.** What is the procedure if the previous marriage was a Catholic wedding or a non-Catholic wedding with special dispensation to be married before someone other than an ordained Catholic clergyman or a marriage between two non-Catholics?
- A.** The tribunal process in these circumstances is termed a “formal case.” It is more complex than the “lack of form” case mentioned above because it examines what happened in the marriage. The procedure takes approximately eighteen months. In this type of case, the Church researches not merely the location of a wedding, but also the relationship between spouses before and during the marriage. **In the United States, a person may start this process only after obtaining a divorce under civil law.** The petitioning individual then works through an extensive, printed inquiry that explores the childhood of both persons, their courtship, the early years of marriage and what the petitioner considers the major cause of the marital breakup. The petitioner will need to secure official documents: proof of Baptism, if pertinent; a marriage record and the divorce decree. In addition, names and addresses must be provided of the former spouse as well as witnesses who can share their observations and experiences of the courtship and marriage. The petitioner’s ex-spouse is known as “the respondent” and has the right to give testimony. Once all the materials have been assembled, the diocesan tribunal examines the case.

Usually, the petitioner is interviewed, and the counsel of a psychologist or therapist can be requested. The initial judgment is then sent to a different tribunal for confirmation. If both tribunals agree that there are sufficient grounds for nullity, the diocesan tribunal communicates a declaration of nullity to the petitioner. Respondents who are interested and who have cooperated in the process are also notified about the declaration of nullity.

- Q.** Does a declaration of nullity make the children illegitimate?
- A.** No. The parents, now divorced, presumably once obtained a civil license and entered upon a legal marriage. Children from that union are, therefore, their legitimate offspring. Legitimate, in

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this sense, means “legal”. The civil divorce and the Church process do not alter this situation; they do not change the parents’ responsibility toward the children. In fact, during tribunal procedures the Church reminds petitioners of their moral obligation to provide for the proper upbringing of their children.

- Q.** Are their particular grounds for nullity in failed marriages?
- A.** The most common reasons is a grave lack of due discretion, because of some factor such as young age or pressure to marry in haste). Other reasons include psychological incapacity and the absence of a proper intention to have children, be faithful or remain together until death. <sup>12</sup>

### **I. Causes for Denial or Delay of Marriage**

Although people have a natural right to marry, a priest or deacon is not to witness a marriage unless he is morally certain that nothing impedes its valid and licit celebration. As Pope John Paul II wrote, “... *when in spite of all efforts engaged couples show that they reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls cannot admit them to the celebration of marriage.*” <sup>13</sup>

This decision is not to be arrived at lightly but must come after prayer and through consideration of the problems involved. The decision to delay should be a joint pastoral decision, made by the priest or deacon and the couple with the good of the couple in mind. As a minister, a priest or deacon *cannot* recommend a civil union when the sacrament has been delayed or refused.

The following is a list of situations which may call either for delaying or refusing a marriage. This list is not exhaustive:<sup>14</sup>

- Refusal to cooperate with the preparation process or to participate in good faith. In this case, marriage must be delayed.
- A radical lack of physical, emotional, spiritual or psychological maturity required for marriage. In this case, marriage must be refused.
- Non-practice of the faith by the Catholic party or parties, with no reasonable hope of resuming such practice. In such a case, the marriage is to be delayed until there is some indication of intent to practice the faith.
- Declaration of intention to deny the other party’s right to a permanent union and to exclusiveness. Until such understanding and exclusiveness is attained, the marriage must be delayed. If, after all attempts to encourage the person to accept this teaching have failed, the priest or deacon must refuse the marriage, since such an intention constitute a grave lack of proper matrimonial consent.
- Refusal to have children. By its very nature, marriage is “ordained towards the begetting and education of children.”<sup>15</sup> If the questions on the Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form concerning

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<sup>12</sup> St. Anthony Messenger Press, *Bringing Your Marriage Into the Church: Convalidation of Civil Marriages*. By Msgr. Joseph M. Champlin, June, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, n.68

<sup>14</sup> The Archdiocese of Washington D.C.

