

Common Policy for Marriage Preparation

Preamble

The Bishop, clergy and laity of the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana have long been concerned with the guiding and supportive role they should provide to those contemplating marriage. This concern led, in 1975, to the introduction of a special Policy for those under eighteen years of age seeking marriage in the Catholic Church. In 1982, this Policy was reevaluated. Now it is appropriate for another evaluation and refinement of the Marriage Policy for the Diocese.

The Sacrament of Marriage is a most sacred and serious commitment by its nature. Vatican II states: "The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence, by that human act, whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other, a relationship arises which, by divine will and in the eyes of society, too, is a lasting one." (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, #48, Second Vatican Council.)

Therefore, the Local Church of Lafayette-in-Indiana presents the following Pastoral Directives for couples preparing for marriage. In presenting this Policy, the Local Church intends to reach out to engaged couples and to demonstrate that it does, indeed, care for their welfare.

Policy and Guidelines

Section ONE: The Formation and Assessment Process

Policy: Couples desiring to be married in the community of the Church are to personally notify their parish priest as soon as they have the intention to marry. This time must be at least six months prior to the anticipated time of the wedding so that they necessary formation and assessment process may be completed without pressure of time restriction. It is recommended that all formal preparation be completed at least 6 weeks prior to the anticipated date of the wedding.

At the conclusion of the process, a decision is made to either proceed or delay the marriage. If the decision is to proceed, the wedding date is established and preparations continue. If the decision is to delay,

the reason should be clearly explained to the couple. In those cases where the couple and/or priest has decided that the celebration of matrimony should be delayed, the priest should offer his pastoral assistance to help the couple overcome the obstacles to their readiness for marriage.

This process is intended to produce awareness and growth whereby the couple will have the opportunity to come to a greater realization of the strengths and weaknesses that govern their ability to enter into and grow in a married love relationship.

It is essential that the priest conduct the initial session, establish a rapport with the couple, and thoroughly explain the Policy and all the steps that pertain to each particular couple. After this is accomplished, other qualified members of the faith community, including married couples and professionals, may be enlisted to carry out other steps of this process. This involvement of the wider Church community is not only recommended but has become part of the official teaching of the Church. (See Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, #11, and *Humanae Vitae*, #26.)

The following are the basic elements of the Formation and Assessment Process and must be complied with by all couples regardless of age, previous marital status or special circumstances except those specific situations which are referred to in later paragraphs of this document:

- A. The administration and co-review of a premarital instrument or inventory by the priest of his delegate together with the engaged couple. Instruments that may be used are: FOCCUS, PREPARE, ENRICH, or the Premarital Inventory (PMI).
- B. The Couple is required to participate in one of the approved Diocesan Marriage Preparation Programs. Current programs approved within this Diocese are: Parish Based Sponsor Couple, Regional Pre-Cana Conferences and Catholic Engaged Encounter. (NOTE: Couples residing outside the Diocese are required to participate in formalized Marriage Preparation available in the Diocese of their residence. They shall provide formal documentation of attendance and participation to the priest preparing the couple for marriage).
- C. As part of the process, the priest indicates to the couple the documents required by the Church as part of the permanent record of their marriage. For Catholics, a currently dated Certificate of Baptism (dated within six months of the date of

the wedding) is required together with a Confirmation Certificate. For non-Catholics, A Baptismal Certificate is required if the individual has been baptized, or a Birth Certificate for the unbaptized party as proof of age. For both parties, two Affidavits of "Freedom to Marry" are required; these forms are to be completed by the priest and signed, in his presence, by the attestant. Regularly these Affidavits of "Freedom to Marry" are to be provided by the parents of the couple. If the parents are deceased, the Affidavits are to be provided by relatives and/or friends older than the party. The attestant must have known the prospective marriage party since the party's 14th year. If the party has been a life-long member of the parish of origin and is now personally known to the parish priest, the priest himself may issue a statement attesting to the freedom of the party to marry.

In the event of a previous marriage, a Death Certificate of the former spouse must be presented, or a Decree of Ratification from a Tribunal attesting to freedom from that prior marriage. (A civil Decree of Divorce is not acceptable).

Section TWO: Role of the Priest/Minister

Note: For the purpose of this document, the term "priest/minister" is defined as the Pastor, Associate Pastor or Parochial Vicar, Priest in Residence, a Permanent or Transitional Deacon assigned to a parish or a Diocesan Seminarian during a Pastoral Year.

Policy: The Pastor has serious moral and ministerial responsibilities for all marriages that take place within his parish. As representative of God and delegate of the Church, he is to determine in each situation if the essential elements are present for a valid, Christian marriage.

The priest must advise the couple of requirements of the Universal Church as well as those of the Local Church and assist them in fulfilling these requirements; included in this listing would be: marriage preparation, interfaith (mixed-religion) instructions when appropriate, required Dispensations/Permissions, as well as the submission of necessary documentation.

It is the right and responsibility of the Pastor to witness all marriages celebrated within his parish (canons 1063, 1067, 1070, 1108, 1111,f.). The delegation of priests in residence, as well as extern

priests, must always be a written document or record (canon 1111, paragraph 2). Having received proper delegation, associate pastors, priests in residence, and any extern priests, are required to comply with the practices and policies of this Diocese.

If a conflict of a personal nature arises between the priest and the couple, the priest and the couple should mutually agree to consult the Dean who will evaluate the circumstances dealing with the proposed marriage and offer a solution. This does not apply when, after the Formation and Assessment Process is complete, the priest determines to delay that marriage for a good reason. Reasons for delay or the priest declining the invitation to function at a proposed wedding may include the following:

1. Non-practice of the Catholic Faith by the Catholic party or parties with no evidence of a true intention of renewal;
2. Apparent indifference by the Catholic party for the Catholic formation of children;
3. Lack of freedom, maturity or readiness for marriage;
4. Substantial lack of appreciation for the spiritual and sacramental aspects of marriage.
5. Canonical impediments (until dispensed);
6. An expressed intention by either of the parties to deny the other's right to a permanent and exclusive union and/or the procreation and nurturing of children;
7. Refusal to cooperate with the marriage preparation policy;
8. Marriage of a person who is bound by natural obligation toward another party or toward children arising from a prior union (canon 1071, paragraph 1, number 3).

It is the policy of the Universal Church that weddings are to be celebrated in a parish church (canon 1115 and 1118). As a matter of uniformity, this is to be the parish church of the Catholic party. When both parties are practicing Catholics, the parish of either party is an eligible choice.

WEDDINGS ARE NOT TO BE CELEBRATED DURING THE LENTEN SEASON.
(Diocesan Directive.)

Dispensation for interfaith (mixed) marriage and/or from the Canonical Form in no way implies permission for the celebration of marriage anywhere except a church or rectory (see Statement of the NCCB, numbers 19 & 20).

The Bishops of Northern Indiana will not be disposed to grant permission for marriages to be celebrated in

University, College or High School Chapels, Chapels of Religious Houses or Seminaries, sub divum (outdoors), in private residences or in any place that is not generally regarded as suitable for Divine Worship. (Interdiocesan Norms for Mixed Marriages, 1971.)

A marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic is to be celebrated apart from the Eucharist. An exception will be considered in the case of a person baptized in another faith if that individual is participating in the RCIA or has completed full instruction in the Catholic Faith, or if the Catholic party is a daily or regular communicant (Diocesan Directive). When an exception is granted, it is not permitted to invite non-Catholics to receive the Eucharist. (See "Faculties and Related Directives," September 1986.) In the case of a non-baptized party an exception may not be made.

Section THREE: Special Circumstances

Due to the variety in background of couples requesting marriage today, circumstances are often present that warrant Additional concern and attention. Among these are interfaith marriage, marriage of those under twenty years of age, pregnancy, the non-practicing Catholic, non-residents, migrants, Senior Citizens, Military Personnel and validation of civil marriages in the Church.

A. Catholics Marrying Those Who Are Not Catholic

Goals:

1. To deepen the couple's awareness of the influence on their lives of religious faith, convictions and values in the present and future;
2. To explore the advantages, disadvantages and practical implications of different faith backgrounds in the marriage relationship;
3. To share, in depth, why the Catholic Church believes and teaches as it does concerning Christian Marriage and the sharing of Its Faith with children.

Policy: Since unity in religious belief is a major source of strength in marriage, the Catholic Church urges that Catholics should marry within their own Faith (canons 1124 and 1128). In those instances where the parties are of different Faith Traditions, the Catholic party, through the priest, must request written Dispensation Permission from the Bishop to marry in the Church. Additionally, special sessions

are required to acquaint or update the couple's understanding of Catholic beliefs and practices. It is further recommended that the Catholic party becomes acquainted with the religious tradition of their future spouse. When possible, cooperative effort of the Clergy of both Faith Communities is urged.

These sessions will focus special attention at this teachable moment to impart a clear understanding of the Catholic Faith and give appropriate and sufficient time to discuss the following areas:

1. General information of religion- the role of Scripture, Faith and grace;
2. Values, Relationship with God;
3. Morality- Guidelines to moral decision-making;
4. Catholic Church- History, Myths, etc.;
5. Sacraments;
6. Requirements for a Catholic marriage;
7. Practical Implications:
 - a. Diverse denominations/Religious Traditions/Faith backgrounds;
 - b. Identifying with a Faith Community (parish).
 - c. Feelings of Family members;
 - d. Religious Formation of children.

Note: The number of sessions needed to cover the above is at the discretion of the priest.

B. Marriage of Those Under 20 Years of Age or When Deemed Necessary by Priest Preparing the Couple for Marriage

Goals:

1. To assist the couple to understand the degree of maturity necessary for such a serious, permanent commitment;
2. To assure the couple that the Church cares for them and is striving to insure a lasting and loving union for them and protect them against irreparable mistakes;
3. To respond to the much greater difficulties of marriages when either party is still in their teen years.

Policy: When either of the parties is under the age of twenty (20) at the time they express their intention to marry, the decision to proceed may be given by the priest when the approved Diocesan Evaluation Process is completed and after consultation with the parents or guardians.

The Diocesan Process entails a referral to a license psychologist through the Pastoral Office for a comprehensive evaluation of the individuals and their

relationship. The psychologist will primarily be concerned with each individual's capacity to sustain the life-long commitment required of those seeking marriage in the Church. In gathering information for the evaluation, the psychologist also attempts to increase the couple's awareness of one another's personality, while also helping the couple understand themselves and their relationship.

During the final session, the psychologist shares with the couple basic feedback based on the psychologist's observations. Following the final session, the Pastoral Office sends a written report of the observations to the priest as well as the Chancery. This report includes recommendations about whether the marriage preparations process should proceed or whether serious consideration should be given to delaying the marriage.

Responsibility for making the determination to proceed with or delay a marriage rests with the priest in concert with the couple. It is also required that the parents of the couple be interviewed in light of the psychologist's recommendations.

The priest shall prepare the evaluation form as the final document in this process by adding his own recommendations. This parcel of the total report is critical to the final decision to proceed or delay.

C. Pregnancy

Goals:

1. To relieve the couple of all parental, societal and individual pressure to marry because of the pregnancy;
2. To allow the couple the time and opportunity to assess their reasons and readiness for marriage exclusive of the pregnancy.

Policy: Pregnancy of itself does not constitute a positive motivation for marriage nor does it justify an exception to this common policy for marriage preparation. The primary concern must be to evaluate the couple's readiness for marriage exclusive of the pregnancy. If the couple made the decision to marry, i.e., were engaged prior to the pregnancy, plans for the wedding may be made if the priest in consultation with the parents of both parties, assesses the couple as sufficiently prepared for marriage and all applicable steps of the Formation and Assessment Process (Section Three) are completed. This scenario was precisely the motivation for instituting the original policy. It is still valid today.

If the decision to marry was not made prior to the pregnancy, the priest must seek additional input through the approved Diocesan Evaluation Process as used for marriages of those under twenty (20) years of age (Section Four, B). In this case, the priest and parents should strongly encourage the consideration of a delay of the wedding until after the birth of the child.

There was a time when social pressure was such that it was deemed almost imperative that persons involved in a premarital pregnancy should marry. Experience has shown that the majority of such marriages fail. The percentage of failure increases, proportionately, to the younger age of the couples involved. