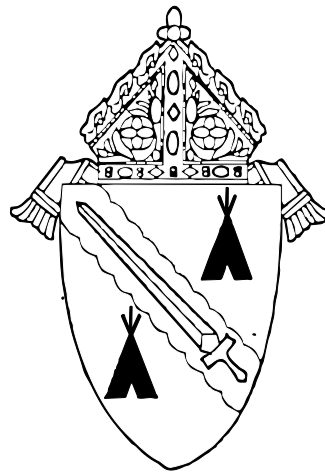


Diocese of Yakima
Policy for
Pastoral Marriage Preparation

Second Edition - March 2004



Diócesis de Yakima
Póliza para la
Preparación Pastoral Matrimonial

Segunda Edición - Marzo 2004

March 2004

Dear Priests, Deacons, Religious Women and Men, Seminarians, All those involved in Marriage Preparation,

I am happy to write this letter as a new preface to our diocesan Policy for Pastoral Marriage Preparation. In presenting the text of this document to you, I promulgate it as particular law for our diocese for a period of three years, after which I will initiate a broad consultation to assess any need for appropriate revisions.

This policy is the result of the expertise brought to its preparation during a period of seven months by a subcommittee of the Executive Committee of the Council of Priests whose members were Monsignor Perron J. Auve and Fathers Juan M. Flores, John J. Murtagh and Ronald J. Patnode. The subcommittee reviewed a number of existing pastoral marriage preparation policies as part of its work together. The policy now in use in the Diocese of Reno had almost all the elements that seemed desirable for our use in Yakima and significant portions of its text have been made part of our policy.

The whole presbyterate in assembly at their October 2002 Convocation reviewed the policy and recommended that I designate it as particular law.

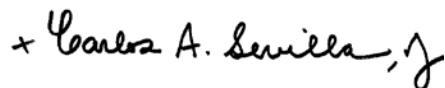
I am very grateful to all those who had a part in formulating this policy. I'm sure it will be a blessing for the whole diocese.

In this Second Edition, an important correction was made in the text of the second paragraph of Section XIII on page 13. That correction as well as changes from the earlier text are in italics.

In order to facilitate the implementation of this policy, it will be very helpful if every pastor copies it and distributes it to those parishioners of his who are involved in the ministry of marriage preparation in his parish.

Please join me in praying that the Lord Jesus help us to be ever more effective instruments of his presence for all those who come to us for marriage preparation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carlos A. Sevilla, S.J." with a cross at the beginning and a flourish at the end.

Carlos A. Sevilla, S.J.
Bishop of Yakima

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DIOCESE OF YAKIMA

POLICY FOR PASTORAL MARRIAGE PREPARATION

INTRODUCTION

This Policy for Pastoral Marriage Preparation, which is particular law for the Diocese of Yakima, is intended to assist the Church as a caring community in her ministry to all who wish to marry in the Church. With this policy the Church says to each couple, “We, the community to which you belong, care about you and your future success in marriage. We want to help you in the growth of your relationship to each other and to God. Our goal is to help you prepare not just for your wedding but for your married life together in the sacrament.”

This policy is a sign of the Church’s concern for the future of marriage and the family. Current divorce statistics are but one indication that, in our world today, many couples fail to realize their hopes for a stable and happy marriage.

This policy also establishes a support system for priests, deacons and those working with them in the important ministry of marriage preparation. It establishes definite diocesan norms and guidelines which will help to eliminate the confusion that can result from a wide disparity of marriage preparation practices among our parishes and also help to make this ministry more pastorally effective. Whenever the term pastor is used, it is to be applied also to associate pastors and deacons.

This policy can be implemented most effectively in parishes where trained married couples work in close cooperation with the pastor to prepare engaged couples for marriage.

This policy is not intended to make it difficult for couples to marry in the Catholic Church. Rather it recognizes the seriousness of marriage and the responsibility of a caring Church to help couples prepare adequately for a life together.

This policy is *guided* by the Code of Canon Law (1983), especially Canon 1063.

“Pastors of souls are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the Christian faithful the assistance by which the matrimonial state is preserved in a Christian spirit and advances in perfection. This assistance must be offered especially by:

1. preaching, catechesis adapted to minors, youth, and adults, and even the use of instruments of social communication, by which the Christian faithful are instructed about the meaning of Christian marriage and about the function of Christian spouses and parents;
2. personal preparation to enter marriage, which disposes the spouses to the holiness and duties of their new state;

3. a fruitful liturgical celebration of marriage which is to show that the spouses signify and share in that mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church;
4. help offered to those who are married, so that faithfully preserving and protecting the conjugal covenant, they daily come to lead holier and fuller lives in their family."

I. REMOTE PREPARATION

In On the Family (United States Catholic Conference/USCC, 1982), our Holy Father, John Paul II, wisely insists that preparation for marriage begin at an early age.