<sup>15</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (12-7-65)

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children is answered negatively by one or both of the parties, the marriage is to be delayed until the couple agrees to be open to the possibility of children.

- Existence of a canonical impediment (until dispensed). If no dispensation is possible, the marriage must be refused.
- Marriage in the Catholic faith only to satisfy parents or due to parental pressure or simply for appearance's sake. In such a case, marriage is to be delayed until the couple demonstrates a more substantive motivation for marriage in the Church.
- Indifference or disdain for the Catholic instruction of their children. In such a case, marriage is to be delayed until this attitude has been corrected.

### **J. Cohabiting Engaged Couples**

Canon Law does not cite cohabitation as a formal impediment to the sacrament of Matrimony. However, this does not negate the priest to deacon's responsibility from *canon 1063* to assist the couple through "personal preparation for entering marriage, so that through such preparation the parties may be predisposed toward the holiness and duties of their new state."

Cohabitation is of great concern to pastoral leaders throughout the United States. This is particularly true in the framework of the marriage preparation, as an ever increasing number of cohabiting couples come to the Church to be married. These couples need to be affirmed for their willingness to take this step.

However, the priest or deacon is cautioned to assess carefully the motives of both persons, their readiness for marriage, especially its call to fidelity, and their intent on making this a lifelong commitment.

It has been the constant teaching of Christ and the Catholic Church that sexual intimacy belongs exclusively in marriage. Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation on the Family states, "*The gift of the body in the sexual relationship is a real symbol of the giving of the whole person.*" For the couple to engage in sexual intercourse outside of marriage without making a formal, public and permanent commitment of their whole lives to each other is to trivialize its sacredness. The Church, therefore, rejects cohabitation and calls on couples to follow Christ's teaching.

Canon 1055§2 states: "*The intimate partnership of life and love which constitutes the married state...is rooted in the contract of partners, i.e. in their irrevocable consent,*" a quality that is not found in a cohabiting relationship. Despite negative statistics about cohabitation, most of the engaged couples coming to the Church to be married have grown up in a culture that accepts and even condones this lifestyle. The fact that many of them are also "unchurched" makes their preparation for the Sacrament of Matrimony even more problematic because when they come to the Catholic Church asking to be married, they see no reason why they should be treated differently than any other engaged couple.

Good pastoral practice requires that the uniqueness of each individual be taken into consideration. Each cohabiting couple requires specialized care depending on their relationship to God and the teaching of the Church as well as to each other and this means increased attention during marriage preparation time. Any pastoral approach is meant for the couple's welfare and not just as bureaucratic barriers that must be negotiated on the way to the altar. **The couple are not to cohabit during the time of preparation and refrain from having sex in order to focus on other aspects of their relationship.** It may also be advisable to temporarily postpone the marriage, if it is in the best interest of the couple.

### ***Marriage Preparation Policy***

Sincere hospitality, concern and encouragement are key elements in assisting these couples to realize the Catholic Church cares about them. In general terms, there are four main pastoral goals:

- (1) Charity, patience, and understanding- not merely because what the Church teaches about marriage and sexuality, but more importantly, why she teaches it.
- (2) Challenge couples charitably, gently, yet directly to stop having sexual relations until they can be an honest expression of their marriage commitment.
- (3) Assist the couple reflects on their situation and why they decided to cohabit and/or engage in sexual relations, providing them with tools to address various practical factors that put them at risk for later marital difficulties.
- (4) Help the couple heal from the spiritual and emotional wounds they have inflicted upon themselves through their behavior, which, if not properly addressed, will inevitably have a deleterious effect on their marriage. This includes not only their present relationship, but also previous sexually active relationships.

