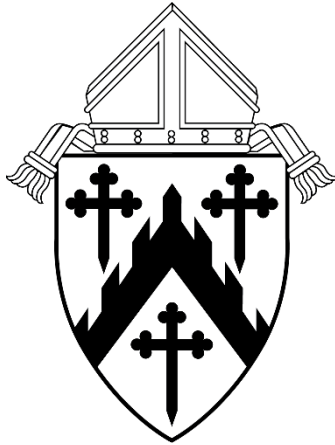


DIOCESE OF DAVENPORT



Marriage Preparation: Policies and Procedures

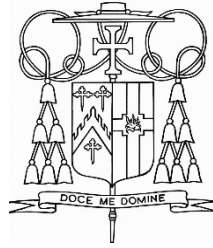
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Promulgated at the Pastoral Center of the Diocese of Davenport–December 30, 2016
Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Most Reverend Martin Amos
Bishop of Davenport

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DIOCESE OF DAVENPORT

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Over the past several years, our Church has asked us to turn our attention to the care and strengthening of marriage and family life. We received the revised *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (OCM) this year. After an extensive consultation, Pope Francis gave us *Amoris Laetitia* (AL), The Joy of Love. The Holy Father is not only calling us to a renewed understanding of the family in the Church and society today, he is also calling us to help couples and families embrace and live out the vocation of marriage in challenging times.

The immediate preparation of a couple who has come to the Church seeking to be joined in Matrimony requires our renewed attention and effort. Pope Francis advises that “marriage preparation should ensure that the couple do not view the wedding ceremony as the end of the road, but instead embark upon marriage as a lifelong calling based on a firm and realistic decision to face all trials and difficult moments together... [and] involves not only helping them to accept the Church’s teaching and to have recourse to her valuable resources, but also offering practical programs, sound advice, proven strategies and psychological guidance” (AL 211).

Sufficient time is necessary to truly walk with a couple in this way, to embrace “a pedagogy of love, attuned to the feelings and needs of young people and capable of helping them to grow interiorly” (AL 211). Enough time is also needed to provide couples with a solid grounding in the Church’s teaching on marriage and family life and in an understanding of the wedding liturgy and its elements so the marriage can be celebrated “thoughtfully and fruitfully” (OCM #17). It is my belief, and it has been my experience, that this investment of time is well worth the effort. “The Joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church” (AL 1).

Therefore, it is with that same joy, and with these ends in mind, that I promulgate these revised policies regarding preparation for matrimony in our diocese.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Martin Amos".

Most Rev. Martin Amos
Bishop of Davenport

§IV-450 MARRIAGE PREPARATION: POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Implementation

The purpose of this policy is to direct the pastoral ministers of the Diocese of Davenport as they prepare engaged couples for the Sacrament of Matrimony¹. Immediate marriage preparation is a part of the larger pastoral responsibility to assist the Christian faithful in living out this sacrament. The Church's goal is to aid couples as they enter into the great mystery and joy of a sacramental marriage and to help them develop the necessary skills to thrive in that vocation.

Preparation for marriage is both an evaluative and instructional process in which engaged couples are assisted by the Church. The evaluative aspect allows the couples to discern their suitability for marriage, and the Church assists by offering her wisdom and counsel. Throughout this process couples are provided with opportunities to recognize and acknowledge their readiness to live out the obligations of Christian marriage. The primary evaluative responsibility of the priest, deacon, or pastoral minister is to verify that no impediments prohibit a couple from marrying. The instructional aspect of marriage preparation focuses on helping couples to develop skills to successfully live out the Catholic vision of marriage.

Couples often find themselves in a culture that largely has rejected the Christian view of marriage. This requires that marriage preparation be set within the context of a rich evangelization process and structured in such a way that couples not only receive accurate information but also experience a desire to enter actively into the Church community. Incorporating evangelization and catechesis into marriage preparation leads to a more proper understanding of the sacrament, which in turn promotes a deeper commitment to the human skills that help marriages thrive.

The ongoing nature of marriage as a life-long vocation must be emphasized. In *Familiaris Consortio* (*The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*), Pope St. John Paul II taught that marriage preparation does not end on the day that a couple is wed but rather is a journey of faith that continues throughout family life. Just as the Christian life demands vigilance and effort, marriage requires that couples continually renew their commitment to the covenant they first made on their wedding day, and that they constantly strive to live out this covenant more faithfully. During the marriage preparation process, engaged couples must be assured of the Church's sincere desire to walk with them throughout this journey.

Every step of marriage preparation is to be presented positively as an opportunity for couples to grow closer to God and each other. Many couples fail to see the value in marriage preparation, and this unfortunate reality calls for renewed efforts on the part of the Church to introduce participants to the love and blessings that Jesus Christ has for them and to the sincere interest the Church has in helping them live out the most loving marriage possible. All individuals in the marriage preparation process must be committed to this vision, and no requirement should ever be presented as a "hoop to jump through." All aspects of the policy are to be promoted as opportunities the Church is offering to help their marriages thrive.

Couples preparing for a Catholic marriage should expect to hear the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality, and have a right to hear that message in a consistent, clear, and positive way. It is imperative that every member of the marriage preparation process understand and support this Church teaching, which is to be offered as a gift to engaged couples.

¹ When the policy refers to the Sacrament of Matrimony, it also applies, as appropriate, to those marriages in the Catholic Church that are valid but not sacramental (marriages involving a partner who is not baptized).

Couples have a natural right to marry, but this is not an unrestricted right. The Church can establish legitimate conditions for exercising the right to marry. In addition to the diocesan marriage preparation policy, additional requirements may be established by an individual parish (as long as those requirements are not contrary to canon law).

Exemptions to diocesan or parish policy are available if a couple is unable to complete the marriage preparation process due to an insurmountable obstacle. In these cases, a couple may request a waiver, which is applied for by the pastor or his delegate. The request will be reviewed by the diocesan Marriage Tribunal, and granted or denied by the Bishop or his delegate. (See Appendix A for more information a requesting a waiver).

Summary

- Immediate marriage preparation is a part of the larger pastoral responsibility to assist the Christian faithful in preparation of marriage, and in living out this sacrament.
- The primary responsibility of marriage preparation is evangelical and catechetical, helping couples to encounter God's plan for marriage and embrace that vision.
- Marriage preparation is intended to help couples further develop the skills necessary for a thriving marriage.
- Marriage preparation does not end on the wedding day, but is an ongoing journey that requires the couple's continued devotion and effort throughout their marriage.

Guiding Principles

- *CIC c.1058* All persons who are not prohibited by law can contract marriage.
- *CIC c.1063* Pastors of souls are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the Christian faithful the assistance by which the matrimonial state is preserved in a Christian spirit and advances in perfection.
- *CIC c.1067* The conference of bishops is to establish norms about the examination of spouses and about the marriage banns or other opportune means to accomplish the investigations necessary before marriage. After these norms have been diligently observed, the pastor can proceed to assist at the marriage.
- *USCCB Complementary Norm to Canon 1067* The couple should receive appropriate education and pastoral preparation through participation in a marriage preparation program approved by the diocesan bishop.
- *FC 66* "Changes that have taken place within almost all modern societies demand that not only the family but also the society and the Church should be involved in the effort of properly preparing young people for their future responsibilities... The Church must therefore promote better and more intensive programs of marriage preparation, in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favor positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages."
- *AL 218* "Marriage preparation is to help couples realize that marriage is not something that happens once and for all. Their union is irrevocable, confirmed and consecrated by the Sacrament of Matrimony. Yet in joining their lives, the spouses assume an active and creative role in a lifelong project."

Implementation Strategies

- Encourage those serving in the marriage preparation ministry to pray for the engaged couples at your parish, especially when couples are not enthusiastic about sacramental marriage preparation.
- Ensure that everyone involved in the marriage preparation ministry presents the marriage preparation policy positively as an opportunity for couples to experience further growth and intimacy.
- Ensure that those working with couples in marriage preparation understand and support the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality.
- Maintain contact with newly married couples after the wedding day, offering creative ways to support and enrich their vocation to married life.

Theology of Marriage

Marriage by its very nature is a serious and sacred commitment between one man and one woman. Through it, spouses are called upon to draw closer to God and to each other in a life-giving community of love. Christ enhanced the dignity of marriage by making the Christian marriage relationship a sacrament – a living sign of His love for the Church. Since marriage also entails a natural good, some engaged couples approach marriage without a full understanding of the sacramental reality. For this reason, the center of marriage preparation must reflect in faith on Matrimony as seen through the Word of God and the guidance of the Magisterium.

Along with the Sacrament of Holy Orders, Matrimony is a sacrament at the service of communion and is meant to serve the community as a sign and an instrument of God's love. It is important to involve the entire community in marriage preparation. Couples should understand that when they enter into a sacramental marriage, they take on responsibilities to each other and to the whole community.

Marriage is a vocation, a calling by God for the sanctification of the couple as individuals. All vocations involve discernment, with the persons being called consciously listening to God and seeking God's will for their lives. This concept may be new to many engaged couples, so every effort must be made to draw them more deeply into the discernment process.

Marriage is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring. Its essential properties are unity and indissolubility. The permanence of marriage and its orientation to procreation are of major catechetical importance in the marriage preparation process since these teachings are often misunderstood and at times ignored by our modern culture. At its root a sacramental marriage is always an invitation to enter into the divine life – which is an invitation to joy.

A permanent marriage, in itself, does not constitute a successful marriage. An enduring marriage involves more than simply endurance – it is a process of growth into an intimate friendship and a deepening peace. To live faithfully in a marriage requires humility, trust, compromise, communication, and a sense of humor. Marriage is a give-and-take experience, often involving hurt and forgiveness, failure and sacrifice.

God's plan for marriage is a joyful plan even when the marriage itself is accompanied by significant trials. Christians know that for those who cooperate with the gift of God's grace, no cross is impossible to bear. When marriages are faced with significant trials, the spouses must be supported by the community and, most importantly, find strength within the sacramental life of the Church. It is the duty of the Christian community to walk with couples experiencing pain, and to witness to Christ's healing presence in their lives. Engaged couples often cannot imagine that any difficulties will occur within their marriage. Couples need to be aware of this

potential in order to be prepared to face such challenges. It is important for couples to understand that once they have entered into a sacramental marriage nothing but death can end that marriage.

Marriage preparation occurs in a culture that often fails to acknowledge the value of permanence, self-sacrifice and the gift of life. Engaged couples can find the Christian message of a permanent and generous marriage difficult to understand. Time and care should be devoted to helping couples understand this teaching. An accurate presentation of the theology of marriage must be at the center of marriage preparation. The essential goal is to make the couples more aware of the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony and everything that flows from it regarding the responsibility of family.

Questions concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage and the meaning of the union and of procreation in married life and its specific act must be treated faithfully and accurately according to Church teaching.

Summary

- Marriage is a natural good that was elevated to a sacrament by Christ.
- Marriage is a sacrament at the service of communion, and is meant to be a sign and an instrument of God's love for his people.
- Marriage is ordered toward the good of the spouses and procreation, and its essential properties are unity and indissolubility.
- Doctrinal preparation is of primary importance in a society that often fails to understand or accept Christian principles.

Guiding Principles

- *CIC c.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.
- *CIC c.1056* The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, which in Christian marriage obtain a special firmness by reason of the sacrament.
- *CCC 1615* The unequivocal insistence on the indissolubility of the marriage bond may have left some perplexed and could seem to be a demand impossible to realize. However, Jesus has not placed on spouses a burden impossible or too heavy to bear.
- *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage Paragraph 47* The center of this preparation must be a reflection in the faith on the Sacrament of Marriage through the Word of God and the guidance of the Magisterium.
- *AL 211* "The pastoral care of engaged and married couples should be centered on the marriage bond, assisting couples not only to deepen their love but also to overcome problems and difficulties. This involves not only helping them to accept the Church's teaching and to have recourse to her valuable resources, but also offering practical programs, sound advice, proven strategies and psychological guidance. All this calls for a pedagogy of love..."
- *OCM 1-11* serves as an excellent synopsis of the Church's theology of marriage.

Implementation Strategies

- It is imperative that everyone involved in marriage preparation view the work as evangelical and catechetical.
- Ensure that everyone on the marriage preparation team has received basic instruction on the sacramental nature of marriage, and that they are often invited to grow in their own understanding of the sacrament.
- Intentionally draw out the parallels between the Sacrament of Matrimony and the Sacrament of Holy Orders.
- Directly address the confusions or misconceptions of the secular society regarding Church teaching on marriage.

Abbreviations Used

AL	<i>Amoris Laetitia</i> (The Joy of Love, Pope Francis, 2016)
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
c./cc.	canon or canons
CIC	<i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i> (Code of Canon Law)
FC	<i>Familiaris consortio</i> (On the Christian Family in the Modern World, Pope St. John Paul II, 1981)
HV	<i>Humanae vitae</i> (On the Regulation of Birth, Pope Paul VI, 1968)
OCM	<i>Order of Celebrating Matrimony</i> , 2nd edition (2016)
USCCB	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Acknowledgment

Special thanks to the Marriage & Family Life Office of the Diocese of Des Moines for granting permission to adapt portions of their diocesan *Marriage Preparation: Policies & Procedures* manual in the composition of this document.

§IV-450 Marriage Preparation Requirements

The preparation and celebration of Marriage, which above all concern the future spouses themselves and their families, belong, as regards pastoral and liturgical care, to the Bishop, to the pastor and his associates, and, at least to some degree, to the entire ecclesial community (OCM #12).