"By its very nature authentic human love always moves one beyond the self so that life finds meaning in relationship with another person. For the Christian, this love is actualized in the Cross of Christ – that act of selfless, vulnerable love which releases the possibility of life to the fullest – life forever! To live for the sake of others is the great call of the Gospel; indeed it is the mission of the church: 'Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord!' In this sense love, like faith, is always personal but never private. In its authentic expression love always is oriented outward – toward the other – while at the same time finding its inner strength deep within the human heart, that quiet dwelling place of God.

Each person is conceived within a community, by the communion of a man and a woman. Each person also needs to be nurtured by selfless love in the 'domestic church' of family and home. Each family needs the support and nourishment of those beyond the family bonds, even as the same gift is offered to others who stand in such need.

Each person is immersed into the community of Christ, through hearing God's holy Word, and by the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the waters of Baptism and the anointing of Confirmation – a bath and a sealing, marking each person for a place at the Table of the Lord where selfless, sacrificial love is actualized in one bread and one cup given for all. The sacrifice offered, the meal shared, the 'holy communion' received, sets each person free for selfless love, identifies each with the living body of Christ, the Church, and commissions each one with the command to live for the sake of others. This sacred meal, this holy sacrifice, enables newly married couples to 'bear witness to the love of God in this world so that the afflicted and the needy will find in us generous friends' (The Rite of Marriage, #125)."

Thus, marriage is an important moment for the church community. It is an integral part of the life of the parish faith community and not an isolated event. It is a sacramental moment that should strengthen the bonds of the bride and groom within the faith community. The church community provides hospitality to those who desire to marry, to the newly-married and not-so-newly married; to those who are life-long members of the community, to those who are new to the community, and to those being welcomed as they return.

Marriage is a liturgical event that can be celebrated only within the church community with members of that community as active witnesses. The community should reinforce and support

the love shared by the couple with the love of the community as it gathers to celebrate the marriage liturgy. As witnesses the community is not a passive audience for the marriage, but is called to be involved in all aspects of the liturgical celebration.

The church community needs both to aid couples who desire to marry as they prepare for a happy, life-long community of love together and also to provide support to the couple in the years after the liturgical celebration of the marriage. Members of the church community need to be aware of their responsibilities in the marriage preparation process. Married couples provide example and influence to those who are preparing for marriage and to those who have already celebrated the marriage liturgy. In fact, some of the community's married couples may, as sponsor couples, be of great assistance in the preparation of those to be married and in providing support to them later on.

Since couples may marry in one parish and settle in another, it is vital that the parish community prepare to assist couples whenever they present themselves, especially with sponsor couples. At all the stages in life, married couples in the community can help and influence others through their fidelity and their example of focusing on the other.

II. CATECHESIS

Preparation for an adequate understanding of marriage begins at an early age. For better or worse, children learn from their family experience what marriage is about. Similarly, the cultural values about marriage communicated by television, movies, and peer conversation, influence everyone.

Therefore, *a* more formal religious formation, whether *it* be in the family or the classroom, must be aimed at the age of the participants, and should contain some focus on family, personal worth, interpersonal relationship, sexuality, marriage, and the single vocation.

Formal catechesis for marriage begins with young children and includes the importance of such issues as commitment, faith, and communication. As they reach junior high, high school and college age, catechesis presents a deeper knowledge of the human person, of sexuality, and the sacramentality of marriage. Adults will benefit from programs directed toward instruction regarding skills that can be helpful to and supportive for families when they face challenges like parenting; the first day of school; teenagers; children leaving home and the care of elderly parents.

Such catechesis must be accomplished within the parish community to bring about an understanding of the role of the community in the marriage of a couple within that community. The members of the parish community must understand that they are a part of the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony, just as they are a part of the celebration of all the sacraments of the church. It is important that members of the parish community be a part of the marriage preparation process so they can help to welcome the couple into their parish community.

Prior to marriage catechesis is appropriate for all couples, no matter what their current practice of the faith might be. Such catechesis serves to instill a deeper awareness of God's action in their lives and to help them establish their married life in the context of faith.

III. REQUIRED PREPARATORY PERIOD

Couples must contact the priest or deacon in sufficient time to complete the paperwork and attend the marriage preparation course in the parish. The time for the preparation will vary, but at least four months before the marriage. This is not intended as a waiting period, but rather one of preparation. Therefore, the process of such preparation should begin at the first meeting with the parish priest. It is highly desirable for the couple to fulfill all the preparations required at least two months before the wedding date.

The purpose of this requirement is to insure adequate time for a couple to participate in and benefit from the steps of the marriage preparation process. In the event that the preparation reveals problems or obstacles to the marriage, this affords a couple more time to resolve their difficulties through such steps as, for example, counseling and canonical procedures. In certain cases, circumstances can arise that make the time requirement very difficult to observe. Exceptions to this time requirement should be made only for grave pastoral reasons and the couple should still be obliged to take part in all the steps of the marriage preparation process. The inability or unwillingness of the couple to understand the need for a adequate preparation for marriage does not constitute a grave reason. However, their ethnic background and the particular problems this may involve should be given special pastoral consideration by the priest responsible.

IV. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PARISH PRIEST

The parish priest who will witness the marriage has the responsibility to judge and make a twofold assessment of:

- A. The couple's readiness for marriage (Refer to the text of Canon 1063 on pages 1 and 2 of this document.)
- B. The level of faith of the Catholic parties.

V. PREPARATION PROCESS

- A. The couple's immediate preparation for marriage will include three complementary components:
 - 1. At least one initial and one concluding session with the parish priest.
 - 2. Participation in one of the available Marriage Preparation Programs.

3. Personal sessions with the parish priest or staff member.

B. Initial Session(s) with the priest provide(s) the opportunity to:

1. Explain the policy as an effort by a caring Church to help the couple prepare adequately for the sacrament of marriage. Dispel the notion of these requirements as “more red tape” before they can be married in the Church.
2. Explain the diocesan policy that a marriage must be celebrated in a church or chapel building.
 - a. When a couple, however praiseworthy their motives, marries outside a church, they set themselves apart from the faith community represented by a parish church. It is important for *engaged* couples to realize that their spiritual family, the parish community, is as important as their families of origin. This rootedness of our spiritual identity in the parish is also the reason that, except for grave reasons, all the other Sacraments related to Catholic identity – Baptism, Confirmation, First Eucharist and Holy Orders – should be celebrated in a church.
 - b. Placing such emphasis on a building might seem exaggerated to many, but for Catholics *a wedding* in the context of *a parish church* underlines beautifully what St. Paul teaches in the latter verses of chapter 5 in his Letter to the Ephesians. Namely, that the loving union of a husband and wife is a symbol without equal of Christ's love for the Church. Any other setting for a wedding, no matter how meaningful for a family, deprives those present of the Church's rich theology of that Sacrament and makes what should be a public ceremony in the space made holy by the common faith of the parish community, into something just for family and friends.
3. Explain any additional guidelines that the parish may have concerning photography, dressing areas, *parish fees* involved.
4. Discuss the premarital inventory whether Focus or P.M.I. It is essential to use one or other of these forms in order to begin and nurture a fruitful dialogue among the couples and with the Church. It is strongly encouraged that married couples be involved in administering and processing the inventory. The use of *sponsor* couples is an ideal that we *should* strive to foster in all areas of marriage preparation.
5. Fill out the premarital forms. This is an occasion to discuss the couple's attitude to marriage and also their present relationship with God, Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church. This will assist the priest in determining whether there are any serious obstacles to the wedding of a couple in the Catholic Church.
6. Discover if a canonical impediment is present. For example, a previous marriage, mixed religion, disparity of cult, any unfulfilled obligations to children and/or a former

spouse. The parish priest should begin his investigation of these matters at the first meeting with the couple. A date must not be established until the impediment is removed.

7. Explain the marriage preparations programs. Help the couple choose *a* program among the *available* options. They should normally participate in this program before their next meeting with the priest.
8. A civil marriage license must be obtained before the wedding takes place.

C. Marriage Preparation Programs

These programs are important aids—but not substitutes for the personal sessions with the parish priest. Participation in one of the programs below is required for every couple preparing for marriage. The parish program and the Engaged Encounter are the most highly recommended forms of Marriage preparation. It is the responsibility of each parish to determine the program or programs that are best suited to its situation.

Every reasonable effort should be made to include solid instruction on Natural Family Planning in all marriage preparation programs. Allowance should be made for at least six hours of instruction on this topic. Trained instructors must be used. The diocese is planning to make such NFP instruction obligatory in not more than three years.

Couples seeking a validation of a civil marriage or wishing to enter a second marriage should also participate in a preparation program. For example, Engaged Encounter *has* special weekends for those previously married.

1. Parish Marriage Preparation program. Engaged couples meet in the homes of married couples in the parish.
2. Engaged Encounter. A weekend experience focused on a couple's communication on vital topics. A team of two married couples and a priest conduct this weekend.
3. Pre-Cana Conference. A half-day or evening conference consisting of a group discussion, couple dialogue and lecture. Conducted by married couples and priests.
4. Marriage Preparation with the Parish Priest. In some parishes the priests themselves conduct a preparation program consisting of at least four sessions. This is commendable, but only if another is deemed not suitable because of, for example, the couple's age, ethnic background, or language difficulties.

These personal sessions with the priest provide an opportunity to:

- a. Discuss with the couple their feelings and reactions to the marriage preparation program they attended.

- b. Discuss any sensitive areas in their relationship that have surfaced thus far.
- c. Discuss the meaning of a *Catholic* marriage, *for example*: its religious/sacramental dimensions; fidelity and unity.
- d. Explore the role they expect the Church to play in their married life.
- e. Assist the couple in planning their wedding liturgy.

VI. ASSESSMENT OF READINESS FOR MARRIAGE

- A. Responsibility for assessment. Couples may enter marriage with major problems that lead to probable marital failure. Some of these are such that they may even render the marriage invalid from the start, as evidenced by some applications to the Office of Canonical Concerns for annulments. This policy asks the priest to be sensitive to the possible existence of such major problem areas: for example, real difficulties in their relationship, lack of any openness to faith, serious lack of maturity (minimum age *is* 18 years of age for marriage), and canonical impediments. The initial presumption is that each engaged couple will be able to proceed with the arrangements for their marriage. The question of delay or denial of a Church ceremony arises only when the assessment process surfaces major difficulties.
- B. Role of the Priest. It is important to recognize the fact that the priest in this assessment is not called on to be a psychologist or a judge. He is asked to do what his pastoral training and experience as a priest qualify him to do – namely, to make a prudent, pastoral judgment whether certain conditions exist.
- C. Process of Judgment. When the priest discovers the possible presence of a major obstacle to a marriage, he can follow a definite procedure that will assist him in making a decision. It consists of these three steps:
1. Consultation: The priest should seek advice from another competent person, for example, another priest, a deacon, a married couple, a counselor, or a social worker.
 2. Evaluation/Assessment: Some form of testing may prove helpful. Also the couple can be referred to a professional counselor for evaluation/assessment. The couple should be informed that this counselor/evaluator will then discuss with the priest, if the couple gives him their permission, the possible obstacles to their marriage. If the couple does not give its permission, then the evaluation/assessment is without purpose.
 3. Decision: The priest with the help of the above *resources* then makes a definite decision.
 4. Appeal: If the wedding is delayed or denied, the couple should be advised of their right to appeal this decision to the Office of Canonical Concerns. If this is the case, it is the responsibility of the parish priest to inform the Office of Canonical Concerns and bring all needed documentation and his written evaluation to the Office of Canonical Concerns.

VII. REASONS FOR THE DELAY OF A MARRIAGE

The Church holds that the right to marry is an important natural right. It is, however, a restricted right. Both Church and State have determined legitimate restrictions. There can be serious reasons for delaying a marriage. There is no single objective standard by which one can judge a couple's readiness to marry. However, special reasons may indicate a need for further assessment and justify a delay *of* the marriage ceremony. Among the reasons that may in certain circumstances warrant a delay are:

- A. Refusal of the couple to participate in the process of preparation for marriage. This may also include an unwillingness to take part in further evaluation and counseling that special circumstances (for example, under-age or pregnancy) may warrant.
- B. Lack of Faith. Reception of the sacrament of marriage presumes faith. The priest has the responsibility to determine that the wedding in the Church is an expression and profession of faith. The Catholic person/persons *may be* at a developmental stage in their religious life and there is often a gap between their faith and their practice of it. Lapsed Catholics should be treated as non-Catholics in this circumstance as regards catechesis.
- C. Inability of the couple to contract a valid marriage because of, for example, the denial of the indissolubility of marriage or of the purpose of its permanence according to the norms described in the relevant sections of Canon Law.
- D. Lack of readiness for marriage resulting from circumstances such as, for example, a serious lack of maturity, social pressure, home conditions, in certain circumstances *a* pregnancy, undue haste in entering into marriage.
- E. Teenagers. Such couples may require individual evaluation and counseling before the marriage can be arranged in accord with the *diocesan policy* and the laws of the State of Washington.
- F. Separation of the couple for an extended period before/after the wedding. There may be insufficient opportunity for the couple to develop a mature relationship.
- G. Convalidation of a civil marriage (a couple wishing to renew their vows in the Church). Pastoral judgment will dictate the preparation necessary for this situation.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS TO HELP END THE DELAY

- A. If any of the above factors are present or if some reasonable question is raised concerning the couple's readiness to marry, further consultation and evaluation may be required before a wedding date can be set.

- B. If possible, the priest should make every effort to help the couple overcome the specific circumstances that make the delay advisable. Of course, any such necessary delay will be disappointing for a couple. Sensitivity and understanding on the part of the priest are vital.
- C. In such a remedial approach the following are among the options available:
1. Counseling by the priest. Lack of faith would be one instance where this approach would be of value.
 2. Referral to a marriage counselor. Referral should be made only of those couples who want help in resolving their difficulties.
 3. Referral to an education program, for example, pre-marriage or adult education programs.
 4. Time. The passage of time may be all that is required in certain circumstances, as for example, the marriage of minors, or the extended separation of those to be married, or immaturity.
- D. The priest should meet periodically with the couple to evaluate their process. This will enable him to judge when the problem is sufficiently resolved and then set a date for the wedding.
- E. A couple who has been advised of a necessary delay by the priest arranging for their marriage may approach another priest. He, however, may not proceed without contacting the priest who counseled delay or the Office of Canonical Concerns. If a priest delays a marriage, he should forward the names of the couple to the Office of Canonical Concerns to prevent their “shopping around.”