After the priest or deacon has asked the couple to consider a chaste, separate living and given them sufficient time to reflect on their decision, a final course of action must be determined.<sup>16</sup>

- 
- If the sexually active (non-cohabiting) couples strive to live a chaste life and returns to the sacraments, the usual preparation continues.
- If the cohabiting couple separates, strives to live a chaste life and returns to the sacraments, the usual preparation continues.
- If the cohabiting couple's promises to establish separate sleeping quarters in the same residence, practice a chaste relationship, and returns to the sacraments, the usual preparation continues.
- If a couple refuses to attempt to live chastely, or shows a lack of good will in the preparation process, then the priest or deacon in conscience may see the need to postpone the marriage in order to secure the time needed to assist the couple sufficiently understand the meaning of marriage and the sacredness of sexuality. The priest or deacon continues to minister with the couple, with the goal of their evangelization, always holding out to them the availability of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the grace of conversion it affords.
- If the couple refuses to cease sexual relations before marriage, and the pastor decides that the marriage can eventually take place, the priest or deacon should still encourage the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- If a couple, after through preparation and having been given every opportunity for conversion, is still unable to acknowledge God's plan for marriage and sexuality and the need for sacramental reconciliation, then it may be advisable, in the judgment of the pastor, to hold the wedding outside of Mass in a ceremony that is reserved and simple.

It is the goal of the preparation process to bring the sexually active/cohabiting couple to realize the sin in sexual activity outside of marriage and the very meaning of the "one flesh" union as a sacramental sign of Christ's love for the Church. A couple who, after having been given every opportunity for conversion,

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<sup>16</sup> The Catholic Diocese of Peoria, from whose norms this section was adapted.

### ***Marriage Preparation Policy***

still refuses to acknowledge the contradiction of their behavior, need to realize that the course of action taken by the pastor is not a “punishment” for wrong doing, but the consequence of their own choices necessary to maintain the integrity of the sacrament.

#### **Suggested Readings:**

- *Faithful to Each Other Forever: A Catholic Handbook of Pastoral Help for Marriage Preparation*
- *Familiaris Consortio*
- *Sons and Daughters of the Light*
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- *U.S. Bishops’ Statement on Marriage: 1980-2005*  
([www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/statements.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/statements.shtml))
- *Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples* ([www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/cohabiting.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/cohabiting.shtml))
- ‘*Preparing Cohabiting Couples for Marriage*’ by Barbara Markey, Ph.D. (Tel: 402-551-9003)

## **IX. SACRAMENTAL AND LITURGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The Catholic Church recognizes the importance of this occasion for the couple and emphasizes that the priest, deacon, or pastoral coordinator need to convey to the couple the importance of careful planning of the liturgy. The journey of preparation leads the couple to the celebration of marriage, the source and origin of their conjugal life. *“To indicate a clearer relationship between the nuptial sacrament and the paschal mystery. The celebration of marriage is normally wet within the celebration of Eucharist.”*<sup>17</sup>

The celebration of marriage is basically a liturgical act. It is grounded in Baptism. In Baptism we become members of the Body of Christ and, therefore, a part of the assembly of the people of God. Through Baptism we are no longer merely ourselves but ourselves in reference to others. What happens with our lives affects others. Whether we live a life of happiness and fulfillment or life of dysfunction affects the Body of Christ and the people of God.

*Celebrating the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist* (Canon 1065 §2): The first consideration with a couple should be their relationship to the assembly in the parish. Are they truly part of it? Do they come regularly and do they fully, consciously, and actively participate in the Liturgy? Are they known as members of this parish who regularly join the assembly at Mass? If they are not, there is an obvious need here that must be addressed.

*Catholic engaged persons are encouraged to celebrate the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist as part of their preparation process.*

*This sacramental preparation will deepen their relationship with Jesus,  
Prepare the couple for a more meaningful experience of their wedding liturgy,  
And become the foundation on which they build their married lives (Canon 1065 §2).*

This is a “teachable moment”! Couples entering marriage need not only be concerned with their maturity, psychological and physical health, and their readiness for commitment. They also need to determine what they are truly asking of the Church. Are they asking for the support of the community in helping to build up the Body of Christ as a family unit within the Body?

The engaged couple need to consider, among the many other aspects of their celebration, the actual liturgical celebration as primary. They will, by reason of their own full, conscious and active participation in the Sunday assembly, begin to consider:

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<sup>17</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family, Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, n.53.

