

INTRODUCTION

This marriage policy is the fruit of several years of broad consultation in the Diocese designed to assist all of us celebrate this sacrament meaningfully, responsibly, and joyfully. Hopefully, this policy will especially be helpful for couples as they prepare to celebrate and live their sacrament of marriage. Their special relationship in marriage will not only be a great blessing and grace to them but to all of us. St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians spoke insightfully about how the relationship between husband and wife is a wonderful symbol of the relationship between Jesus and the Church. This privileged relationship between husband and wife well lived is a powerful sign within the Church and culture at large. We all know the special challenge and grace of a marriage relationship. Such a bond lived with the recognition that Jesus must be central to their lives provides marvelous opportunities for growth in holiness and for strengthening families. My hope and prayer is that married couples will appreciate the sacrament they celebrate and live. In turn, we as Church must also journey with them in support, prayer, and love.

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1. The Catechism of the Catholic Church introduces its presentation of the Sacrament of Matrimony with a reference to the Code of Canon Law: "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament." (CCC 1601, CIC 1055 §1). Pope John Paul II summarizes the complexity and significance of the catechesis on marriage in these words: "Conjugal loves involves a totality, in which all the merits of the person enter— appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands *indissolubility* and *faithfulness* in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to *fertility*. In a word it is a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values." (*Familiaris Consortio*, 13)
2. The first catechetical experience of marriage takes place in the family. Through their unique marital relationship, parents by word and example share with their children the meaning of marriage as a covenant of fidelity and forgiveness.
3. Programs of Christian education must teach young people about the mystery of human love and the dignity of the marital covenant. This education must clearly present the goodness of human sexuality in its unitive and procreative facets; the exclusivity of the commitment of spouses; the indissolubility of the bond of marriage because it is an icon of God's faithfulness and love; the ordering of married love to the procreation and education of children.
4. Practical programs for adolescents should help them understand the challenges of dating and the real meaning of developing interpersonal friendships before they become involved in exclusive relationships inappropriate for their age and experience. Pastoral leaders are challenged to help young people reflect on their experiences so that growth toward self-understanding and maturity may take place.
5. Remote preparation for marriage through programs during the years of junior high and high school teaches young people to understand marriage as a vocation or a specific response of faith to the universal call to holiness. The Diocese affirms the effort of Catholic Universities to provide courses and programs of even greater depth on Christian marriage.
6. The Diocese affirms its support for the marriage preparation programs that are the apostolate of married couples to couples preparing for marriage. These include the Diocesan sponsored Marriage Preparation Weekends and the Engaged Encounter. Local programs and sessions led by married couples for couples in the parish are a very special ministry to those preparing for marriage.

PART II: MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

1. Marriage is a state of grace that begins with the celebration of the wedding. The grace of this sacrament is given to perfect the couple's love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity.
"Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of Matrimony, whereby they signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church, help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children. By reason of their state and rank in life they have their own special gift among the people of God. From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state." LG, 11). Marriage is a sacred state. The Sacrament is a continuing way of life.
2. Parish life must support the domestic church. Enrichment programs should be an ordinary part of pastoral ministry. The apostolate of marriage enrichment as undertaken by Marriage Encounter, Retrouvaille and other spiritual exercises for couples is an important part of the life of our diocese. Immaculate Heart Retreat Center is committed to providing programs that support and enrich the spirituality of spouses and families. Couples should be encouraged to nourish and renew their marriages through these resources. They are encouraged to participate in some form of spiritual renewal on a regular basis, for example every five years.
3. It is fitting that married couples in the parish community be recognized and honored. The rite for Blessing a Married Couple on the anniversary of marriage or other occasions (Book of Blessings nn. 90 ff.) may suitably be employed for this purpose.
4. Families are encouraged to continually remember the spiritual relationship established by the sacrament of Marriage between the family table, the Eucharistic altar and the wedding feast of the Lamb. The spirituality of the family table nourishes the domestic church and the spouses to be ever faithful to the promise given in the Bread of Life to share here on earth the foretaste of the eternal banquet of love.

PART III: THE CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF MARRIAGE

Those approaching the Church to celebrate marriage today often come from different cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds than the mainstream experience of the United States . We are aware of the presence of immigrants from Mexico and other countries of Central and South America . While the predominant language of these immigrants is Spanish, they can come from very different cultural experiences. Immigrant populations have also come from Asia, the South Pacific and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, Native American peoples have maintained a cultural identity that deserves recognition and respect.

Diverse cultural experiences give rise to differing expectations and understandings of the marriage relationship. The following issues call for sensitivity and flexibility in dealing with couples where one or both parties have a different experience than our local culture:

Age: while the customary age for marriage in mainstream American culture has tended to increase, a younger age may be more common within other communities, calling for sensitivity and awareness of both the differences and the changing dynamics that are taking place in immigrant communities.

Gender expectations and roles: The immigrant couple brings expectations about acceptable gender responses. At the same time, the local culture will be reshaping those expectations and will continue to do so after marriage.

Faith Development: In some cultures, the marriage preparation is a significant point in faith development. Ministers must be aware of the expectations by some couples to renew their faith development in marriage preparation.

Legal Status: Because of unresolved questions of their legal status, some couples are reluctant to enter into the civil processes for marriage in the State of Washington . Ministers are challenged to understand that this fear leads couples to cohabit for long periods of time until their status is regularized.

Costs: The policies for marriage preparation set forth in this document presuppose the ability of couples to pay the costs of evaluations and preparation experiences. They in fact may not be able to afford these costs, and should be appropriately subsidized by the parish.

Preparation Tools: Most of the available preparation instruments tend to be culturally biased. Often the literacy of couples places them at a disadvantage. Great sensitivity must be used in the selection of preparation tools and in the interpretation of the results.

Documentation: Marriage is a right that supercedes the availability of proper documentation. Flexibility in demanding baptismal certificates and other documentation must be present in these special circumstances. Sworn testimony (cf. canon 876) may sometimes supply proof of baptism and of freedom to marry.

Transcultural Marriages: Honest dialogue about their expectations of each other and their understanding of marriage is of special concern when the bride and groom come from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This situation can be a positive and dynamic part of a relationship as well as a great challenge.

Cultural differences call for pastoral sensitivity and awareness. Married couples who share the cultural background of the couple preparing for marriage can creatively assist the couple to understand their marriage within the context of American culture.

In the celebration of marriage, ministers should allow for the incorporation of rituals and customs in accord with the spirit of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: "Even in the liturgy the Church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather does she respect and foster the qualities and talents of the various races and nations. She sometimes even admits such things into the liturgy itself, provided they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit." (SC 37).

PART IV: MARRIAGE PREPARATION:

1. Pastors are responsible to insure that engaged couples are provided with adequate marriage preparation. Normally at least four months of formal preparation should be offered. Marriage preparation is not judged by the passing of time, but by the offering of a time of reflection, maturation, activities and interaction with the parish pastoral team. The commitment to a wedding date presupposes the willingness of the couple to engage in the formal marriage preparation process offered by the parish.
2. The date for a wedding can be set only when the pastoral minister has established the freedom of the parties to marry in the Church and has the necessary documentation in hand if a previous marriage has taken place.
3. Several pre-marriage evaluation programs are available. Proper pastoral ministry requires that couples review and discuss the results offered by one of these pastoral tools. A copy of the inventory should remain a part of the permanent file of the marriage preparation.
4. Pastoral ministers are urged to include sessions led by experienced married couples of mature faith and deep commitment to their marriages. This formation may be provided by a couple to couple program in the parish or by participation in the Diocesan Marriage Preparation Weekend, or by participation in Engaged Encounter.
5. Marriage preparation should help couples to interrelate the celebration of their marriage in the Church with the spiritual nature of the relationship to which they are committing themselves.
6. The Pre-nuptial Investigation is more than the gathering of data from the couple. It is an exploration of their faith experience, their families of origin, how their experience has already formed their understanding of marriage, and of how this understanding may be affirmed and challenged.
7. The marriage celebration takes place in the context of a community of faith. The Rite of Marriage is an act of worship in which the couple is united with the faith community in celebrating the mystery of God's love for them and in them. Their participation in the preparation of the marriage ceremony is an opportunity to deepen their understanding of this mystery.

