

MARRIAGE PREPARATION

POLICIES & PROCEDURES



Marriage Preparation

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

DIOCESE OF DES MOINES



OFFICE OF MARRIAGE & FAMILY LIFE



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FOREWORD
BY THE MOST REVEREND
RICHARD E. PATES
BISHOP OF DES MOINES

*Beloved, let us love one another;
for love is of God,
and he who loves is born of God
and knows God.
He who does not love
does not know God, for God is love.*

—FIRST LETTER OF JOHN 4:7-8

FOREWORD

It is with joy that I promulgate the new marriage-preparation policies of the Diocese of Des Moines. This document was formed as a response to the Pontifical Council for the Family's call to strengthen the marriage-preparation process. These policies build upon the solid foundation developed in the Diocese of Des Moines over many years.

It is important to recognize that every step in the process of sacramental marriage preparation is meant to be an opportunity for evangelization, a privileged moment where a couple can recognize the relationship between their love and Christ's love for them. It is my hope that this work will help couples embrace their marriage as what St. John Paul II called both a saved and saving community. They are saved because of the redemptive love of Christ, and agents of salvation because their love is a participation in God's love made present in the world.

While engaged couples today face many challenges, there are many reasons for hope. The Church's vision of marriage, even while involving expectations, is always an invitation to the fullness of life. This invitation resonates in the hearts of the engaged. With the help of our marriage-preparation process, may we continue to extend Christ's invitation to the benefit of married life with joy and clarity!

I thank all those who have been involved in the preparation of this document. Appreciation is owed to everyone who contributed either by offering comments, examples, or research to this project. Most importantly I thank the priests and deacons of the Diocese of Des Moines, who directly and faithfully serve our engaged couples.

Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary
22 August 2014

+ *Richard E. Pates*

✠ The Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines



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FOREWORD
BY THE MOST REVEREND
RICHARD E. PATES
BISHOP OF DES MOINES



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INTRODUCTION:
NATURE & IMPLEMENTATION
OF POLICY

*Marriage preparation doesn't end
on the day of the wedding,
but rather is a journey of faith
that continues throughout family life.*



THE THREE STAGES OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Familiaris Consortio (*The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*), the apostolic letter of St. John Paul II, teaches that marriage preparation is to be seen and put into practice as a gradual and continuous process. It identifies three main stages:

Remote marriage preparation begins in early childhood with family training that instills esteem for authentic human values. It includes spiritual and catechetical formation focusing on vocational choices.

Proximate marriage preparation builds up this foundation with the more specific preparation for the sacraments, presenting marriage as an interpersonal relationship of a man and a woman that has to be continually developed for their own benefit as a family.

Immediate preparation for the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony should take place in the months and weeks immediately preceding the wedding, so as to give a new meaning, content, and form to the premarital inquiry required by Canon Law. This preparation not only is necessary in every case, but it also urgently is needed for engaged couples who still manifest shortcomings or difficulties in Christian doctrine and practice.

The Des Moines Diocese's policies and procedures are concerned with immediate marriage preparation.

INTRODUCTION

NATURE & IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to direct pastoral ministers of the Diocese of Des Moines as they prepare engaged couples for the sacrament of Matrimony. 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 gift.

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

Couples currently find themselves in a culture that largely has rejected the Christian view of marriage. All marriage preparation must be set in the context of evangelization and structured in such a way that couples not only receive 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 skills that help marriages thrive.

The ongoing nature of marriage as a foundation for successful living must be emphasized. In *Familiaris Consortio* (*The Role of the Christian*

Family in the Modern World), St. John Paul II taught that marriage preparation doesn't 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, so too marriage requires that couples continually renew the covenant first expressed 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 joyfully as an opportunity for couples to grow closer to Jesus and to each other. Many couples initially fail to see value in sacramental marriage preparation, and this sad reality calls for renewed efforts on the part of the Church to introduce participants to the love that Jesus Christ has for them and to the sincere interest the Church has in helping them to live out the most joyful marriage possible. All members of the marriage-preparation team must be committed to this vision, and no step of the policy ever should be presented as a "hoop to jump through." All aspects of the policy are to be promoted as ways in which the Church is committed to helping marriages thrive.

Couples preparing for a Catholic marriage should expect to hear the Church's teaching on marriage and ►



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► sexuality, and they have the right to hear that message presented in a consistent, clear, and joyful way. It's imperative that every member of the marriage-preparation team understand and support this Church teaching, which is to be offered as a gift to engaged couples.

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 marriage-preparation policy set by the Diocese of Des Moines, additional

requirements may be established by an individual parish.

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 such cases, a couple may request a waiver, which is applied for by the pastor or his delegate. The request is reviewed by the diocesan Marriage Tribunal, then granted or denied by the Bishop or his delegate. (See Appendix A on page 32 for more information about to go about requesting a waiver). ✠

SUMMARY

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

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

—GENESIS 1:27

INTRODUCTION

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Codex Iuris Canonici (Code of Canon Law, CIC) 1058—All persons who aren't prohibited by law can contract marriage.