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- The importance of the full assembly's participation in the liturgy in which they are joined in marriage;
- Whether it is better to plan the wedding liturgy within the Mass or within a Liturgy of the Word;
- What is the significance of the various readings that are offered and which ones apply best to their experience;
- What proper, liturgical music can be used to enhance the liturgy;
- Who will serve as liturgical ministers and what roles will they take;
- The importance of planning and praying with the actual Rite of Marriage
- Praiseworthy customs that belong to various people or ethnic groups can be brought into the celebration provided they are appropriate signs of faith
- The homily (which is obligatory) should have at its center the presentation of the "great mystery" of marriage as spoken by St. Paul in Ephesians 5.
- Care should be taken that the details of the marriage celebration are characterized by restrained, simple, and authentic style.

### **XI. PASTORAL CARE AFTER MARRIAGE**

"Once the wedding is over and the honeymoon a wonderful memory, the real work of marriage begins. The faith community must continue the hospitality and welcome offered during the marriage preparation period, so the couple remains part of the local church."<sup>18</sup>

This paragraph from the United States Bishops is but one of many prompts toward ministry with couples in the early years of marriage. Pope John Paul II places the duty of aftercare help upon "*all the members of the local ecclesial community*" who are entrusted with the task of "*helping the couple to discover and live their new vocation and mission.*"<sup>19</sup> Pastoral Initiative 4, '*Eucharist and Sacraments,*' further challenges parishes, parish clusters, and deanery level to "*provide training for those entrusted with the responsibility for sacramental formation, including the following: Models for marriage preparation and support for newly married couples (p. 11).*"

Care for "newly-married/early-weds" is also rooted in awareness that young adults distance themselves from institutions just when church affiliation could be mutually beneficial.

Ministers need to be aware that 50% of all divorces occur during the first five years, and 33% of all separations happen within two years.<sup>20</sup> Ministers also need to be aware of a report on a national study on the first five years of marriage conducted by the Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University. It listed three (3) problematic issues:

**Balancing Time and Relationship:** The most intense cluster of problematic issues included balancing job and family, balancing parent and couple time, and time spent with spouse.

**Sexual Issues:** The second most intense cluster of problematic issues was frequency of sexual relations and unsatisfying sexual relations.

**Financial Issues:** The third most intense cluster of problematic issues include debt brought into the marriage, financial situations, financial decision-making, the employment of husband, and the employment of wife.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops. '*Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults,* p. 38. Washington D.C.: USCC, 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Pope John Paul II, *On the Family*, no. 69.

<sup>20</sup> *Faithful to Each Other Forever*, p. 128.

<sup>21</sup> *Time, Sex, and Money: The First Five Years of Marriage*, Center for Marriage and Family, Creighton University, p. 1, 2000.

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Individuals in our parishes and Newman communities sought advice for these and other marital problems from friends (56.9%) and/or from parents (46.5%). They also indicated that they were unaware of current programs and resources and/or did not use them. There are non-profit organizations and religious movements within the Diocese of Sacramento and our nation that offer a wide variety of support for marriage. Some offer specific enrichment programs for married couples. Others are professional organizations or sources for those who minister with couples and families.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Committee on Marriage and Family*.  
(202/541-3040) ([www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org).)

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities*  
(202/541-3070) ([www.usccb.org/prolife/nfp](http://www.usccb.org/prolife/nfp))

Worldwide Marriage Encounter ([www.wwme.org](http://www.wwme.org))

Christian Family Movement ([www.cfm.org](http://www.cfm.org))

Marriage Retorno ([www.marriageretorno.org](http://www.marriageretorno.org))

National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers ([www.nacflm.org](http://www.nacflm.org))

Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment ([www.bettermarriages.org](http://www.bettermarriages.org))

Center for Marriage and Family ([www.creighton.edu/MarriageandFamily](http://www.creighton.edu/MarriageandFamily))

Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education ([www.smartmarriages.com](http://www.smartmarriages.com))

Retrouvaille ([www.retrouvaille.org](http://www.retrouvaille.org))

Beginning Experience of Sacramento ([www.sacramentobe.org](http://www.sacramentobe.org))

Catholic Alumni Club ([www.cacsacramento.org](http://www.cacsacramento.org))

Diocese of Sacramento Single Adult Ministry ([www.diocese-sacramento.org](http://www.diocese-sacramento.org))

Marriage Magazine ([www.marriagemagazine.org](http://www.marriagemagazine.org))

The aftercare of married couples is extensive in time and diverse in approach. Ministers are encouraged to become familiar with the NCCB Catholic Handbook of Pastoral Help for Marriage Preparation: *Faithful to Each Other Forever*, in which the following areas are discussed.<sup>22</sup>

- Early Years of Marriage
- Middle Years of Marriage
- No-Children Years
- Faithful Forever
- Some delicate Areas of Concern, such as:
  - Abortion
  - Sterilization
  - Pastoral Care of Infertile Couples
  - Divorce and Remarriage
  - Annulment Procedures

## **Acknowledgements**

The Catholic Diocese of Sacramento wishes to give appreciation and acknowledgment to the following:

The Catholic Diocese of Austin  
The Catholic Archdiocese of Denver  
The Catholic Diocese of Erie  
The Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles  
The Catholic Archdiocese of Omaha  
The Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.

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<sup>22</sup> Faithful to Each Other Forever, pp. 128-138.

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The Catholic Diocese of Peoria  
The Catholic Diocese of Phoenix  
St. Anthony's Messenger Press  
The Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University

G:\WP60DATA\DIRECTOR\Marriage Preparation Policy\Policy 2005.doc

**Appendix I**  
**PRE-MARRIAGE TESTIMONY FOR BRIDE/GROOM**  
**DO YOU SOLEMNLY SWEAR TO TELL THE TRUTH IN ANSWER TO WHAT YOU ARE  
ABOUT TO BE ASKED?**

Parish: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: Home( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Work( ) \_\_\_\_\_

3. Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Father's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Religion: \_\_\_\_\_

Father's address: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Mother's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Religion: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's address: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Have you been baptized? \_\_\_\_\_ In which religion? \_\_\_\_\_

When and where? \_\_\_\_\_

(A recent baptismal certificate, issued within the past six months, is to be obtained when the party has been baptized in the Catholic Church).

7. What is your religion now? \_\_\_\_\_ Do you practice it? \_\_\_\_\_

To be asked of converts:

8. When and where were you received into the Catholic Church? \_\_\_\_\_

To be asked of the Catholic Party:

9. To what rite (Latin, Eastern) do you belong? \_\_\_\_\_

If the Catholic Party or either of his parents have ever been or are now a member of any Eastern Catholic Church, the Marriage Tribunal is to be contacted for further information. (See Canon 1109)

Where were you confirmed? \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever left the Church by a formal act? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, please indicate date, place, etc.

In what parish do you reside? \_\_\_\_\_ How long have you lived there? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Whom do you intend to marry? \_\_\_\_\_

11. How long have you known each other? \_\_\_\_\_ Length of engagement? \_\_\_\_\_

12. Has your intended spouse been married before, even civilly? \_\_\_\_\_

To whom, where, when, before what officiant? \_\_\_\_\_

How did this marriage cease? (Death, divorce, annulment)? \_\_\_\_\_

If this marriage has been declared null by an Ecclesiastical Tribunal give: Date of Decree: \_\_\_\_\_

Diocese and Protocol Number: \_\_\_\_\_

12. Have you been married before, even civilly? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, to whom? \_\_\_\_\_

How did this marriage cease? (Death, divorce, annulment): \_\_\_\_\_

If this marriage has been declared null by an Ecclesiastical Tribunal give: Date of Decree: \_\_\_\_\_

Diocese and Protocol Number: \_\_\_\_\_

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Here the auditor will carefully inquire concerning the following obstacles to marriage:

- a. Mixed Religion (non-Catholic is baptized) Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Disparity of Cult (non-Catholic is not baptized) Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Are you aware of any physical or psychological problems that make it impossible to have normal marital relations? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Are you related to your intended spouse by blood? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Are you related to your intended spouse by marriage? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