It is for the Bishop, who is to take into account any norms or pastoral guidelines that may have been established by the Conference of Bishops regarding the preparation of engaged couples or the pastoral care of Marriage, to regulate the celebration and pastoral care of the Sacrament throughout the diocese by organizing assistance for the Christian faithful so that the state of Marriage may be preserved in a Christian spirit and advance in perfection (OCM #13).

§IV-450 Policy

Effective January 1, 2017, the following elements are required components of preparation for Matrimony in the Diocese of Davenport:

Procedures

1. **Initial personal interview** with the priest, deacon, or other parish pastoral minister.
2. Completion of an approved **pre-marital inventory**
 - a. FOCCUS/REFOCCUS
 - b. PREPARE/ENRICH
3. Appropriate number of **follow-up meetings** as determined by the minister to address the specific circumstances of the couple
4. Participation in a **Marriage Preparation Instructional Program**
 - a. Sponsor Couple (preferred option)
 - b. Approved Diocesan Marriage Preparation Day/Weekend
 - c. Approved On-line option - catholicmarriageprepclass.com (only under special circumstance with parish approval required)
5. Participation in an approved **Introductory Natural Family Planning Instruction** (see Diocesan website)
 - a. Individual couple or group on location instruction
 - b. Live or self-paced online instruction
 - c. One-on-one video conferencing instruction
 - d. Introduction to Natural Family Planning video and study guide
6. Completion of the **Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form** and final decision to proceed or delay the wedding
7. **Post-wedding Couple Contact Plan**

§IV-450.1 Initial Interview

The initial interview with the priest, deacon or pastoral minister must be set within the evangelical context of marriage preparation, just as every element of marriage preparation is informed by this goal. The initial interview establishes the tone for the entire marriage preparation process, and is essential to the successful implementation of this policy.

A wedding date should be set no sooner than six months from the time of the first meeting with the couple. If there is any impediment, a wedding date cannot be set until that impediment is removed. The most common obstacle is a previous marriage that has not been declared null. **If an individual has a pending annulment case, they cannot begin marriage preparation or set a date for their wedding, since the previous marriage is assumed valid until declared otherwise.** The minister should patiently and charitably assist a couple in this situation.

Parishes are responsible for preparing couples who reside within parish boundaries. If such a couple is not currently practicing their faith, they should be encouraged to become involved at the parish and to participate in the sacramental life of the Church. They should be helped to understand what it means to be a practicing Catholic and what it means to raise a child in the faith, since they will be asked to make these two commitments during the marriage preparation process. If the pastor ultimately discerns that the couple has explicitly and formally rejected what the Church teaches the couple should not be admitted to the celebration of marriage until such a time as their disposition has changed.

There are multiple goals for the first session with the engaged couple. First, the minister should warmly welcome the couple. This often is one of the most exciting times in a person's life, and it is vital that the Church shows that she is sharing in this joy. Even when a couple approaches the Sacrament of Matrimony without full understanding or without a perfect disposition, they should be welcomed and encouraged. The minister's hospitality often helps the engaged couple to be more open to the preparation process.

Secondly, the minister should establish whether there are any existing impediments to the couple's marriage. If there are existing impediments, two extremes should be avoided. The first would be to turn the couple away, alienating them from the parish. The second would be to ignore the impediments or assure the couple that they are not significant. The couple should be told that all impediments must be addressed as part of the preparation process. The minister should help the couple take appropriate steps to rectify the situation. The minister should also help the couple to better understand their current state, and if they are living outside of God's plan for marriage, the minister should encourage and advise them to re-enter full communion with the Church. Living outside of God's plan for marriage, even in ignorance, is harmful, and ministers have a pastoral duty to invite couples back into God's plan, even when this invitation may not be accepted.

This pastoral duty also applies to cohabitation, a state of life that is inconsistent with the gospel message regarding marriage and sexuality. Once again, the same two extremes must be avoided in addressing cohabitation. It is harmful to alienate these couples, and it is equally harmful to ignore the serious nature of their situations. The minister may decide that it is imprudent to address cohabitation at the initial interview. It is of utmost importance, however, that the couple be invited to rectify their situation as soon as possible.

During their initial interview, the couple should receive a summary of the entire marriage preparation process in order help them plan for its completion. At this time arrangements should also be made for the couple to complete the pre-marital inventory and the coordination should begin for the assigning a parish sponsor couple or registering for a diocesan approved program.

Marriage preparation should be completed at least 60 days before the wedding date. It is more valuable the sooner it is completed, allowing couples more time to reflect on and communicate about what they have learned.

Summary

- The initial interview, set within an evangelical context, is of vital importance because it will set the tone for the rest of the marriage preparation process.
- During the initial interview a couple should be welcomed and have the entire preparation process summarized.
- The pastoral minister should establish whether any impediments exist.
- A wedding date should not be set less than 6 months before the initial interview, and all marriage preparation should be completed at least 60 days before the wedding date.

Guiding Principles

- *OCM 15* Sufficient time is necessary for a suitable preparation for Marriage. Engaged couples should be made aware of this necessity in advance.
- *CIC c.1066* Before a marriage is celebrated, it must be evident that nothing stands in the way of its valid and licit celebration.

Implementation Strategies

- Be welcoming and excited for the engaged couple. Engaged couples are alienated when they enthusiastically come to the parish and are met with cold logistics or a spirit of condemnation.
- Develop materials that summarize the entire marriage preparation process for your parish, including contact information for marriage preparation coordinators, expectations on time frames to be met, and details about liturgical and sacramental preparation. (The Marriage and Family Life Coordinator can offer sample resources.)

§IV-450.2 The Pre-Marital Inventory (FOCCUS, PREPARE, REFOCCUS)

A FOCCUS or PREPARE inventory should be administered to each couple preparing for marriage through the Diocese of Davenport. If a couple has been civilly married for more than three years it is recommended that the REFOCCUS inventory be used. The inventory should be given soon after the initial meeting with the pastoral minister and the first follow-up session scheduled shortly thereafter. It should be made clear to the couple that the **inventory is not a test** and that will not be used to determine whether or not a couple may marry.

The inventory is to be used as an instrument that helps the couple explore with each other and the pastoral minister important aspects of the future marriage. It is meant to help couples develop and reflect upon skills that are necessary for marriage, such as communication, conflict resolution, and commitment. At times a pastoral minister may be required to offer instruction in skill development or make appropriate referrals for the couple.

Discussions based on the pre-marital inventory should be divided into multiple sessions so couples will have adequate time to talk about topics on their own between sessions. It is expected that ministers will meet with the engaged couple several times before the wedding in order to complete a thorough processing of the inventory

results. Supplemental resources may be used during the inventory sessions, at the pastoral minister's discretion.

Confidentiality is critical when discussing the inventory results with the couple. The parish is **not** to keep the inventory on file for possible use in a future annulment. The inventory is meant to supplement, not substitute for, the couple's participation in a diocesan approved Marriage Preparation Instructional program.

Summary

- Each couple is required to take a FOCCUS, PREPARE or REFOCCUS inventory.
- REFOCCUS is recommended for couples who have been civilly married for three years or more.
- The pastoral minister should ensure that the couple understands that the inventory is a preparation tool, not a test.
- Inventory results should be destroyed once the couple has completed preparation.

Guiding Principles

- *USCCB's Complementary Norm to CIC 1067* The couple should receive appropriate education and pastoral preparation in a marriage preparation program approved by the diocesan bishop.
- *AL 211* "The pastoral care of engaged and married couples should be centered on the marriage bond, assisting couples not only to deepen their love but also to overcome problems and difficulties. This involves not only helping them to accept the Church's teaching, and to have recourse to her valuable resources, but also offering practical programs, sound advice, proven strategies and psychological guidance. All this calls for a pedagogy of love..."

Implementation Strategies

- Ensure that all parish pastoral ministers are properly trained in the most updated editions of FOCCUS/REFOCCUS and/or PREPARE. (Contact the Diocesan Marriage and Family Life Coordinator for training options).
- Administer the inventory as early as possible in the engaged couple's preparation process to allow ample time to discuss the topic areas recommended in the instrument results.
- The pastoral minister should meet with the engaged couple on several occasions to highlight and discuss the inventory results.
- Once the engaged couple has thoroughly completed the inventory discussion process, the pastoral minister should indicate so by checking the appropriate box on the diocesan Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form.

§IV-450.3 Appropriate Number of Follow-up Meetings Addressing Specific Issues

Some circumstances require further evaluation regarding the couple's readiness for marriage. Issues may be present in the relationship that put the success of the marriage at high risk. With pastoral concern, our diocese requires that these issues be addressed as part of the couple's preparation for marriage.

The reasons for addressing additional issues are twofold. First, it is important to tailor marriage preparation as much as possible to each individual couple, taking into account their personal needs and experiences so that

they may experience marriage preparation in a personal and fruitful way. Second, certain circumstances present challenges to marriage that increase the potential for conflict and divorce. Because the goal of marriage preparation is to guide couples to the best marriages possible, it is important to address the following risk factors:

- One or both individuals are under 21 years of age
- Pregnancy or children
- Remarriage after the death of a spouse or an annulment
- Blended Families
- Cohabitation
- Cultural Differences
- Faith Concerns
- Serious concern on the part of those preparing the couple

One or both individuals are under 21 years of age

Those entering into marriage at a young age often lack the maturity to realize and accept the responsibilities of marriage. While young people should still take part in all the elements of marriage preparation spelled out in this policy, careful attention must also be paid to their level of maturity and understanding. At times it is appropriate to speak with the parent(s) or guardian(s) of a young person to try to discern any family dynamics that may have influenced him or her. If the pastoral minister feels that the young couple is not yet ready to marry, the couple should be encouraged to wait for a period of time.

Pregnancy or children

Pregnancy is not a sufficient reason for marrying or for shortening the minimum six-month marriage preparation time. Pregnant couples, or unmarried couples who already have children, may face societal pressure to get married. It is important to discern whether or not their choice to get married is being made freely. If the pastoral minister feels that the couple is being pressured to marry, the couple should be encouraged to wait for a period of time and be provided with parenting resources and other appropriate support from the parish.

Remarriage (after the death of a spouse or an annulment)

Having been in a previous marriage often affects the expectations and concerns about a new marriage. Because of the permanent and indissoluble nature of marriage, this issue can be especially confusing and challenging for engaged couples. When a couple is entering a second marriage it is important to help individuals reflect on the causes of the breakdown of their previous marriage and also to reflect on the new circumstances of their upcoming marriage. It may be that an individual will not have fully grieved the loss of their previous relationship.

It is important to consider this situation during each element of marriage preparation. It is best to assign such couples to a seasoned sponsor couple, who will be able to discuss these issues in a sensitive and honest way. For some couples professional counseling may be advised in order to more fully explore the psychological and emotional issues which cannot be resolved through standard marriage preparation sessions.

Occasionally a person receives a *monitum* or *vetitum* with their Declaration of Nullity. A *monitum* is a warning to those involved in marriage preparation that certain issues exist which must be given special attention. An individual who has received a *monitum* must demonstrate that such issues have been addressed and resolved

before entering into the new marriage.

A *vetitum* is a prohibition of marriage until certain conditions are fulfilled that address the reasons for the imposition of the *vetitum*. In these situations, the Tribunal Office should be contacted to assist in determining what is necessary to lift the *vetitum*.

Blended Families

Children in blended families will have a significant impact on family dynamics. For the good of the couple and the good of the children it is important to address this situation in advance. (Resource materials are available through the office of the diocesan Marriage and Family Life Coordinator.)

Cohabitation

A majority of couples in the United States who approach the Catholic Church today seeking the Sacrament of Marriage have very little Catholic formation and often do not understand the graces and obligations that they are seeking. Many couples are formed by the secular culture to a much greater degree than they are formed by their Catholic faith. This can be seen in many ways. Of particular significance are the common occurrences of cohabitation, pre-marital sex, and the use of artificial contraception.

The Church's teaching on sexuality is countercultural, and it is rarely understood by many engaged couples who request to be married in the Church. A more thorough catechesis on the Church's sexual ethic is needed so that every couple is given the chance to understand and contemplate what the Church teaches and why. A couple should not be turned away from marriage preparation because of cohabitation, premarital intercourse, and/or the use of contraception, but neither should the issues be ignored.

Instead, situations involving cohabitation should be viewed as an opportunity for evangelization, a privileged moment when the good news can be shared. Couples should always be encouraged to rectify their situation, which would mean separating before the wedding day and committing to chastity. The pastoral minister should prudently and charitably decide how to raise these issues with the couple.

During marriage preparation, it is important to address these risks, which include a lack of clear commitment, unrealistic expectations of marriage, pressure to marry, and behavior that can inhibit judgment. It is vitally important that these issues are raised in love and truth, in a way that does not alienate the engaged couples but instead shows the Church's true concern for their well-being.

Cultural Differences

Cultural differences, with their own blessings and challenges, contribute to the richness of the Catholic community. Just as every couple must negotiate differences in their families of origin, couples of different ethnic traditions will need to discuss how these particularities may impact their marriage and how they might be negotiated. There is often a greater need for communication about topics which are taken for granted when individuals are from the same cultural background. When issues stemming from cultural differences do arise, the couple will need to discern and communicate the difference between non-negotiable values and mere cultural preferences.

Faith Concerns (Ecumenical, Interfaith, Non-practicing Catholic)

A growing number of couples presenting themselves for marriage in the Catholic Church are not both practicing Catholics. Canon law and the liturgical books are specific about what dispensations or permissions are required and about which rites are to be used in these situations. Although the Catholic Church no longer stresses the "conversion" of the partner who is not a member of the Catholic Church, it is prudent that the pastoral minister

discuss with the couple the faith-related issues they are likely to encounter. The non-Catholic partner is to be informed that the Catholic partner must promise “to do all in one’s power” to raise their children in the Catholic faith. The Catholic partner should be aware that the Church recognizes that the non-Catholic party may feel a similar obligation to his or her religious commitment. Despite the challenges of ecumenical and interfaith marriages, these couples should be encouraged to nurture prayer in the home in a form that is common to both spouses. (Resource materials for use with these couples are available through the office of the diocesan Marriage and Family Life Coordinator).

Serious concern of those preparing the couple

The pastoral minister may become aware that there are factors present in a relationship (i.e., addictions or abuse, use of pornography) that may require further attention. When these situations arise, the couple should be referred to the appropriate professionals and resources which best address their specific circumstance.

Summary

- Follow-up meetings should address the personal needs and experiences of each couple.
- Issues such as impediments and living outside of God’s plan for marriage must neither be ignored, nor addressed in a way that is alienating.
- Ministers have a pastoral duty to inform and invite couples into God’s plan, even knowing that at times the invitation will not be accepted.
- Couples should be referred to additional resources when deemed necessary.

Guiding Principles

- *FC 68* The faith of the person asking the Church for marriage can exist in different degrees, and it is the primary duty of the pastors to bring about a rediscovery of this faith and to nourish it and bring it to maturity. But pastors must also understand the reasons that lead the Church also to admit to the celebration of marriage those who are imperfectly disposed.
- *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage Paragraph 4* The greater the difficulties caused by one’s surroundings for knowing the truth of the Christian sacrament and of the institution of marriage, all the greater must be our efforts to prepare spouses adequately for their responsibilities.
- *AL 247* “Issues involving mixed marriages require particular attention. Marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons ‘have their own particular nature, but they contain numerous elements that could well be made good use of and developed, both for their intrinsic value and for the contribution that they can make to the ecumenical movement’. For this purpose, ‘an effort should be made to establish cordial cooperation between the Catholic and non-Catholic ministers from the time that preparations begin for the marriage and the wedding ceremony’ (*FC, 78*).”
- *AL 248* “Marriages involving disparity of cult represent a privileged place for interreligious dialogue in everyday life... They involve special difficulties regarding both the Christian identity of the family and the religious upbringing of the children...”
- *OCM 20* In conducting the preparation, pastors, taking into account prevailing attitudes toward Marriage and family, should endeavor to evangelize the couple’s authentic and mutual love in the light of faith. Even the requirements of law contracting a valid and licit Marriage can serve to promote a living faith and fruitful love between the couple, ordered toward establishing a Christian family.

Implementation Strategies

- Be prepared to meet the couples where they are and begin to journey with them joyfully sharing the Church's teachings on marriage.
- Address difficult issues such as impediments, cohabitation, or other circumstances in truth and love. Pray before these sessions for the love, patience, and wisdom that is necessary in difficult pastoral circumstances.
- Familiarize yourself with resources and referral options to address the specific concerns you are likely to encounter with the couples you are preparing.

§IV-450.4 Marriage Preparation Instructional Program

In addition to the meetings scheduled with the parish pastoral minister, each engaged couple preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony in the Diocese of Davenport should participate in an approved instructional program: Sponsor Couple, Diocesan Workshop, or On-line Program.

Sponsor Couple – Diocesan Preferred Option

The sponsor couple program continues the evangelization begun in the initial interview and follow-up sessions with the parish pastoral minister. The sponsor couple's goals are to help the engaged couple establish roots in the life of the parish and to provide them with a positive example of marriage. The sponsor couple acts to facilitate conversations between the engaged couple during the marriage preparation process.

The sponsor couple's primary function is to serve as a witness to God's invitation to joy, found within the Sacrament of Matrimony. This witness becomes especially important in today's culture, which often lacks good examples for the engaged. The sponsor couple affirms the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality, but in many ways their ministry is one of presence. They offer a sign that the parish cares about the engaged couple and their upcoming marriage.

The sponsor couple also helps the engaged couple feel more connected to the parish, and in this role the sponsors should be open to inviting the engaged couple to attend Mass or other parish functions with them. The sponsor couple helps to represent a welcoming and enthusiastic parish.

The sponsor couple is meant to help an engaged couple grow in their relationship with each other and with God, which often involves challenging the engaged couple as an expression of love. One important aspect of the sponsor couple's ministry is to witness to the power of praying together as a family, both at Mass and in personal prayer. (See Appendix B for additional information on the parish Sponsor Couple ministry.)

Diocesan Workshop*

Several Marriage Preparation workshops are offered throughout the year at various locations throughout the diocese. Engaged couples may register for a one-day or weekend workshop from the options listed on the diocesan website, <https://www.davenportdiocese.org/marriage-preparation>.

During the workshop a group of engaged couples gather to interact with a team of married couples speaking on a variety of subjects vital to successfully living out of the vocation of marriage. Engaged couples are given time throughout the day or weekend to process and discuss key questions on each of these topics. At the conclusion of the workshop couples receive a certificate of attendance to be copied and placed in their pre-nuptial file.

If the engaged couple chooses this preparation option, they should be linked with at least one married couple in their parish who will accompany them as they journey through the time of immediate marriage preparation and during the fragile period of early married life.

* Note that several approved programs (*Two Become One* Remarriage Program, Engaged Encounter and Pre-Cana workshops) are also available through the Archdiocese of Dubuque. (See the Archdiocese of Dubuque website, <https://www.dbqarch.org/offices/family-life/marriage-preparation-program> or contact the Davenport Marriage and Family Life Coordinator for more information).

On-line Marriage Preparation Program – Use Only Under Special Circumstance

This limited preparation option is acceptable only under rare circumstance where there exists no possible alternative for the engaged couple. If the couple is separated by distance they should attempt to go through the on-line program at the same time while communicating by phone, video conferencing or some other electronic means. A link to this approved on-line marriage preparation program - *Catholic Marriage Prep Class* from Marriage Ministries, <http://catholicmarriageprepclass.com> - can be found on the diocesan website. Note that a special version is also available for military couples. A printable certificate of completion will be issued to the couple for all on-line versions and a copy should be placed in their pre-nuptial file at the parish.

Any engaged couple that selects this preparation option should be paired with a couple from the parish to ensure that they receive continued pastoral support during their time of marriage preparation and beyond.