8. The Celebration of the Blessing of an Engaged Couple (Book of Blessings, nn. 195 ff.) is an opportunity to invite the faith community to pray for the couple as they prepare for the celebration of their marriage. This Rite is an appropriate part of Sunday worship, at the time of the preparation weekend, or as a special celebration with the families of the couple.

PART V: COUPLES IN SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

A. Marriage of a Catholic and a non-Catholic

Today it is difficult to describe a marriage of a Catholic with non-Catholic, whether baptized or not, as a special circumstance. But such situations call for pastoral attention and ministry, and attentiveness to canonical formalities. From a pastoral perspective, the canonical status of the non-Catholic party (i.e., baptized or not baptized) may be of less significance than his/her attitude toward and understanding of Catholicism, and one's religious formation and commitment.

1. In marriages where the other party has received little or no religious formation, but is not hostile to religion, the pastoral minister is challenged to help the Catholic party understand the implications of this upon his or her faith and upon the faith life of their future family. Every effort must be made to help the couple understand the spiritual nature of marriage as that experience where spouses and children encounter the unconditional love of God for them in the flesh. This fundamental truth is an important common ground for the marriage relationship. When the non-Catholic desires to convert or enter into full communion, participation in the Church is to be encouraged. However, catechetical formation or the catechumenate should not be shortened to accommodate a wedding date. It may be better, e.g., to receive the person into the order of catechumens, allowing the ongoing formation in the faith to be pursued after the marriage.
2. When there is hostility in the non-Catholic party, this hostility and its implications must be addressed honestly and kindly. An analogous circumstance may be present when both parties are Catholic, but one has abandoned the faith.
3. When the other party is a committed non-Christian believer, the dialogue with the parties should explore the common ground of their relationship and the impact of their religious differences on their children and their family life.
4. When the other party is a committed Christian with involvement in another ecclesial community, the pastoral minister must help the couple discuss the role of religious life in their marriage. How can this couple compliment each another's religious commitment and how will this be worked out for their children?

In each of these instances, the canonical formalities specified in canon 1125 must be fulfilled to obtain permission for a mixed marriage (Catholic and baptized non-Catholic), or dispensation of the impediment of disparity of cult (Catholic and non-baptized person). The Catholic party may need to be reminded that the fundamental issue is not the faith of children yet to be born, but the faith that he or she is challenged to live in the present moment as a life giving element of the covenantal love that Christian marriage signifies.

B. Marriages of persons who have been previously married:

1. When one or both parties seeking marriage in the Church have been previously divorced, the pastoral minister must clarify the Church's belief in the indissolubility of marriage. If the divorced person truly believes that the former marriage lacked one or more of the requirements of the Church's understanding of a valid marriage, it is the right of that party to have that question resolved by the Marriage Tribunal.
2. No Date for marriage should be established until this question is resolved.
3. The pastoral minister should act as the advocate for the person to assist in determining whether grounds for nullity exist, consulting with the Tribunal if necessary. The minister assists the party in preparing the testimony and documentation required by the Tribunal.
4. If freedom to marry is established through the Tribunal's decision, there may be a requirement for special attention in preparation for a subsequent marriage. The pastoral minister is to see that this requirement is met. It may be helpful to contact the tribunal to receive a summary review of

the concerns of the Tribunal.

- A stipulation for “pastoral counseling” is usually met through aggressive pre-marriage counseling to help the party confirm that unhealthy attitudes and actions have been honestly confronted and overcome.
 - A stipulation for “professional counseling” calls for intervention by a licensed marriage and family counselor or psychologist. The pastoral minister should request a report from the professional person and include that report in the prenuptial file.
 - The natural obligations of a prior union must be justly and honestly met, especially regarding parental rights and duties. It is unlawful to celebrate marriage without some objective assurance that these obligations are being met (cf. Canon 1071 §1.3). At times, this may be an issue for additional pastoral or even professional counseling that also involves the intended spouse.
5. When the previous marriage of either party was dissolved by death, the pastoral minister should carefully and kindly seek to assure that the patterns of mourning have been completed and that the party is emotionally free to enter a new marriage

C. Cohabitation Prior to Marriage:

When a couple seeking marriage in the Church is already cohabiting, the pastoral minister must help this couple to understand how their action is contrary to the law of God and has not prepared them well to sustain a relationship which will be faithful and permanent. The subjective uprightness of conscience does not excuse the couple from the objective harm that has been done to the Christian community and their families, as well as to their own integrity as models for their children. However, the pastoral minister does not have the right or authority to refuse marriage on the basis of cohabitation. One or both parties may welcome the invitation of the pastoral minister to participate in the sacrament of penance.

Cohabitation is not a reason to omit or shorten the marriage preparation process. There may be a need for the parties to consider why they now desire the formality of marriage and whether each party is fully and freely committed to this course of action.

D. Convalidation (blessing) of previously invalid marriages:

Although commonly referred to as “blessing” the marriage, convalidation is not the action of the sacred minister, but of the parties themselves who now renew their consent through a new act of the will concerning a marriage which they know or think was null from the beginning (cf. canon 1157). For some couples, the canonical marriage was impeded by an existing marriage that has now been proven invalid. For others, indifference to their Catholic faith has given way to a desire to return to the sacraments and ecclesial participation. However, it may also be the case that marital difficulties have prompted one or the other party to seek an extrinsic remedy for relational problems that are not honestly acknowledged. Concerns of the pastoral minister may include:

1. Is this couple seeking to validate a relationship that is already in difficulty and tension?
2. Is the relationship truly reflective of mutual respect and honor or is one party using the other party in some way, e.g. sexually, economically, socially. etc?
3. Will the validation of this marriage lead this couple to more faithful commitment to the life of the Church?
4. Are their already children from this relationship? Are the parties exercising responsible parenting?

Pastoral discretion rather than a strict four months timetable for marriage preparation is generally called for in these cases.

E. Pre-marital Pregnancy:

When the relationship has led to pregnancy, the pastoral minister must discern whether the pregnancy is the primary reason for the decision to marry. Such an action tends to manifest a lack of discretion of judgment about the nature and ends of marriage. Pregnancy is not a reason to rush or expedite marriage preparation. This couple has become responsible for the life, nurturing and education of a child. How can they best provide for this obligation? This issue as well as the issue of marriage both need to be faced. Professional counseling is recommended.

F. Marriage involving a person under 20 years of age:

When either of the parties is under the age of 20, the parties must be interviewed by a Catholic Charities Counselor. This process usually consists of six hours of counseling and evaluation. The report of the counselor must be included in the prenuptial file. The pastoral minister must balance the statistical reality of marital failure in the vast majority of these marriages with the natural right of persons to contract marriage.

Marriages of couples in these special circumstances (especially prior marriage, convalidation and cohabitation) may sometimes appear to contradict the values of Christian marriage and cause wonderment and even division in the community. It is the duty of the couple to recognize how their behavior and circumstances have harmed the Christian community, and celebrate their wedding in a spirit of conversion of heart. An ostentatious celebration is not in keeping with the objective reality of these circumstances.

PART VI: POLICIES REGARDING THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE:

The following provides a summary of the policies of the Diocese of Spokane regarding the celebration of Marriage. This summary includes material found in the *Rite of Marriage*, the *Code of Canon Law*, the Diocesan Policy for Marriage Preparation, and the faculties of the priests and deacons of the Diocese.

1. The celebration of Marriage in Catholic tradition is a sacred action within the community of faith. The parish church is the sacred space appropriate to the establishment of this holy covenant. All parishes, but especially those which have a significant number of marriages, shall have guidelines regarding the time, decorum, ministries, music, etc. for the liturgy to assist the couple in the preparation of these sacred rites. Catholic Marriage is never a private event and always is celebrated in the context of the faith of the worshipping community.
2. The requirements of the Diocesan policy for marriage preparation are to be observed. That policy in ordinary circumstances requires four months of preparation, encourages use of one of the available inventory instruments, and provides guidance about situations involving special circumstances.

The Church's teaching articulated by Pope John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* (#68) reminds pastors that because this sacrament is rooted in the economy of creation, the Church also admits to the celebration of marriage even those who are "imperfectly disposed" and who may seek marriage in the Church for motives which are "social rather than genuinely religious." Their right to the sacrament is established by their "right intention," "to commit by their irrevocable conjugal consent their whole lives in indissoluble love and unconditional fidelity." Laying down further criteria concerning "the level of faith" would involve the "risk of making unfounded and discriminatory judgments.

3. The pastoral minister preparing the couple for marriage will complete a prenuptial investigation to ascertain the freedom of the parties to marry, the absence or dispensation of impediments, and the capacity and readiness of the couple to enter into the marriage covenant.

In the cases where a previous marriage is not dissolved by death, the prenuptial investigation is not satisfied and no date for marriage shall be set until a declaration of nullity or a statement of freedom to marry is received from the competent tribunal or diocese. A stipulation concerning counseling prior to remarriage is to be observed

4. In the Diocese of Spokane pastors have the faculty to dispense the impediment of disparity of cult and to permit mixed marriages and grant permission to those bound by natural obligations arising from a previous union. They are responsible to assess that the conditions for granting these dispensations or permissions are fulfilled. (In the case of mixed marriages and for special reasons, a Dispensation from Canonical Form is granted only by the Ordinary. Please consult the Catholic Pastoral Center for information in these circumstances.)
5. By law and by diocesan faculty, pastors and parochial vicars and deacons who are administrators of parishes may validly assist at marriages within the limits of their territory, and may grant delegation to other priests or deacons to do the same.
6. The dignity and sacred nature of marriage makes a Catholic church especially "suitable" for the celebration of marriage. Marriage is to be celebrated in a parish church. With the permission of the pastor, it can be celebrated in another public Catholic chapel. Marriages may not be celebrated in places other than a parish church or public oratory without permission of the Local Ordinary. This permission (and delegation) must be obtained before the minister agrees to assist at the marriage.
7. According to the Rite of Marriage #8, a mixed marriage (between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic) may not be celebrated at Mass without the permission of the Local Ordinary. When the couple requests a Nuptial Mass, the priest may request this permission only after he has considered and explained the many pastoral, ecumenical and liturgical difficulties impeding the proper celebration of the Eucharist. The faith and desire of the Catholic family is itself not a sufficient reason. Pastors or other celebrants may not grant permission for or offer an invitation to intercommunion.
8. A marriage between a Catholic and an non-baptized person may not be celebrated at Mass, in accord with chapter III, nn. 55-66 of the Rite of Marriage.
9. The time of marriage should take into account the liturgical season and the pastoral situation of the faith community. In parishes where significant numbers of marriages are celebrated, local policy must take into account the circumstances of the pastoral life of the parish and its regular Mass schedule. It is always appropriate to celebrate the marriage of two Catholics at regularly scheduled Masses.

PART VII: PASTORAL AGENTS RESPONSIBLE FOR MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Canon 1115: Marriages are to be celebrated in a parish where either of the contracting parties has a domicile, quasi-domicile, or month long residence or, if it concerns transients, in the parish where they actually reside. With the permission of the proper ordinary or proper pastor, marriages can be celebrated elsewhere.

Canon 1070: If someone other than the pastor who is to assist at marriage has conducted the [prenuptial] investigations, the person is to notify the pastor about the results as soon as possible through an authentic document.

The norms of Canons 1115 and 1070 are helpful, but not adequate in many situations to establish the rights and responsibilities of couples and pastoral ministers in facilitating pastoral preparation for marriage and its liturgical celebration. The following directives and guidelines supplement the canons.

1. Even though a Catholic has not participated in ecclesial life or "registered" in the parish where he/she resides, the right to pastoral ministry in that parish cannot be denied on that basis.
2. The adult children of parishioners, even though they no longer have domicile within their parents' parish, are generally considered to enjoy the right to celebrate marriage in that parish. The pastor of the parish should consult with the couple and the proper pastor (where the party/parties actually reside or participate in church) to determine pastoral responsibility for marriage preparation.
3. By reason of personal or familial relationship, a couple may ask a priest or deacon to assist at their marriage. Prior to accepting this request, the priest or deacon must consult with the proper pastor to determine responsibility for marriage preparation and to obtain the requisite permission or delegation for the celebration of marriage.

4. At times a couple has no involvement in ecclesial life, but may come to a particular priest or parish to contract marriage. The church's minister must determine the pastoral response that is prudent and reasonable. At times, this may entail acceptance of pastoral responsibility for the marriage; at other times, the minister may facilitate connecting the couple to a parish where this pastoral care may more appropriately be provided.
5. Whenever a couple lacks ecclesial participation, an element of pastoral preparation for marriage is fostering the couple's relationship with the community of faith.

PART VIII: OFFERINGS OF THE FAITHFUL FOR THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

1. Parish policies are to be in conformity with the principles of universal law. Canon. 1264—Unless the law has provided otherwise, it is the responsibility of a meeting of the bishops of a province: 2^o to set a limit on the offerings given on the occasion of administering the sacraments and sacramentals.

Canon 1267--§1. Unless the contrary is established, the offerings given to the superiors or administrators of any ecclesiastical juridic person, even to a private one, are presumed to be given to that juridic person.

Canon 531—Although another person [i.e., someone other than the pastor], may have performed some parochial function, that person is to put the offerings received from the Christian faithful on that occasion into the parish account, unless it is obvious that such would be contrary to the will of the donor in the case of voluntary offerings.

Canon 848—The minister should ask nothing for the administration of the sacraments beyond the offerings defined by the competent authority, always being careful that the needy are not deprived of the help of the sacraments because of their poverty.

2. Offerings traditionally called "stole fees" are offerings to the parish, not to the person of the minister. A "limit" may be set on the amount of these offerings by the bishops of a province. The bishops of the Province of Seattle have not acted to set these limits. Consequently, the custom of each parish determining this matter is left intact, provided that the designated offering is just and reasonable, and that canon 848 is always observed. The amount of the offering set by the parish for the celebration of marriage should take into account the operating expenses of the parish and the time of parish staff, and not merely of the pastor. When a parish requires that its wedding coordinator assists the couple, that person's remuneration should be included in the defined offering. Compensation for other persons (e.g. musicians) asked by the couple to provide some service, is the responsibility of the couple.
3. When a priest or deacon other than a member of the parish staff has been asked by the couple to assist at the marriage, the couple is to offer appropriate remuneration apart from its offering to the parish.
4. When the expectations of a couple go beyond what is customary, their duty to justly compensate the parish should be insisted upon.
5. It is just and reasonable to determine the amount of the offering according to the relationship of the couple and their families to the parish. When a family (or the couple or a party in the marriage) has been committed to parochial stewardship through sacrificial giving, a further offering for administration of the sacraments should be reduced or even omitted altogether.
6. At the time a couple begins proximate preparation for marriage, the parish should make available its policies governing the use of parish facilities for weddings. This literature should include the defined offering for marriage, and other fees, deposits or rates for the use of parish facilities and employment of parish personnel.