13. Mark any of the following diriment impediments that apply:

Age \_\_\_ Impotence \_\_\_ Ordination \_\_\_ Abduction \_\_\_ Crime \_\_\_ Perpetual religious vows \_\_\_  
Consanguinity \_\_\_ Affinity \_\_\_ Public Property \_\_\_ Legal relationship from adoption \_\_\_ Disparity of  
Worship \_\_\_

14. Inquire concerning possible permissions (see Canon 1071: a partial list follows):

Parties have no fixed residence (vagi): \_\_\_\_\_

The marriage cannot be recognized by civil law: \_\_\_\_\_

One or both are minors whose parents are unaware of or oppose the marriage: \_\_\_\_\_

15. Have you ever undergone psychiatric or psychological therapy? \_\_\_\_\_ (If so, please explain)

16. Are you entering marriage free from any pressure or fear? \_\_\_\_\_

17. The essentials elements of a valid marriage:

a. Do you sincerely intend a permanent marriage, one that excludes divorce? \_\_\_\_\_

b. Do you sincerely intend to be faithful to your partner always? \_\_\_\_\_

c. Are you open to the possibility of having children from this marriage? \_\_\_\_\_

d. Do you believe that your intended spouse has these same intentions? \_\_\_\_\_

18. Have you concealed anything significant about yourself or your state from you intended spouse?

19. Is there anything else that should be make known regarding this marriage? \_\_\_\_\_

Besides the mandatory six month marriage preparation requirements at the parish level, participation in at least one of the following marriage preparation program is required:

(Please indicate the program this couple has chosen)

Pre-Cana Conference \_\_\_ Engaged Encounter \_\_\_ Evenings for the Engaged \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Groom/Bride

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Priest-Deacon/Pastoral Minister

The priest will record the following:

1. Date and place of marriage: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Dispensations granted: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Delegation asked for or given: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Permission asked for or given: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Date of notice sent to parishes of baptism: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix II
PRE-NUPTIAL WITNESS TESTIMONY

Parish \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_
Name of person to be married: \_\_\_\_\_
Do you promise to tell the truth in answer to the questions asked of you? \_\_\_\_\_

- 1. Name of the witness: \_\_\_\_\_
Address: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Relationship of witness to above named party: \_\_\_\_\_
Does the witness know the party well? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Was the party ever baptized? \_\_\_\_\_
If yes, when, where, and in that denomination? \_\_\_\_\_

If Catholic, which rite is he/she a member of (Roman, Eastern, etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Has the party ever contracted or entered marriage, (even civilly)? \_\_\_\_\_
(If more than one marriage list details on an extra sheet.)
Was the marriage annulled or dissolved by a Church tribunal? \_\_\_\_\_
If yes, when and where? \_\_\_\_\_

- 5. Is the party bound by any diriment impediment (age, impotence, disparity of worship, ordination, perpetual, vow of chastity, abduction, crime, consanguinity, affinity, public property, legal relationship resulting from adoption)? \_\_\_\_\_
If yes, by which impediment is the party bound? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Is the party entering marriage free from pressure and fear, and does the party intend a permanent Exclusive union open to having children? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Does the witness consider the party sufficiently mature to accept the responsibility of marriage? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Does the witness wish to make any further comments concerning the marriage? \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Witness

Signature of Auditor

Date \_\_\_\_\_
Name and place of Church where testimony was taken:

(Seal of Church)

The wedding is to take place at \_\_\_\_\_
(Parish and City)

If the deposition is taken outside the Diocese of Sacramento, it must be approved by the Chancery Office of the Diocese where the witness resides:

Visum est: \_\_\_\_\_ Diocese: \_\_\_\_\_
Date: \_\_\_\_\_
(Seal of Chancery)

**Appendix III  
PETITION FOR A SANATIO**

Your Excellency:

\_\_\_\_\_, a Catholic and resident of

Name of Catholic Party

\_\_\_\_\_ since \_\_\_\_\_  
Parish of Catholic Party, City Date of Residency in Parish

born in \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_  
Place of Birth of Catholic Party Date of Birth of Catholic Party

and baptized at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Church of Catholic Party, City Date of Baptism of Catholic Party

contracted marriage with \_\_\_\_\_ an unbaptized person,  
Name of Unbaptized Spouse

on \_\_\_\_\_, at \_\_\_\_\_,  
Date of wedding Name of Church of Wedding, City

in the presence of a Roman Catholic Priest.