Summary

- Each engaged couple will participate in a diocesan approved Marriage Preparation Instructional Program: Sponsor Couple, Diocesan Workshop, or On-line Program.
- Sponsor couples will be assigned by the parish.
- Registration for diocesan workshops and the on-line program is available through the diocesan website.
- Efforts should be made to link all engaged couples to at least one married couple in the parish who can provide support and encouragement to them throughout their time of formal marriage preparation and during the early years of their marriage.

Guiding Principles

- *USCCB's Complementary Norm to CIC 1067* The couple should receive appropriate education and pastoral preparation in a marriage preparation program approved by the diocesan bishop.
- *FC 66* "Changes that have taken place within almost all modern societies demand that not only the family but also the society and the Church should be involved in the effort of properly preparing young people for their future responsibilities... The Church must therefore promote better and more intensive programs of marriage preparation, in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favor positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages."
- *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage Paragraph 43* The pastoral workers and persons in charge must have a solid doctrinal preparation and unquestionable fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church so that they will be able to transmit the truths of the faith and the responsibilities connected with marriage with sufficient in-depth knowledge and life witness.

- *Relatio Synodi 2014, 26* “The complexity of today’s society and the challenges faced by the family require a greater community effort on the part of the whole Christian community in preparing those who are about to be married.”

Implementation Strategies

- When informing engaged couples about the instructional program component emphasize that the Church cares deeply about their marriage and hopes to offer them an opportunity to prepare for a strong and lasting union.
- Discuss all instructional program options with the engaged couple, giving preference to meeting with a trained sponsor couple if possible and suggesting the on-line option only under extreme circumstances.
- Ensure that your parish has a sufficient number of trained sponsor couples to accommodate the anticipated number of engaged couples it will be preparing for marriage. (Contact the diocesan Marriage and Family Life Coordinator if you would like to have couples trained for this ministry in your parish).
- If the engaged couple chooses an option other than that of meeting with a sponsor couple they should be linked with at least one married couple in the parish who will accompany them as they journey through the time of preparation and during the fragile period of early married life. Each parish should have a list of married couples willing to serve in this important parish ministry.
- The pastoral minister should indicate the completion of the instructional program requirement by checking the appropriate box on the diocesan Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form.

§IV-450.5 Introductory Natural Family Planning Instruction

The USCCB’s *Diocesan Natural Family Planning Ministry National 2015 Profile Report* has identified a positive trend in NFP education “from the periphery into the heart of diocesan marriage preparation ministry.” However, the document also noted that there is still a great need to substantially integrate a more sophisticated understanding of human sexuality and the nature of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood within all levels of catechesis.

It is recognized that the majority of couples preparing for marriage have not received adequate catechesis on the Church’s teachings regarding human sexuality and marriage. Most do not understand how the modern methods of NFP differ from contraception or how embracing NFP as a couple can be of great benefit to their marriage. Given this present reality, the pastoral minister has a moral responsibility to ensure that each couple receives accurate information and gentle formation in this area.

The parish is to inform engaged couples of child bearing age that they are to participate in an introductory NFP instruction. Pastoral ministers should provide the couples with an NFP informational brochure and direct them to the link on the diocesan website that contains a listing of approved instructional resources. Both general information as well as method-specific content is offered in a variety of formats:

- Individual couple or group on location instruction
- Live or self-paced online instruction
- One-on-one video conferencing instruction
- Video instructional program and study guide

Couples may select to participate in one of more of these resources based on their individual level of interest or particular life circumstance. (For example, a couple that suspects they may have difficulty conceiving a child due to an underlying physical condition would benefit most from instruction in the Creighton Model FertilityCare System). The various types of NFP methods are briefly described in the recommended USCCB's NFP informational brochure (see ordering information below). If a couple has questions concerning which instructional method would best meet their specific needs they should be advised to contact the diocesan Marriage and Family Life Coordinator for additional information.

The couple is to notify the pastoral minister after completing the required introductory NFP instruction. The minister should ask the couple if they have any questions and be ready to refer them for follow-up if necessary. Completion of the instruction should then be documented in the space provided on the diocesan Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form.

Summary

- Pastoral ministers are to inform couples of the diocesan requirement of participating in an introductory NFP instruction in order ensure that they have basic understanding of the subject and appreciation of how its use may be of benefit to their marriage.
- Each couple should be provided with a NFP informational brochure and directed to a listing of approved instructional opportunities.
- Approved options include in person instruction, on-line live classes, on-line self-paced classes, private Skype instruction or video with study guide.
- Couples may select one or more of these options for either general information or method specific content.
- The diocesan Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form will provide a space where the couple's completion of instruction may be recorded.

Guiding Principles

- *FC 13* The marital union calls husband and wife to become one flesh, one heart and one soul. It therefore “demands indissolubility and faithfulness in ... mutual giving; and is open to fertility.”
- *AL 222* “Decisions involving responsible parenthood presupposes the formation of conscience... the use of methods based on the ‘laws of nature and the incidence of fertility’ (*HV*, 11) are to be promoted, since ‘these methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourages tenderness between them and favor the education of an authentic freedom’ (*CCC* 2370).
- *HV 16* ... The Church teaches that married people may take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile, thus controlling birth in a way which does not offend moral principles...
- *AL 167* Large families are a joy for the Church. They are an expression of the fruitfulness of love. At the same time, Pope Saint John Paul II rightly explained the responsible parenthood does not mean “unlimited procreation or lack of awareness of what is involved in rearing children, but rather the empowerment of couples to use their inviolable liberty wisely and responsibly, taking into account social and demographic realities, as well as their own situation and legitimate desires.”

- *HV 10* ... In a word, the exercise of responsible parenthood requires that husband and wife, keeping a right order of priorities, recognize their own duties toward God, themselves, their families and human society.

Implementation Strategies

- Introduce this topic as an opportunity for the couple to learn about a natural, effective, and healthy method to achieve or postpone a pregnancy while enhancing their marriage.
- Order the appropriate number of NFP informational brochures – Publication #9521 (English) #9525 (Spanish) from the USCCB (1-866-582-0943)
- Make a copy of the Diocese of Davenport Natural Family Planning Resources to hand out or offer them the link to the information on the diocesan website.
- After the couple has been instructed conduct a brief follow-up discussion and record completion on the diocesan Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form.

§IV-450.6 Completion of Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form and Final Decision to Proceed or Delay the Wedding

Marriage is not simply a private act or possession between the two parties but it is also a matter of public interest. Both Church and civil authorities have traditionally established rules and laws concerning the basic requirements for marriage. The establishment of these laws has been for the purpose of assuring that the parties involved will not enter into a marriage relationship that would be detrimental to themselves, possible children, or the community. The Church includes in its preparation for marriage some form of pre-nuptial investigation in order to ensure that all expectations for marriage are being met, that both parties are free to marry and they are entering this marriage covenant with free consent.

The pre-nuptial investigation is an essential part of the preparation for marriage. This examination of the engaged couples is aimed primarily at:

1. Determining that the parties are free from impediments to marriage;
2. Ascertaining that there is sufficient understanding of the nature and obligations of Christian marriage;
3. Determining that they are freely consenting to this marriage.

The pastoral minister who participates in the marriage preparation is to complete the Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form and obtain the necessary permissions and dispensations according to diocesan policies and faculties granted by the bishop. The pre-nuptial investigation ensures the couple that they both are capable and intending to express consent in a way that is consistent with the meaning of marriage. It is vital that the form be thoroughly and accurately completed.

To ensure the integrity of the couple's answers, they must be questioned separately and their responses recorded by the pastoral minister. It is the duty of the pastoral minister to ensure that each of the engaged persons understands the meaning of the questions that are being posed. Both the engaged couple and the pastoral minister are to sign the forms.

No Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form is to be completed until all previous marriages have been ecclesiastically declared null or dissolved (death excepted). It is essential to list all previous marriages. Death certificates or file

numbers of a church decree of nullity or dissolution for each previous marriage must be provided in order to demonstrate how the marriage or marriages ended.

Baptismal records of all persons involved, Catholic and non-Catholic, must accompany the form as part of the permanent record or parish marriage file. Since baptismal records also contain information about the reception of other sacraments these records must have been **issued within the past six months**.

For Catholics marrying non-Catholics, the Catholic party is required to reaffirm his or her faith and agree to do all in his or her power to raise their children in the Catholic faith. The promise may be made orally or by signature. The non-Catholic party must be informed of these promises and of the responsibilities of the Catholic party.

A Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form must be sent to the diocesan Tribunal when:

- a) Any dispensation or permission is required;
- b) The marriage is to take place in another diocese or parish;
- c) There is a validation of a civil marriage;
- d) There is a previous marriage or marriages of one or both parties.

When a Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form is sent to the Tribunal it must be sent at least **30 days prior (60 days if the documentation must be sent to another diocese) to the scheduled wedding date**. This is imperative to ensure that all necessary work can be completed in a timely manner and that no obstacles will arise to the anticipated wedding. The Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form should be completed by the parish that completes the sacramental marriage preparation.

The Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form and all relevant documents are to be filed in the parish where the marriage takes place or in the parish from which a dispensation from canonical form is requested.

Final decision to proceed with or delay the wedding

All persons helping a couple prepare for marriage should see each session as a teachable moment. A sensitive pastoral approach can do much to re-awaken a faith that has been dormant. However, Church law provides that priests or deacons, through the authority of the Bishop, may temporarily delay the marriage in particular cases for a just cause and for as long as such cause continues. Just causes include:

- a) Lack of readiness for marriage as assessed by the priest/deacon/pastoral minister.
- b) Refusal of the parties to take part in the pre-marriage preparation or refusal to participate in a pre-marriage assessment, evaluation or counseling, as deemed necessary for proper preparation for the reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony.
- c) Substantial lack of appreciation for the spiritual and sacramental aspects of marriage.
- d) Non-acceptance or non-practice of the Catholic faith by both parties with no intention of returning to the faith.

Should a priest or deacon reach the decision that he cannot in good conscience witness the marriage and the marriage should be delayed, he must immediately inform the couple of this decision. If the marriage is delayed, the couple may have recourse to the Bishop or his delegate, who can review their case and make a final determination. The priest or deacon must also immediately inform the Bishop or his delegate in writing of the reason or reasons for his decision to delay the marriage. Meanwhile, no priest or deacon may proceed with a marriage after denial by another priest or deacon without the approval of the Bishop or his delegate.

When the decision is made to proceed with the wedding, the couple, with the assistance of the pastoral minister, will begin preparation for the wedding liturgy. Diocesan policy (available through the Office of Liturgy) includes guidelines for the liturgical celebrations of weddings. Individual parishes may also have local guidelines particular to their place of worship. These parish guidelines may not supersede diocesan policy.

Summary

- The purpose of the pre-nuptial investigation is to assure that all expectations for marriage are being met, that both parties are free to marry, and are entering the marriage covenant with free consent.
- The Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form is to be completed with thoroughness and accuracy by the pastoral minister preparing the couple for marriage.
- No Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form is to be completed until all previous marriages have been ecclesiastically declared null or dissolved.
- Baptismal records issued within the past six months of all persons involved, Catholic and non-Catholic, must accompany the form as part of the permanent record or parish marriage file.
- Catholics marrying non-Catholics are required to reaffirm their faith and to do all within their power to raise their children in the faith. The non-Catholic party must be informed of this promise.
- Certain circumstance require that the Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form must be sent to the Tribunal office (see above).
- Just causes exist whereby a priest or deacon may find it necessary to delay a couple's marriage (see above).

Guiding Principles

- *CIC c.1066* Before a marriage is celebrated, it must be evident that nothing stands in the way of its valid and licit celebration.
- *CIC c.1067* The conference of bishops is to establish norms about the examination of spouses and about the marriage banns or other opportune means to accomplish the investigations necessary before marriage. After these norms have been diligently observed, the pastor can proceed to assist at the marriage.
- *OCM 21* But if every effort fails, and an engaged couple openly and expressly demonstrates that they reject what the Church intends when the Marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls is not permitted to celebrate the Sacrament. Though reluctant, he must take note of the situation and convince those involved that, in these circumstances, it is not the Church, but they themselves, who prevent the celebration they are asking for (*FM, 68*).

Implementation Strategies

- The parish minister should obtain the most current Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form from the diocesan Tribunal office or website.
- To ensure the integrity of the couple's answers, each person should be questioned separately by the pastoral minister. It is the minister's duty to see that the engaged person understands the questions being asked and to accurately record the answers they provide.
- Do not complete the pre-nuptial form until any previous marriages are declared null or dissolved.
- Obtain a recently issued (within 6 months) copy the couple's Baptismal records when applicable.

§IV-450 Marriage Preparation: Policies and Procedures

- When circumstances warrant that is necessary to send the Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form to the Tribunal (see above) all paperwork should be received within 30 days of the scheduled wedding date. (Allow 60 days if any of the paperwork must be sent to another diocese).
- A priest or deacon may temporarily delay a marriage in particular cases for just cause (see above).

§IV-450.7 Post-Wedding Couple Contact Plan

Because it is common that many couples drift away from the Church after getting married, each parish should devise an intentional plan to reach out to couples after the wedding, helping them to stay connected to each other and to the Church.

It has already been stated that marriage preparation is most accurately described as “a journey of faith which does not end with the celebration of marriage.” Often the engaged couple assumes that the Church’s role or interest ends on the day of the wedding. Rather, after the wedding day the Church takes on a renewed interest in the couple as they have sacramentally deepened their relationship with the Church. Marriage is a sacrament at the service of communion, and so it is only within the context of the Body of Christ that it can be fully understood.