CIC 1063—Pastors of souls are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the faithful the assistance by which the matrimonial state is preserved in a Christian spirit and advances in perfection.

CIC 1067—The conference of bishops is to establish norms about the examination of spouses and about the marriage bans 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.

United States' Conference of Catholic Bishops Complementary Norm to CIC 1067—The couple should receive appropriate education and pastoral preparation through participation in a marriage-preparation program approved by the diocesan bishop.

Familiaris Consortio (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World) 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.”

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Encourage the marriage-preparation team to pray for engaged couples, especially for those couples who appear less than enthusiastic about preparing for sacramental marriage.

Ensure that everyone on the team presents the marriage-preparation policy joyfully as an opportunity for couples to experience further growth and intimacy.

Ensure that everyone on the team understands and supports the Church's teaching regarding marriage and sexuality, which is imperative for a couple's successful preparation for a sacramental marriage.

Maintain contact with the newly married couple through such things as notes and calls from team members, a final meeting with the team three months after the marriage ceremony, wedding and anniversary cards from the pastor and parish, and a follow-up meeting a year after the wedding.



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THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE

*To live faithfully in a marriage requires
humility, trust,
compromise, communication,
and a sense of humor.*

*It's a give-and-take experience, involving
hurt and forgiveness,
failure and sacrifice.*



THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE

Marriage by its nature is a most 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. Jesus Christ enhanced the dignity of marriage by making the Christian marriage relationship a sacrament—a living sign of Christ’s love for the Church. Since marriage also entails a natural good, some engaged couples approach marriage without a full understanding of its sacramental reality. For this reason, the center of marriage preparation must reflect in faith on the sacrament of Matrimony as seen through the Word of God and the under the guidance of the Magisterium.

Along with the sacrament of Holy Orders, marriage 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’s important to involve the entire community in marriage preparation. Couples must be shown that when they enter into a sacramental marriage, they take on responsibilities to each other and to the whole community as well.

Marriage is a vocation and 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 may be foreign to 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 to 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 marriage preparation since these teachings are misunderstood, misrepresented, and at times ignored by our modern culture.

At its root, sacramental marriage is an invitation to enter into the divine life—which is an invitation to joy.

A permanent marriage in itself doesn’t constitute a successful marriage. An enduring marriage involves

more than simply endurance—it’s a process of growth into intimate friendship and 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, 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 serious difficulties, the spouses must be supported by their parish community and, most importantly, find strength within the sacramental life of the Church. It’s the duty of the community as the body of Christ to walk with couples experiencing pain, and to bring Christ’s healing presence into their lives.

Engaged couples often cannot imagine that any difficulties will occur within their marriage. Couples need to be made aware of potential trials in order to be prepared to face such challenges. It’s important for couples to understand that once they’ve entered into a sacramental marriage, nothing but death can end that marriage.

Marriage preparation is occurring in a culture that often fails to acknowledge the value of permanence, ►



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► self-donation, 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 presentation of this doctrine.

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 the family.

Questions concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage, the meaning of the union and of procreation in married life and its specific act, must be treated faithfully and accurately, according to the clear teaching of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (*Of Human Life*). ☩

SUMMARY

- Marriage is a natural good that was elevated to a sacrament by Christ.
- Marriage is a sacrament at the service of communion, and it 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 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 baptized persons.

CIC 1056—The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, which in Christian marriage obtain a special firmness by reason of the sacrament.

Catechism of the Catholic Church (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. Jesus, however, hasn't placed on couples an impossible burden or one that is too heavy for them to bear.

Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, 47—The center of this preparation must be a reflection in faith on the sacrament of Matrimony through the Word of God and the guidance of the Magisterium.

THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Take steps to ensure that everyone involved in marriage preparation views the work as a ministry of evangelization and catechesis.

Ensure that everyone on the marriage-preparation team has received basic instruction about the sacramental nature of marriage.

Offer frequent opportunities for team members 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 confusions or misconceptions of the secular society regarding Church teaching.



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THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE

*For this reason a man shall leave
his father and mother
and be joined to his wife,
and two shall become one flesh.
This is a great mystery,
and I mean in reference
to Christ and the Church.*

—THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS 5:31–32



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SUMMARY OF PROCEDURES

SUMMARY OF PROCEDURES

MARRIAGE PREPARATION IN THE DIOCESE OF DES MOINES

Initial interview with the priest, deacon, or pastoral minister	15
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Participation in a parish sponsor-couple program	20
Addressing any additional issues related to marriage preparation	24
Completion of pre-nuptial investigation form	28
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INITIAL INTERVIEW

The initial interview with the priest, deacon, or pastoral minister must be set within the context of evangelization, 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 successful implementation of diocesan policy. The priest, deacon or pastoral minister has a vital role as representative of the Church, and implementation of the marriage-preparation policy will be made more effective by their conducting the interview.