I now petition Your Excellency for a radical sanation of this and this marriage in view of the fact that this marriage was performed under the erroneous impression that a dispensation has been granted for Disparity of Worship, when in fact, it had not. The Catholic party has signed in a formal manner the usual promises.

Both parties are of sound mind and their original consent preserves.

Yours Sincerely in Christ,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Priest

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Seal of Church

Sanatio in Radice

Granted on \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Reverend David L. Deibel, J.C.L.  
Judicial Vicar

**Appendix IV  
PETITION FOR A SANTIO  
(Lack of Form)**

Your Excellency:

\_\_\_\_\_, a Catholic and resident of

Name of Catholic Party

\_\_\_\_\_ since \_\_\_\_\_  
Parish of Catholic Party, City Date of Residency in Parish

born in \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_  
Place of Birth of Catholic Party Date of Birth of Catholic Party

and baptized at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Church of Catholic Party, City Date of Baptism of Catholic Party

contracted marriage on \_\_\_\_\_,  
Date of wedding

with \_\_\_\_\_ a Non-Catholic,  
Name of Non-Catholic Spouse

born in \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_  
City of birth of Non-Catholic Spouse, State Date of birth of Non-Catholic Spouse

and baptized at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Church of Baptism for Non-Catholic Spouse Date of Baptism of Non-Catholic Spouse

in the presence of \_\_\_\_\_  
Minister/Justice of the Peace, etc.

I now petition Your Excellency for a radical sanation of this marriage in view of the fact that

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Both parties are of sound mind and their original consent perseveres.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date  
Seal of Church

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Priest

## Appendix V

### MODEL INTERVIEW FOR PREPARING COUPLES FOR MARRIAGE

The pastor or his delegate's involvement in the initial interview and follow-up meetings with the engaged couple are essential in preparing a couple for marriage. However, a marriage preparation ministry team or wedding coordinator in the parish could be utilized to assist the priest or deacon with the third and fourth meetings.

Sponsorship Couples or other team members can also assist with any additional preparation, such as facilitating the FOCCUS instrument, teaching NFP classes, etc. The team members could include: pastoral staff, wedding coordinator, sponsor couples, NFP teachers, etc. As indicated in Synod initiative # 3 [**>Collaborative Ministry and Shared Responsibility=**] and Synod initiative # 4 [**>Eucharistic and Sacraments=**] this team can provide valuable expertise and is an excellent means for the community to offer substantial support to them on their journey to marriage in the Church.

The team should keep in mind a report of a study on the value of marriage preparation in the Catholic Church for couples married one through eight years entitled, *Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church: Getting in Right*, (Center for Marriage and Family, Creighton University). Marriage Preparation is rated most helpful when it deals with the 5C's: Communication, Commitment, Conflict-Resolution, Children and Church (p.3). This report also indicates that the perceived value of marriage preparation is *lowest* for couples who had only one session. The value rises continuously for those who had up to eight to nine sessions, and then diminishes for those who had more than nine sessions (p.23).

#### INITIAL INTERVIEW AND FOLLOW-UP SESSIONS:

This interview takes place one year to six months before the proposed wedding date. The kind of welcome extended and the attitude of the priest or deacon toward the couple should be one of the hospitality and understanding. While many practical things need to be addressed, the care which comes through the Church=s minister will speak volumes to the couple about who we are as Church, provide a great opportunity for evangelization, and create a positive attitude toward the Sacrament.

- § This should always be done in person, never by phone or through a secretary.
- § Get to know the couple a little about their background: e.g., Where do you work? How did you meet? Why do you think you fell in love with each other? What is his/her most endearing quality for you, right now? Are there any serious obstacles standing in the way of your marriage in the Church, such as either one or both of you having been married before? Any other issues you think would be important for me to know? Would you tell me a little about your religious upbringing?
- § Explain the goal of marriage preparation, what the steps toward marriage in the Church are, and how these are the Church=s way to show concern and support for their marriage. Explain the assessment process as a way to evaluate their readiness to make this important step in their lives.
- § If there are any special circumstances in these guidelines (e.g., teenage marriage; pregnancy; non-practice of the faith; cohabitation; interreligious marriage; convalidation. remarriage), further discussion will be called for. Discussion might take place regarding a delay of the wedding. Share reasons for the delay with the couple and develop with them a way to remove the impediment or concerns. No wedding date can be set until the impediments have been removed

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and the concerns addressed.

- § If there are no special circumstances, determine a tentative wedding date with the couple. Give them information regarding formal marriage preparation (e.g. one day marriage preparation program, Engaged Encounter weekend, Evenings for the Engaged, etc.) To be taken within the next three months. Explain the needed documents and why they called for (e.g. recent baptismal certificates, two letters of freedom for each of them, any dispensations, etc.).
- § Explain the purpose of a premarital inventory (e.g. FOCCUS, PMI, or Prepare). If time permits, the inventory can be administered at this meeting or a later date can be determined. This may take up to two or three sessions together.
- § If applicable, arrange for a sponsor couple from the parish who will journey with them toward their wedding date.
- § Always set a dates and times for their next appointment.

Follow-up to the initial interview that takes place about three months before the wedding. The goal of this meeting is to provide ongoing supports as the couple continues their preparation. This meeting focus on the engaged couple and their relationship with each other, with God, with their families (including in-laws), and with friends.

- § Inquire how things are going for the couple. In regard to their formal preparation, what was their experience? What are some of the topics that surfaced as needing further discussion? Where are they in regard to discussing these topics? Would they care to discuss any with you now?
- § Discuss the results of their premarital inventory, even if it has been previously discussed by a qualified lay minister working in this ministry with you. Remember this is not a pass/fail test. It is a tool to help them to better understand themselves and the areas where some further growth might be helpful.
- § The prenuptial inquiry can be administered at this time.
- § Wedding ceremony options should be discussed. Explain that the care that goes into the planning of the celebration will speak about their faith and how they want to make it visible to others as they celebrate their commitment to each other and God.
- § Follow up with documents and paperwork and address any questions they might have.
- § Set a date for their next appointment.
- Close with a prayer.

Another meeting takes place about one month before the wedding. While there are many practical things needing to be addressed at this time, hopefully, there would be some quality time to center again on their relationship as well as the place of God and faith in it.

- Once again, inquire how things are going for them. Are there any issues that they want to discuss with you now? How is the pressure of their upcoming wedding affecting them and their family relationships?
- How is their faith in God making a difference in their lives during these days? Is prayer an important part of their relationship?
- Finalize plans for the wedding liturgy. Go through the wedding ceremony planning sheet.
- Verify date and time of rehearsal.
- Close with a prayer with/for the couple.

**Rehearsal:** The Rehearsal usually takes place the week before the wedding. Even though a wedding coordinator can handle the details of the rehearsal, it is suggested that the priest or deacon be available at some time to meet and welcome the family and wedding party. It does provide a teachable moment for evangelizing those who are involved in the wedding.

**APPENDIX VI**

**NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING CERTIFICATE**

**This is to certify that**

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

have attended a  
Full One-Hour Information & Discussion Session  
as required by the Diocese of Sacramento  
in accordance with the marriage preparation guidelines  
on  
Natural Family Planning.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Natural Family Planning Instructor  
or  
Parish Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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**This is to certify that**

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

have attended a  
Full One-Hour Information & Discussion Session  
as required by the Diocese of Sacramento  
in accordance with the marriage preparation guidelines  
on  
Natural Family Planning.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Natural Family Planning Instructor  
or

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

***Marriage Preparation Policy***  
Parish Representative