The communal dimension of the Sacrament of Matrimony is twofold. By entering a sacramental marriage, the couple has taken on new responsibilities and obligations in relation to the Church, but it is also true that the Church has deepened her responsibilities and obligations to the couple. As the Body of Christ the Church is called to walk with every married couple, through their joys, sorrows, trials and triumphs. Every effort should be made to remind newly married couples that the Church continues to be relevant in their lives and continues to care for them deeply.

Summary

- A specific plan for post-wedding contact should be developed for each couple and intentional efforts made to help them continue to be active participants in the Church.

Guiding Principles

- *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage Paragraph 16* Christian marriage preparation can be described as a journey of faith which does not end with the celebration of marriage but continues throughout family life.
- *CCC 1534* Two other sacraments, Holy Orders and Matrimony, are directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so.
- *Gaudium et Spes 1* The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.
- *AL 224* Pastoral workers and groups of married people should think of ways to help young or vulnerable couples...
- *AL 218* ...marriage preparation is to help couples realize that marriage is not something that happens once and for all. Their union is irrevocable, confirmed and consecrated by the Sacrament of Matrimony. Yet in joining their lives, the spouses assume an active and creative role in a lifelong project.

Implementation Strategies

- As a part of your marriage preparation process, invite the couples to consider a ministry in the Church that they can serve in after their wedding day, as lectors, extraordinary Eucharistic ministers, or some other suitable ministry.
- Develop a mystagogical reflection experience for the newlyweds.
- Explore additional creative ways to reach out to newly married couples in the parish. (Resources available through the diocesan Marriage and Family Life Coordinator).
- Invite couples in the parish to begin a newly married (5 years or under) social group, that could meet on a regular basis for fellowship. Be sure to offer childcare during these meetings.
- Record that a post-wedding parish contact plan has been developed for the couple on the diocesan Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form.

APPENDIX A: Application for Waivers to Policy

Due to couples' canonical right to marry, there will always be cases where a partial or total exemption to the marriage preparation policy is in order. These exemptions would stem from an insurmountable obstacle in completing the diocesan or parish marriage preparation process. If the pastor, deacon, or pastoral minister discerns that such an obstacle exists, a letter should be sent to the Tribunal office which (1) identifies the nature of the obstacle, and (2) identifies whether the waiver requested entails part or all of the diocesan policy. These requests will be reviewed by the Tribunal office and granted or denied by the Bishop or his delegate. If a pastor, deacon, or pastoral minister discerns that a parish level policy should be exempted, they can grant such a waiver without an application for exemption.

If a couple feels that an exemption is in order due to an obstacle that the pastor, deacon, or pastoral minister has not recognized, they can personally apply for a waiver by sending a letter to the Tribunal which (1) identifies the nature of the obstacle, and (2) identifies whether the exemption entails part or all of the diocesan policy. This application can also pertain to a parish policy. The nature of the obstacle and the requested exemption will be shared with the pastor, deacon, or pastoral minister, and they will be asked to submit a letter indicating their reasons for not requesting an exemption. At this point the request will be reviewed by the Tribunal office and granted or denied by the Bishop or his delegate.

APPENDIX B: Sponsor Couples

1. Recruitment of Sponsor Couples

Parishes will need to be intentional in the recruitment of couples to serve in the sponsor couple ministry. Often times married couples will not simply volunteer for this ministry because they may feel inadequate or that they need to have a perfect marriage to be an effective minister. For this reason, personal invitation is usually the best means of sponsor couple recruitment. It is especially effective when the parish is able to express the importance of this ministry, and the opportunity for enrichment within the couple's own marriage. Once couples have been trained and become active in this ministry, they usually continue to participate as sponsor couples because of the benefits they discover that this ministry is providing to their own marriages. In order to avoid overworking sponsor couples, effort should be made to assign no more than two engaged couples to a sponsor couple per year. Therefore, parishes should ensure that they have a sufficient number of trained sponsor couples to meet the anticipated annual need. (Resources for the recruitment and training of parish sponsor couples are available through the diocesan Marriage and Family Life Coordinator).

2. The Ministry of Sponsor Couples

The sponsor couple program is a calling that must be discerned by the individual sponsor couple, and by the parish at which the sponsor couple serves. Every baptized Christian has an obligation to participate in the work of Christ, but different people are called to different ministries, and becoming a sponsor couple will involve a process of discernment, both by the parish and by the couple.

Couples serving in their parish's Sponsor Couple ministry must meet the following requirements:

1. Be recommended by the pastor, deacon or pastoral minister
2. Be validly married for five or more years
3. Have knowledge of and support the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality
4. Have a reasonably joyful and healthy marriage
5. Attend a diocesan approved training for sponsor couples
6. Be willing to follow the diocesan marriage preparation policy
7. Be willing to participate in yearly sponsor couple enrichment

Potential sponsor couples should also be made aware of the time commitment that this ministry involves. In addition to the 5-6 meetings prior to the wedding, the sponsor couple is encouraged to make a commitment to pray for the engaged couple for their first year of marriage and propose one meeting three months and six months after the wedding in order to reconnect with the couple and discuss ongoing marriage enrichment. This expectation comes from an acknowledgment that marriages are never stagnant, but that they require constant work and renewal. It also stems from an understanding that the temporal preparations for marriage can often distract couples from sacramental preparation, and therefore after the wedding the couple may be more disposed to formation. These meetings serve to remind the couple that the Church cares deeply about their marriage, and that they are always invited into the life of the parish.

Because of the importance of this ministry, every sponsor couple is encouraged to attend at least one marriage enrichment event per year. These learning opportunities may take place on the parish, deanery, or diocesan level, depending on a parish's demographics and resources.

3. Support of Parish Sponsor Couples

Parish sponsor couples give an invaluable service to the marriage preparation process. This ministry is fundamentally evangelical, but it also plays an important role in teaching engaged couples the skills that will help them have a thriving marriage. It is imperative to offer ongoing support to our sponsor couples, in order to ensure that they feel confident in their ministry.

Support for sponsor couples can take on many forms, but all support should include three elements: (1) Couples should have the opportunity to collaborate with other sponsor couples, (2) to interact with the pastoral minister who coordinates the parish marriage preparation program, and (3) to spiritually and relationally enrich their own marriages. Each of these three elements can be achieved in a yearly sponsor couple enrichment event.

A diocesan marriage enrichment program for sponsor couples will be held annually. This event will offer a time for sponsor couples to come together and discuss their experiences and to develop specific skills and strategies that can enrich their marriages and their ministry. Parishes are encouraged to host their own sponsor couples enrichment events as well. This will offer an opportunity to help the sponsor couples of a particular parish grow in community and support. Sponsor couples may attend diocesan or parish level enrichment events; the most important aspect is that they continue to grow and feel supported in their ministry.