IX. INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

- A. When the parties are of different faith backgrounds, at least one session with the priest should be used to discuss the religious dimension of the marriage and the possible problems that can arise. Some key issues are: 1) membership in two different church communities; 2) religious formation of children; 3) feelings of family members.
- B. Differences in the faith traditions and religious practices of a couple who each come from a different *Christian* culture *may present some challenges*. The couple should reflect on their differing backgrounds to avoid or alleviate future difficulties.
- C. The Eucharist is not to be celebrated at the marriage of a Catholic and non-baptized person; only a liturgy of the Word is permitted. The Eucharist may be celebrated at the marriage of a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic. However, Communion cannot be given to non-Catholics.

- D. Two non-practicing Catholics should not have the celebration of a Nuptial Mass.
- E. A dispensation from Form can be granted for those who would have a serious reason to be married by their own minister or rabbi in another church or synagogue. For example, one of the parents of a person or party to be married is a minister of another Christian church.
- F. A dispensation of Form does not presume a dispensation from celebrating the marriage in a church or synagogue building. The Diocese of Yakima requires that a Catholic marriage take place in a Catholic church or chapel. Only the bishop of our diocese can dispense from this requirement.
- G. If one of the persons to be married is of one of the Eastern Catholic churches, the priest should call the *Diocesan* Office of Canonical Concerns before proceeding with preparations for marriage.

X. NOMINAL CATHOLICS

- A. When one of the individuals to be married was baptized in the Catholic faith but received very little instruction and is non-practicing, the same procedure as for interfaith marriage instruction is required. If someone has been raised in the Church but has abandoned the practice of their Catholic religion, the same procedure should be followed as for non-Catholics. These circumstances provide the priest with a valuable opportunity to discuss with the couple the place of God, Jesus Christ and the Church in their lives. This, in turn, may help a couple clarify their understanding of the nature of religion, become more knowledgeable about the level of their own faith-life and that of their partner, and perhaps be *integrated again within their parish* community.

XI. COHABITATION

- A. For the purposes of these guidelines, *cohabitation* is defined as “living together in a sexual relationship without marriage.” This definition does not include couples who are civilly married and are coming to the Church for "convalidation."

Today many couples who come for marriage preparation in the Catholic Church are in a cohabiting relationship. In our culture cohabitation has become a generally perceived and accepted stepping stone to marriage and is set within a context of widespread sexual activity outside of marriage.

Nonetheless, the Church has many good reasons *to suggest* that couples cease cohabitation and/or sexual activity during the marriage preparation process. Cohabitation is not marriage nor is it a good preparation for marriage. An increasing body of research on the phenomenon of “trial marriage” indicates that cohabitation may even contribute to marriage failure. In addition, cohabitation is a practice that seriously undermines the wisdom of Church teachings and tradition about sacramental marriage and sexual morality.

From one perspective, then, there is a rich and valid Church tradition and teaching which must be safeguarded and upheld. From another perspective, the opportunity is there to connect with and support couples desiring to regularize their “marriage.” Like Jesus, we must love these couples as they are, while always calling them to conform their lives to gospel morality.

Faithful to Each Other Forever, (United States Catholic Conference/USCC, 1989) notes that two extremes are to be avoided: (1) immediately confronting the couple and condemning their behavior and (2) ignoring the cohabitation aspect of their relationship. In the decade following the document’s publication, pastoral experience and diocesan policies have borne out the wisdom of this approach.

B. The guidelines that follow are meant to encourage and support a pastoral response to the issue of cohabitation.

1. Initial Interview

During the initial interview with the couple preparing for marriage, the priest (or other marriage preparation *assistant*) collects biographical information. If, in the course of this and following sessions with the couple, the *assistant* discovers that the couple is in a cohabiting relationship, he/she should discuss with the couple the importance of addressing their situation as part of good marriage preparation. It may also be helpful to give the couple some reading material about cohabitation and the reasons for the Church’s concern about this practice.

2. Pastoral Approach for Clergy

- a. In the course of his meetings with the couple, an extended conversation should take place in which the priest gets to know the couple and invites them into a discernment process about their cohabiting situation.
- b. During this period, the priest (or other marriage *preparation assistant*) should address all five of the following issues:
 - i. The couple’s perspectives on cohabitation and marriage.
 - ii. The reasons for their personal decision to cohabit.
 - iii. The Catholic Church’s teachings on human sexuality and marriage.
 - iv. The couple’s desire to appropriate this teaching within their life situation, including the possibility of discontinuing their cohabitation.
 - v. Their personal faith response for the future.

- c. Once the couple has made their informed response, the *marriage preparation assistant* continues to *help* the couple in ascertaining their readiness and ability to enter into a sacramental marriage.
- d. Since cohabitation is not in itself a canonical impediment to marriage, the couple may not be refused marriage solely on the basis of cohabitation. Marriage preparation may continue even if the couple refuses to separate. However, if there is not sufficient awareness on the couple's part of the essential commitments in their future marriage, the marriage should be postponed until such awareness has developed.

XII. PASTORAL CARE FOR DIVORCED PERSONS

Divorce is a real type of death experience, and includes all the denial, anger, bargaining, and sadness that *can* accompany the death of one of the spouses.

Regrettably, too many Catholics judge for some reason that, by itself, the mere marital breakup, legal separation, or final divorce excludes or excommunicates them from the church. This false view needs correction and such persons are to be reassured that God and the church are always close to them during such a painful time. Moreover, they need the Lord's grace and the church's help more than ever throughout those dark moments.

Pope John Paul II offers some practical words in this regard:

Loneliness and other difficulties are often the lot of separated spouses, especially when they are the innocent parties. The ecclesial community must support such people more than ever. It must give them much respect, solidarity, understanding and practical help, so that they can preserve their fidelity even in their difficult situation; and it must help them to cultivate the need to forgive which is inherent in Christian love and to be ready perhaps to return to their former married life.

(On the Family, United States Catholic Conference/USCC, No. 83, 1982)

The Pope also offers words of support for those who are divorced, have entered into a second union, and find themselves in perplexing spiritual circumstances:

I earnestly call upon pastors and the whole community of the faithful to help the divorced and with solicitous care to make sure that they do not consider themselves as separated from the church, for as baptized persons they can and indeed must share in her life. They should be encouraged to listen to the word of God, to attend the sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts in favor of justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace. Let the church pray for them, encourage them and show herself a merciful mother and thus sustain them in faith and hope.

(On the Family, United States Catholic Conference/USCC, No. 84, 1982)

Pastoral leaders are urged to make efforts to see to it that divorced persons and single parents are made very welcome in the faith community and are encouraged to become as actively involved as their situation permits.

XIII. PROCEDURES FOR A DECLARATION OF NULLITY

In our society, remarriage rates are high, and most divorced individuals will form a new partnership. After a divorce, five out of six men and three out of four women remarry.

A person is not free to remarry in the church after a civil divorce unless all previous spouses are deceased or all previous marriages have been declared null *by the bishop through the Office of Canonical Concerns or their difficulties have been resolved through the Office of Canonical Concerns in cases involving Lack of Form, Prior Bond, Pauline Privilege and Declaration of Nullity.*

A church annulment is a declaration that two people who were formerly married are not bound by that particular marital relationship. It is a statement by the church that the relationship did not meet at least one of the elements seen as essential for a union to be binding in the church.

A church annulment has no effect in civil law. However, a civil divorce must be obtained before the church annulment process may begin. To adequately evaluate the situation of a previous marriage, the minister involved should consult the Office of Canonical Concerns.

Contrary to many civil procedures, the annulment process is not aimed at determining a “winner” or a “loser.” The procedure seeks, above all, to come to the truth of the situation while protecting the legitimate rights of the concerned parties. In fact, the formal process for a marriage annulment frequently becomes a moment for healing the pain and hurt of the breakdown of the relationship between the spouses. And the insight gained during the process often serves to strengthen the quality of any subsequent marriage relationship.

Finally, an annulment does not in any way denigrate the positive aspects of the relationship that the spouses once had, nor does it illegitimize any children born of the union. It is the recognition that factors that precluded a valid marriage bond from coming into existence – for which the spouses may bear no personal responsibility – were at play at the time they entered marriage.

XIV. REMARRIAGE FOLLOWING DIVORCE

Most will *readily agree that it takes time to heal after a divorce, but when romance comes, a divorced person is often blinded to the fact that time to heal is really very necessary.* Too swift an entrance into a new relationship can be disastrous. *Before a new relationship can begin satisfactorily following a divorce, experience indicates that five years are most often needed so that an adequate reflection upon many or all of the considerations itemized in Section XVI can be completed.*

XV. REMARRIAGE FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF A SPOUSE

The passing of many months and even several years can be needed to sift through and properly accept all the thoughts and feelings that accompany the death of a spouse. Our pastoral care of a widowed person who wishes to remarry should recommend that the passage of an adequately lengthy period of time precede a new marriage. Among the considerations to be taken into account and resolved by the widowed party(ies) and intended spouse may be many or all of those itemized in Section XVI.

XVI. PASTORAL CARE FOR THOSE WISHING TO ENTER A SECOND MARRIAGE

- A. Here are some of the more important *concerns* to be included in the pastoral care of those wishing to enter a second marriage, either because *a declaration of nullity has been granted after a divorce* or because of the death of a spouse.
1. Be sure that *undue haste has not influenced the decision to remarry. As many as five years can be a good time frame for the healing required by affected individuals..*
 2. Help the person through the *mourning process that can follow a divorce or the death of a spouse. Refer the person to an appropriate support group.*
 3. See that the necessary canonical work has been started, if necessary. Remember that the process takes about a year.
 4. Give an appropriate pre-marriage inventory.
 5. If possible, have the couple talk to a couple who are in a successful second marriage.
 6. Discuss the following items with the couple in marriage preparation *and encourage them to discuss them privately and to reach a peaceful resolution regarding every relevant issue.*
 - a. *Relationships to children from the earlier marriage.*
 - b. Real estate: *Will it be owned by each equally? Will a house be sold? Is it practical to invest in a common domicile?*
 - c. Assets: *What is merged and what remains separate property? An understanding should be reached about each other's financial arrangements*
 - d. Insurance: *Who will be the beneficiary after the marriage?*
 - e. *Discuss the arrangements made orally or in writing with children concerning their education, weddings, business ventures, car insurance, support.*

- f. Former spouses: Discuss all the financial and other obligations agreed upon with the former spouse, for example, child support payments and visitation.
- g. Issues that arise from differences in the faith traditions or religious practices of different Catholic cultures.
- h. Religious practice: Will they *become part of the same faith community*? *What about church attendance*?
- i. Discuss where each will be buried.

XVII. DELEGATION

While it is true that all priests within the diocese share the same faculties, there is a long-standing tradition supported by Church law that no one should exercise ministry in a parish *that is not* their own without first contacting that *other* parish. Therefore, courtesy and the validity of marriage itself require that a visiting priest or deacon request and obtain delegation for the celebration of a marriage outside of their own parish from the resident pastor, associate pastor or deacon. All such delegations should be noted in the marriage envelope and register.

APPENDIX ONE

SUMMARY OF POLICY FOR PASTORAL MARRIAGE PREPARATION

(as outlined on pages 1-15)

1. The couple *should* contact the parish priest at least four months before the anticipated date of the wedding.
2. The preparation process should begin at the first meeting with the parish priest or staff member. It is highly desirable to complete this process at least two months before the wedding date.
3. Their immediate preparation for marriage will include three complementary components:
 - a. At least one initial session and one concluding session with the parish priest.
 - b. Participation in one of the marriage preparation programs available to them.
 - c. Personal sessions with the priest.
4. A civil marriage license must be obtained before the wedding takes place.
5. The parish priest has the responsibility to make a twofold assessment of:
 - a. The couple's readiness for marriage.
 - b. The level of faith of the Catholic parties.
6. If a couple who has been advised of *a necessary delay regarding their wedding date* by the priest *who is helping them to arrange for it* should approach another priest, he may not proceed without contacting the priest who counseled delay or the Office of Canonical Concerns.
7. EVERY EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE to include solid instruction regarding Natural Family Planning in any marriage preparation program.
8. A marriage in our diocese must be celebrated in a church or chapel building.
 - a. When a couple, however praiseworthy their motives, marries outside a church, they set themselves apart from the faith community represented by a parish church. It is important for *engaged* couples to realize that their spiritual family, the parish community, is as important as their families of origin. This rootedness of our spiritual identity in the parish is also the reason that, except for grave reasons, all the other Sacraments related to Catholic identity – Baptism, Confirmation, First Eucharist and Holy Orders – *are* celebrated in a church.

- b. Placing such emphasis on a building might seem exaggerated to many, but for us as Catholics a parish church in the context of a wedding underlines beautifully what St. Paul teaches in the latter verses of chapter 5 in his Letter to the Ephesians. Namely, that the loving union of a husband and wife is a symbol without equal of Christ's love for the Church. Any other setting for a wedding, no matter how meaningful for a family, deprives those present of the Church's rich theology of that Sacrament and makes what should be a public ceremony in the space made holy by the common faith of the parish community, into something just for family and friends.
9. A nihil obstat must be obtained from the Office of Canonical Concerns for all marriages which will take place out of this diocese. Likewise, all marriages prepared outside this diocese must be processed through the Office of Canonical Concerns of this diocese. All of the marriage packet, with the documents, is to be sent to the Office of Canonical Concerns for this purpose.
 10. Delegation: If the couple wishes a priest or deacon from outside the parish to assist at their marriage, proper delegation and permission must be requested and obtained from the pastor, associate pastor or deacon assigned to the parish. The permission of the bishop is also required if the priest or deacon is from another diocese.
 11. The civil marriage license should be brought to the church on the day of the wedding and signed by all concerned immediately after the religious ceremony.

APPENDIX TWO

INFORMATION REGARDING THE WEDDING LITURGY

A. Introduction

Liturgy, the prayer of the Church, is by its very nature communal. Catholic weddings, therefore, are celebrations of the whole Church and of a particular parish as well as of individual couples.

It is important that the couple recognize the mutual relationship they share with the parish, as well as with one another. The engaged couple should be given catechesis on the rites, prayers and readings, in order that they might receive the greatest benefit possible from the celebration of the sacrament.

In the United States, for pastoral and pragmatic reasons, we do not have weddings as part of our Sunday parish celebrations of the Eucharist.

B. Goals

1. To encourage the participation of the assembly in the wedding liturgy
2. To express the faith and commitment of the couple and of the assembly
3. To pray as a faith community for the couple, thereby offering them promise of support in their married life

C. General Guidelines

The general norms for liturgical celebration are to be followed at a wedding liturgy. The couple should be involved in the preparation of their wedding liturgy and may need guidance so that the celebration reflects the sacramental nature of their union. Several resources for preparing the wedding liturgy are available to guide them in the selection of scripture readings, prayers, blessings, and other options in the rite. Through prayer and reflection on these choices, the couple will be able to enrich the celebration with expressions of their faith.

D. Ministries of the Liturgy

Within each liturgical celebration there are a variety of ministries (lector, eucharistic minister, etc.). Some roles can only be filled by a Roman Catholic minister (for example, eucharistic minister); however, other ministries (for example, reader) can be *exercised* by qualified persons of other Christian faith traditions. Care should be taken in the selection and preparation of persons to fill these various roles. They should have the skills and spiritual gifts necessary to fulfill the ministry *and* not just a social relationship *with* the couple. If suitably skilled persons cannot be found by the couple, the parish should offer assistance from among its ministers.

In no circumstance should all of the ministries be performed by just one person, such as the priest or deacon. Members of the assembly should participate in the celebration to the

fullest extent possible, *even* by assuming one of the ministries. Moreover, the liturgy should be prepared so that community participation is encouraged.

E. The Rite

The Church provides three different rites for marriage:

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

F. Entrance Rite

The procession may include the liturgical ministers and the priest or deacon as well as the bride and groom, family members, and attendants. There are many ways to plan the entrance rite. For example, a liturgical procession of the wedding party; attendants entering as couples rather than the bridesmaids alone; the bride and groom accompanied by all parents or relatives in the procession; or the bride escorted by her father.

G. Liturgy of the Word

Biblical readings may be selected from the many options given in the Lectionary for the Ritual Mass of Marriage or from other appropriate biblical text. Non-biblical readings are *never* to be used.

Preferably, the psalm is sung, as is the gospel acclamation. The general intercessions should address the needs of the universal Church as well as those of the couple.

H. The Rite of Marriage

Since the bride and groom are the focus of the rite, they, should be clearly visible to the entire assembly during the exchange of vows. Preferably they should face each other or the assembly so that their exchange of vows may be heard by all present.

The rite provides optional forms for receiving the consent of the couple.

I. Music

When deciding what music is appropriate for the marriage rite, the following questions might be asked:

1. Is this a well-written piece of music (musical judgment)?
2. Are the text and music in keeping with the nature of the liturgy (liturgical judgment)?
3. Can the music be used to help the assembly to pray (pastoral judgment)?

The music used before or during the liturgy must be clearly identifiable as prayer by all gathered. Secular love songs and ballads that have personal meaning to the couple are best played or sung at the reception rather than before, *during or at the end of* the ceremony.

J. Music Ministers

It is very important that the music minister (or other pastoral minister) be able to present in a clear and kind manner the role of music in Catholic worship, as well as the parish policies for music at liturgy.

The presence of a trained cantor should be encouraged at a wedding liturgy. The cantor's main role is to help the assembly participate in the singing.

K. Worship Aids

In order to encourage the participation of the assembly in the wedding liturgy, it is helpful to have a worship aid. This might simply be an available hymnal; another option would be a specially prepared booklet which might include the music to be sung. When preparing such a booklet, care must be taken to respect copyright procedure.

L. Decorations inside the Church

The *decorations* for the wedding should take into consideration the liturgical season.

Quality and appropriateness are the two primary principles which govern the *decorations that provide an environment for* worship. The arrangement of kneelers, flowers, candelabra, and other decorations should not obstruct the view of the assembly or inhibit their participation, nor should it restrict movement within the sanctuary.

M. Parish Policies

Parish policies for wedding liturgies are helpful and to be encouraged and should always be presented in a positive, welcoming, hospitable tone.

Written parish policies or guidelines which state clearly what is allowed or not allowed in the celebration can assist the couple in making initial preparations; such policies typically cover the areas of music, environment, photography *and fees*. A clear understanding at the beginning can help avoid the disappointment of having to change plans after they have already been made. Written policies also *help to* maintain consistency *when* the couple *speaks* with various parish ministers; for example, clergy, music minister, *decoration* coordinators.

While policies may be particular for each parish community, they cannot prohibit what the general law of the Church allows. For example, a parish cannot prohibit weddings during Lent since the Church itself does not prohibit them. However, a couple should be made aware of the penitential character of the season of Lent, informed of the environment which may be in the church at that time, and given assistance in planning their wedding accordingly.

N. Civil Marriage License

The civil marriage license should be brought to the church on the day of the wedding and signed by all concerned immediately after the religious ceremony.