In the Diocese of Des Moines, a wedding date may be set no sooner than six months from the time of the first meeting with the couple. If there is an impediment, a wedding date cannot be set until that impediment is removed. The most common obstacle is a previous marriage that hasn't 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 couples in such a situation. They shouldn't simply be turned away but should be encouraged to attend a diocesan or parish program for those seeking annulments. These programs address wounds that exist after every divorce, and can bring about healing that will serve the upcoming marriage if a declaration of nullity is granted.

Parishes are responsible for preparing couples who live within parish boundaries. If such a couple currently isn't practicing their faith, they should be encouraged to become involved at their 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 Catholic 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 intends, the couple shouldn't be admitted to the celebration of marriage until such a time as their disposition has changed.

There are multiple goals of the first session with the engaged couple. First, the minister should be welcoming and excited for the couple. This often is one of the most exciting times in a person's life, and it's vital that the Church show 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. As a result of the minister's hospitality, the engaged couple may 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, there are two pitfalls that must 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 to assure the couple that the impediments are insignificant. The couple should be told that marriage preparation cannot begin until all impediments are addressed. The minister should help the couple take appropriate steps to rectify the situation. The minister also should 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 ►



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INITIAL INTERVIEW

INITIAL INTERVIEW



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INITIAL INTERVIEW

► full communion with the Church. Living outside of God’s plan for marriage, even in ignorance, always 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 applies to cohabitation, a state of life inconsistent with the Gospel message regarding marriage and sexuality. The same two pitfalls must be avoided in addressing cohabitation. It’s harmful to alienate these couples, and it’s equally harmful to ignore the serious nature of their situations. The minister may decide that it’s imprudent to address cohabitation at the initial interview. It’s

of utmost importance, however, that the couple be invited to rectify their situation as soon as possible.

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

Marriage preparation should be completed at least 90 days before the wedding. It’s more valuable the sooner it’s completed, giving couples more time to reflect on and to communicate about what they have learned. ✠

SUMMARY

- The initial interview, set within the context of evangelization, is of vital importance because it sets the tone for the rest of the marriage-preparation process.
- During the initial interview, a couple should be welcomed and should receive a summary of the entire process.
- The minister should establish at the initial interview whether any impediments exist.
- 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 invite couples back into God’s plan, even knowing that at times it won’t be accepted.
- When scheduling the wedding, no date earlier than six months from the date of the initial interview may be chosen.
- The couple should plan to complete all marriage preparation at least 90 days before their wedding date.

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

—GENESIS 2:18

INITIAL INTERVIEW

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Familiaris Consortio (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern

World) 68—The faith of the person asking the Church for marriage can exist in different degrees, and it's 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 also must 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, 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 efforts to prepare couples adequately for their responsibilities.

CIC 1066—Before a marriage is celebrated, it must be evident that nothing stands in the way of its valid and licit celebration.



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INITIAL INTERVIEW

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Be welcoming and excited for the engaged couple! Couples are alienated when they come to the parish excited and enthusiastic and are met with cold logistics or even condemnation.

Always address difficult issues such as impediments, cohabitation, or other obstacles in truth and love. Try to pray before these interviews for the love, patience, and wisdom that's necessary in difficult pastoral circumstances.

Develop a handout that summarizes 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 & Family Life Office can offer a template for this handout.



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INVITED TO JOY WORKSHOP

INVITED TO JOY WORKSHOP

Engaged couples are asked to attend one of the Invited to Joy workshops provided by either the Diocese or their home parish. These workshops focus on the love of God as foundational to understanding Church doctrine and practice related to Christian marriage. The workshops address such issues as the permanence of marriage, the meaning of the sexual act, and the importance of Jesus Christ and prayer within marriage. It's recommended that couples participate in one of these workshops before they begin any sponsor-couple program. The Invited to Joy workshops are a primary means of evangelization. Once an engaged couple has received the good news of marriage, they are more open to focusing on the skills that help Christian marriages thrive.

While the Invited to Joy workshops emphasize instruction in the Catholic faith, their primary role is to evangelize. All instruction is set within the context of the Gospel proclamation and conducted in a prayerful environment. The aim is to resemble as much as possible a couples retreat.

Invited to Joy workshops will be held throughout the Diocese of Des Moines on a regular basis using different formats (one-day or multiple evenings) to ensure convenient opportunities for couples to attend. Special workshops will be tailored to couples getting married after an annulment and to couples bringing step-children into their marriages.

If a parish prefers to conduct its own workshops they are welcome to

do so using a curriculum approved by the Marriage and Family Life Office. This option can be particularly helpful to parishes that wish to further connect engaged couples to their parish, and for parishes that would like to make the course less expensive. The Marriage and Family Life Office can assist in training parish-level facilitators, and currently approved curriculums include *God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage* by Ascension Press, *Transformed in Love* by Pauline Books and Media, and *One in Christ* by Midwest Theological Forum. If a parish would like to use a different alternative curriculum, their request for a curriculum review must be submitted to the Marriage and Family Life Office. ✠

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

That many couples have been formed by the secular culture to a much greater degree than they've been formed by their Catholic faith is evidenced by cohabitation, premarital sex, and the use of artificial contraception. It would be naïve to think that a single brief presentation of the Church's countercultural good news regarding sex and marriage gives couples all the information and time needed to consider the place of Church teaching in their marriages.

Even as the diocesan- and parish-level workshops begin to address this problem, a more thorough catechesis is needed to help couples to understand the Church's sexual ethic more fully, to give them an opportunity for

conversion, and to help them to understand reproductive health. The Marriage and Family Life Office of the Diocese of Des Moines has been tasked with providing infrastructure that will allow for a course in natu-

INVITED TO JOY WORKSHOP

ral family planning to be required every engaged couple by 2016. In the interim, pastors are encouraged to implement this requirement at their own parishes. Although some exemptions may be required (a couple beyond child-bearing age, for example), it's believed that a family-planning course will benefit every engaged couple. (See Appendix B on page 32 for responses to some pastoral concerns regarding this requirement.) ✠

SUMMARY

Every engaged couple will attend an Invited to Joy workshop prior to their wedding, preferably after their initial interview and before taking other steps.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, 47—The center of marriage preparation must be a reflection in faith on the sacrament of Matrimony through the Word of God and the guidance of the Magisterium.

Faithful to Each Other Forever: A Catholic Handbook of Pastoral Help for Marriage Preparation, Bishop's Committee for Pastoral Research and Practices 1989—“Given current cultural conditioning and the fact that virtually all couples begin marriage using some form of family planning, we urge that premarriage programs require a full course of instruction in natural family planning as a necessary component in the couple's effective realization of what they need and have a right to know in order to live in accord with the clear teaching of the Church.”

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Emphasize that the Invited to Joy workshop is offered because the Church cares deeply and prays that each couple have the most joyful and blessed marriage possible.

Stress that although the workshop is based on Catholic theology, it's goal is not to convert non-Catholic spouses.

Emphasize that the goal of the workshop is not to point out ways in which couples aren't living according to Church teaching.

Continue to show excitement and happiness that the engaged couple has chosen to be married in the Church.

*These things I have spoken to you,
that my joy may be in you,
and that your joy may be full.*

—THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN 15:11



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INVITED TO JOY WORKSHOP



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SPONSOR-COUPLE
PROGRAM

SPONSOR-COUPLE PROGRAM

MEETINGS WITH SPONSOR COUPLES

The sponsor-couple program continues the evangelization begun in the initial interview and in the Invited to Joy workshops. The sponsor couple's goal is to help the engaged couple establish roots in the life of the parish and to provide them with a positive example of marriage. The sponsors act as facilitators of conversations between the engaged couple during the marriage-preparation process. The sponsor couple also may be involved in the secondary function of evaluation, instruction, and if needed, referral.

The sponsor couple's primary function is to witness to God's invitation to the joy found within the sacrament of Matrimony. This witness becomes especially important in today's culture, which often lacks good examples for the engaged. Sponsor couples affirm 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 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 with them or to attend other parish functions. The sponsors represent the welcoming and enthusiastic parish.

This doesn't mean that the sponsor couple should view their ministry as primarily one of friendship. The sponsors are 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 sponsors' ministry is to witness to the power of praying together as a family, both at Mass and in personal prayer.

The most substantial work within the context of the sponsor-couple program is their participation in a pre-marital inventory meant to help engaged couples develop and reflect on skills necessary for marriage. These

include communication, conflict-resolution, and commitment skills.

The sponsor couple facilitates conversations and provides an objective lens through which to view the couple's competence in these skills. Engaged couples often approach marriage preparation from a subjective and sometimes uninformed viewpoint. Sponsors should be willing to offer instruction in any needed skills development or to make referrals for professional assistance for the couple.

Participation in the pre-marital inventory should be divided into multiple sessions, between 60 and 90 minutes each, so that the engaged couples have a chance to discuss topics between sessions. It's expected that sponsors will meet with the engaged couple between three and five times before the wedding in order to complete the inventory. At the discretion of the pastor, deacon, or pastoral minister and the sponsor couple, other resources can be used during the inventory sessions.

Both the sponsors and the engaged couple must respect the confidentiality of this process. This confidentiality doesn't preclude an evaluative letter submitted to the pastor by the sponsor couple **prior to the engaged couple's final interview with the priest or deacon.** This letter is an important part of the final interview, during which a decision is made as to whether further marriage preparation is needed, and so it must be received

SPONSOR-COUPLE PROGRAM

by the minister in a timely manner. In order to respect the privacy of the engaged couple, they will be informed about this letter at the beginning of their meetings with their sponsor couple, and they will be asked to sign an information-release form that will accompany the evaluative letter. ✠

THE MINISTRY OF SPONSOR COUPLES

Like all ministries, the sponsor-couple program is a participation in the work of Christ. The work is initiated by Christ and participated in due to the Christian's dignity as a member of the body of Christ. As such, the sponsor-couple program is a calling that must be discerned by each individual couple and by the parish at which they serve. Every baptized Christian has an obligation to participate in the work of Christ, but different people are called to different ministries. Because the ministry is ongoing, the discernment by the couple and by the parish also is ongoing. If a pastor feels that a couple isn't called to serve as sponsors, the couple should be thanked for their willingness and desire to serve, and another suitable ministry should be suggested to them.

In order to be a sponsor couple, a couple must meet the following requirements:

- be recommended by the pastor or parish administrator;
- be validly married for five or more years;
- believe in the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality;
- have a reasonably happy and healthy marriage;
- be willing to follow the marriage-preparation policy of the Diocese of Des Moines;
- be willing to participate in yearly sponsor-couple enrichment at the parish or diocesan level;
- attend diocesan training for sponsor couples and must attend the diocesan marriage-preparation workshop. ✠

*Welcome one another, therefore,
as Christ has welcomed you,
for the glory of God.*

—THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS 15:7



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ONGOING TRAINING

Because of the importance of this ministry, **every sponsor couple is required to attend one enrichment opportunity each year.** These trainings can be conducted at the parish, regional, or diocesan level, depending on a parish's demographics and resources. At the very least these trainings must include contact with other sponsor couples, contact with the sponsor couple's pastor, and information or tools that will be helpful in future sessions. Sponsor-couple enrichment events will be scheduled throughout the year at various locations in the Diocese of Des Moines. For more information visit the diocesan website or contact the Marriage & Family Life Office.

A sponsor couple cannot be assigned an engaged couple unless the sponsors have fulfilled this training requirement within the past year. As soon as a sponsor couple attends an enrichment event, they are eligible to meet with engaged couples for another year. The parish is responsible for tracking attendance at sponsor-enrichment events. In order to avoid overworking sponsor couples, every effort should be made to assign no more than two engaged couples to a sponsor couple per year. (More information is given regarding supporting sponsor couples in Appendix C on page 34.) ✠

POST-WEDDING CONTACT WITH THE COUPLE

In addition to the sponsor-couple meetings prior to the wedding, the sponsors should make reasonable attempts to contact the newly married couple three months after the wedding. Sponsors should propose one meeting at this time to reconnect with the couple and to discuss ongoing marriage enrichment. This expectation acknowledges that marriages are never stagnant but require constant work and renewal. It also stems from an understanding that engaged couples often are distracted by the preparations for marriage. After their wedding, the couple may be more disposed to formation. This later meeting reminds the couple that the Church cares deeply about their marriage, and that they always are invited into the life of the parish. Content suggestions for a post-wedding meeting are available from the Marriage & Family Life Office.

Sponsors are encouraged to make a commitment to pray for the engaged couple during the first year after the wedding, and to send a first-anniversary card. Remembrances and prayers not only are spiritually efficacious, they serve as a powerful reminder of the Church's love for each couple. ✠

SPONSOR-COUPLE PROGRAM

SUMMARY

- The sponsor couple's role is primarily one of witness and facilitation, and secondarily one of instruction and referral.
- The sponsor couple and the pastor, deacon, or pastoral minister must work closely in the formation of the engaged couple, both for the sake of the engaged and for the support of the sponsor couple.
- The sponsor-couple role is a ministry that involves discernment by the Church and by the couple.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A Study of the Value of Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church,

4—Marriage preparation is perceived as most valuable when it's administered by a team.

Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, 16—Christian marriage preparation can be described as a journey of faith that doesn't end with the celebration of marriage but continues throughout family life.

Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, 43—Pastoral workers and persons in charge must have solid doctrinal preparation and unquestionable fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church in order to transmit the truths of the faith and the responsibilities connected with marriage with sufficient in-depth knowledge and life witness.

Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, 56—A special place should be given to family prayer.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Ensure that sponsor couples have access to you and to other sponsor couples to support them in this demanding ministry.

Encourage frequent enrichment opportunities for sponsors.

Discuss with potential sponsor couples the role of discernment to ensure that they understand and support the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality. If a sponsor couple doesn't support the Church's teaching, don't alienate them but instead help them to find another suitable ministry.

Find ways to reach out to newly married couples to invite them to stay involved in the parish. This is a time where many couples drift away from the Church, so it's important to keep lines of communication open.



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ADDITIONAL ISSUES
(SUPPLEMENTAL
TO ORDINARY STEPS)

ADDITIONAL ISSUES

(SUPPLEMENTAL TO ORDINARY STEPS)

Some circumstances require further evaluation regarding a 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, the Diocese of Des Moines requires that these issues be addressed in addition to the ordinary steps of marriage preparation.

Two reasons exist for addressing additional issues. First, it's 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 lead couples to the most joyful, fulfilling marriages possible, it's important to address the following risk factors:

- one or both individuals are under 21 years of age;
- a pregnancy or biological children are involved;
- the marriage follows the death of a previous spouse or an annulment;
- blended families are involved;
- cohabitation is involved;
- the couple is seeking convalidation of their marriage;
- there is serious concern on the part of those preparing the couple. ✠

INDIVIDUALS UNDER 21 YEARS OLD

Those entering into marriage at a young age often lack the maturity to realize and accept the responsibilities of marriage. While marriage preparation for young people shouldn't change, careful attention should be paid to their level of maturity and understanding. At times it's appropriate to speak with the parents 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 isn't yet ready to marry, the couple should be encouraged to wait for a period of time and should be referred to the Marriage & Family Life Office for further preparation. ✠

PREGNANCY OR BIOLOGICAL CHILDREN

Pregnancy isn't a reason for marrying or for shortening the six-month marriage preparation. Couples bringing biological children into marriage can face societal pressure to get married. It's important to discern whether the choice to marry 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 should be referred to the Marriage & Family Life Office for further preparation. Couples bringing children into marriage should be given parenting resources provided by the Marriage & Family Life Office or by the parish. Incorporating parenting resources in the marriage-preparation process will help to ensure a relevant experience for the engaged couple. ✠

ADDITIONAL ISSUES

REMARRIAGE AFTER THE DEATH OF A SPOUSE OR AFTER AN ANNULMENT

The number of persons remarrying has risen dramatically. 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's important to help individuals to reflect on the causes of the breakdown of their previous marriage and also to reflect on the new circumstances of their upcoming marriage. Often an individual won't fully have grieved the loss of their previous relationship, and this step too is important. Finally, marriage preparation should include evangelization, helping the individuals to know the profound love of God and the meaning of a sacramental marriage.

Issues pertaining to remarriage can be addressed during the sponsor-couple program by using resources provided by the Marriage & Family Life Office. It's best to assign such couples to a seasoned sponsor couple, who will be able to address these issues in a sensitive and honest way. Separate Invited to Joy workshops will be scheduled for couples entering second marriages. The same curriculum will be used, but the workshops will be tailored to the needs of couples in which at least one of the partners is remarrying.

For some couples, additional formation may be necessary. If this is the case, a three-session pre-marriage assessment will be available through the Marriage & Family Life Office to address the psychological and emotional needs of couples in a deeper way in order to help them to work through

issues that cannot be addressed in the normal setting.

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 attend a pre-marriage assessment. Such assessments will be provided by the Marriage & Family Life Office as needed.

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 help the pastor, deacon, or pastoral minister and the individual to become connected with a mental-health professional who can assist in the lifting of the *vetitum*. ✠



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ADDITIONAL ISSUES

BLENDED FAMILIES

Blended families most often accompany second marriages. Children in such families always have a significant impact, so for the good of the couple and for the good of the children it's important to address this situation in advance.

At the end of each Invited to Joy workshop specifically focused on re-marriage, there will be an additional presentation on parenting for couples for whom it applies. Additional parenting resources will be available through the Marriage & Family Life Office. If the pastoral minister feels that the couple isn't yet ready to marry due to issues arising from a blended family, the couple should be encouraged to wait for a period of time and they should be referred to the Marriage & Family Life Office for further preparation. ✠

COHABITATION

A majority of couples in the United States who approach the Catholic Church today seeking the sacrament of Matrimony have very little Catholic formation and often don't understand the graces and obligations that they're 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, premarital sex, and the use of artificial contraception.

The Church's teaching on sexuality is countercultural, and it's rarely understood by many of the 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 shouldn't be turned away from marriage preparation because of cohabitation, but neither should the issue be ignored.

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

how these issues are to be raised with a couple.

It's important to acknowledge that alongside moral concerns regarding cohabitation, living together before marriage increases the risks of many psychological, emotional, and social problems. This is to be expected since the sexual act, outside of the total, faithful, fruitful, and free context that marriage provides, always is intrinsically harmful to the couple.

During marriage preparation, it's 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's vitally important that these issues are raised in love and truth, in a way that doesn't alienate the engaged couples but instead shows the Church's true concern for their well-being. ✠



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ADDITIONAL ISSUES

CONVALIDATION

Couples seeking a sacramental marriage after a civil ceremony come to marriage preparation with a unique experience. On the one hand they haven't yet entered into a sacramental marriage, but their lived experience closely resembles that of couples who already are married. Convalidating couples still should participate in marriage preparation, although every effort should be made to make the process speak to their experiences. Convalidating couples still should attend the Invited to Joy workshop, which consists of relevant catechetical material. Couples in this situation still should meet with sponsor couples, although if a couple has been civilly married for three or more years, the REFOCCUS should be used instead of the FOCCUS as a way to speak to their lived experience. Finally, if the couple is already using natural family planning, a course wouldn't be required, although if they're currently using artificial contraception, a natural family planning course should be part of their preparation. ✠

OTHER SERIOUS CONCERNS RAISED BY THOSE PREPARING THE COUPLE

The pastor, deacon, or pastoral minister may become aware of factors present in a specific relationship that aren't addressed by diocesan policies and procedures and that may require further preparation. In such a situation, the couple should be referred to the Marriage & Family Life Office after that office has been provided with an explanation of the parish's specific concerns. Such issues will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. ✠

*Love is patient and kind;
love is not jealous or boastful;
it is not arrogant or rude.
Love does not insist on its own way;
it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice at wrong
but rejoices in the right.
Love bears all things,
believes all things, endures all things.*

—THE FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS 13:4–7



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PRE-NUPTIAL INVESTIGATION

PRE-NUPTIAL INVESTIGATION

COMPLETING THE FORM

Marriage isn't simply a private act or possession between the two parties but also is a matter of public interest. Both Church and civil authorities traditionally have 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 won't enter into a marriage relationship that would be detrimental to themselves, possible children, or the community. The Church always has included in its preparation for marriage some form of pre-nuptial investigation in order to be satisfied that all expectations for marriage are being met, that both parties are free to marry, and that they're entering the marriage with free consent.

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

- determining that the parties are free from impediments to marriage;
- ascertaining that there's sufficient understanding of the nature and obligations of Christian marriage;
- determining that the couples are freely consenting to the marriage.

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's vital that the form be completed accurately.

The pastoral minister who participates in the marriage preparation is to complete the pre-nuptial investigation form. The following sections are reserved to particular people, however:

a) When delegation (jurisdiction is required from the pastor where the marriage is to take place) or permission (the marriage is taking place in a parish other than the parish of one of the parties) are needed, only the priest or deacon of the parish may delegate or grant such permission.

b) When permission for mixed religion is needed, only the priest or deacon of the parish may grant such permission.

c) While petitions for any dispensation may be made by the priest, the deacon, or the pastoral minister, granting the dispensation is reserved to the delegate of the Bishop.

d) When needed, the testimonial letter and/or nihil obstat is to be signed by the delegate of the Bishop.

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

No pre-nuptial investigation form is to be completed until all previous marriages have been ecclesiastically declared null or dissolved (death excepted). On the first page, it's essential to list all previous marriages and how they ended. 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. Baptismal records for Catholics must have been issued within

PRE-NUPTIAL INVESTIGATION

the past year because these records also contain information about the reception of other sacraments.

For Catholics marrying non-Catholics, the Catholic party is required to reaffirm his or her faith and to agree to do all in his or her power to raise their children in the 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 Tribunal when:

- a) Any dispensation from the delegate of the Bishop 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 Office, **it must be sent at least 30 days prior to the scheduled wedding date.** This is imperative in order 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 does 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. ✠



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*The two shall become one flesh.
So they are no longer two
but one flesh.*

*What therefore God has joined together
let not man put asunder.*

—THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK 10:8–9



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PRE-NUPTIAL INVESTIGATION

FINAL DECISION TO PROCEED WITH OR TO DELAY THE WEDDING

A priest or deacon may not lightly delay the marriage of a parishioner who is free to marry. All persons helping a couple prepare for marriage should see that sessions are teachable moments. A sensitive pastoral approach can do much to re-awaken a faith that has been dormant. Church law provides that priests or deacons, through the authority of the bishop, may temporarily delay a 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 marriage preparation or refusal to participate in a pre-nuptial assessment, evaluation, or counseling, as deemed necessary for proper preparation for the reception of the sacrament of Marriage.
- 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 couples 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 also must immediately inform the Bishop or his delegate in writing of the reason or reasons for his decision to delay the marriage. Meanwhile, no one may proceed with a marriage after denial by any 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 Worship) includes guidelines for the liturgical celebrations of weddings. Individual parishes may have local guidelines particular to their place of worship as well. These local parish guidelines may not supersede diocesan policy. ✠

*This is my commandment,
that you love one another
as I have loved you.*

—THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN 15:12

POST-WEDDING CONTACT

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH AFTER THE WEDDING

It already has 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, while in fact 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 relationship of the sacrament of marriage 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 always walks 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. ✠

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, 16—Christian marriage preparation can be described as a journey of faith that doesn’t end with the celebration of marriage but continues throughout family life.

CCC 1534—The sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony are directed toward the salvation of others. If they contribute as well to personal salvation, it’s through service to others that they do so.

Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), 1—The joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties of this age, especially of those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are the joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties of the followers of Christ.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Find creative ways to reach out to newly married couples.

Examples include sending anniversary cards, remembering them in the Prayers of the Faithful, or inviting them to a meeting with the marriage-preparation team after the wedding.

Invite engaged couples to consider serving in the parish as lectors or extraordinary Eucharistic ministers after their wedding.

Sponsor a regular social group for those married five years or less.

Be sure to offer childcare during these meetings.



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APPENDIX A APPLICATION FOR WAIVERS TO POLICY



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Due to couples' canonical right to marry, there always will be cases in which 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 hasn't recognized, the couple can personally apply for a waiver by sending a letter to the Tribunal Office (1) identifying the nature of the obstacle, and (2) identifying whether the exemption entails part or all of the diocesan policy. This application also can 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. The couple's request then will be reviewed by the Tribunal Office and granted or denied by the Bishop or his delegate. ✠

APPENDIX B PASTORAL CONCERNS REGARDING AN NATURAL FAMILY-PLANNING REQUIREMENT

Time—A full natural family-planning course will demand approximately seven to eight hours of instruction over a two to three-month period. When adding this time commitment to the entire marriage-preparation process, a couple can expect to spend approximately 20 to 22 hours in their sacramental marriage preparation over a six- to nine-month period of time. The entire process does require a significant time commitment, but when considered within the context of the weighty decision to marry, the lifelong commitment of marriage, and the significant harm posed to marriage by the secular culture, this time commitment appears appropriate.

Cost—The cost of a full natural family-planning course will vary depending on the method the couple chooses to learn. In the Diocese of Des Moines, costs currently range from \$50 to \$135. The cost of the natural family-planning course will be in addition to the cost of the marriage-preparation course, which is approximately \$100. It's important to remember that scholarships always will be available for couples in need; no couple ever would be turned away because of their inability to afford the natural family-planning course. When considering the context of modern marriage preparation, these costs seem both affordable and reasonable.

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The average wedding costs more than \$15,000, and sacramental preparation averages less than two percent of total costs. Also, if a couple is intending to use artificial contraception, training in a free and organic way to space births often will pay for itself within the first year of use.

Couples choosing to marry outside the Church—In considering the possibility of requiring a full natural family-planning course, concerns about losing engaged couples must be considered. If marriage-preparation requirements become too cumbersome, wouldn't we expect that couples will go elsewhere to be married? This is a question that always will require prudential judgment.

It's true that overly burdensome requirements will drive couples away, but this concern has been tracked and reported on since the beginning of dioceses requiring a full natural family-planning course, and to date no diocese has reported a decrease of weddings that can be linked to this requirement. Anecdotal evidence suggests that couples don't find this requirement overly burdensome, and that no marriage-preparation policy can avoid dissatisfaction among some engaged couples. Further, collected data reports an overwhelmingly positive experience among couples who attend a full natural family-planning course, even if they attend due to a diocesan requirement. Without conflicting evidence, it doesn't seem that requiring a full natural family-planning course would drive couples away.

Futility—Another concern that must be addressed is the chances of

success of a natural family-planning course requirement. Will engaged couples who attend the natural family-planning course gain anything from this experience? More research is needed, but initial reports monitoring responses have been positive.

In the diocese of Covington, 95 percent of couples reported having a better understanding of their fertility as a result of instruction and 83 percent indicated that they would recommend the class to a friend. Of those who admitted having a poor attitude about natural family-planning instruction before beginning classes (approximately 45 percent of those surveyed), 74 percent would recommend the class to a friend, and only 6 percent reported the class as "not beneficial."

By observing membership renewal for the Couple to Couple League magazine, it's been estimated that dioceses that require a full natural family-planning course increase the percentage of couples who practice natural family-planning by approximately three to five times.

Using this research and anecdotal evidence that's been gathered from other dioceses, it seems that a full natural family-planning course almost always helps a couple better to understand their fertility, often is a positive experience, and sometimes plants seeds that lead to real conversion. Even knowing that some couples ultimately will reject the Church's teaching regarding natural family planning, the Church has a duty to present the teaching in love, and in the most effective way possible. ✠



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APPENDIX C RECRUITMENT OF SPONSOR COUPLES



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Being a sponsor couple is a demanding ministry, and parishes can find it difficult to recruit and retain sponsor couples. On the other hand, sponsor couples often report that this ministry enriches their own marriages, and it's a favorite way to serve the Church. Personal invitation often is the most effective form of recruitment, and it's especially effective when the importance of the ministry and the opportunity for enrichment within the sponsors' own marriages are stressed. The more a sponsor couple feels supported in their work, the more likely they are to enjoy and continue their ministry.

A period of discernment should be provided for couples considering this ministry. They should be made aware of the time commitment that the ministry involves, as well as the expectation that they will pray for the engaged couples and that they will present and support the fullness of the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality. ✠

APPENDIX D SUPPORT OF PARISH SPONSOR COUPLES

Parish sponsor couples give an invaluable service to the marriage-preparation process. The ministry is fundamentally one of evangelization, but it plays an important role in teaching engaged couples skills that will help their marriages thrive. It's imperative that parishes offer ongoing support to sponsor couples to ensure that they feel confident and edified in their ministry.

Support for sponsors should include three elements. Sponsors should have the opportunity to collaborate with other sponsor couples, to interact with the pastoral minister who coordinates the parish marriage-preparation program, and to spiritually enrich their own marriages. These three elements can be achieved in a yearly sponsor-couple enrichment event.

Marriage-enrichment events organized by the Marriage & Family Life Office will be held at regular intervals in every region of the Diocese. These events offer a time for sponsor couples to come together from neighboring parishes and discuss their experiences. The events also include a short teaching of a skill or strategy that can enrich the ministry. Regional events are of particular value to parishes that have a small number of sponsor couples, for they provide an opportunity to interact with other sponsors. Some parishes might choose to host their own enrichment events to support the growth of their sponsor-couple community. Sponsor couples can attend either diocesan or parish-level enrichment events. The most important aspect is that they feel supported in their ministry.

All sponsor couples are to be strongly encouraged to subscribe to the diocesan sponsor-couple e-newsletter, which offers ministry tips, book reviews, and resources to aid sponsors in their ministry. This newsletter is another way to remind sponsor couples that they're valued and supported. ✠



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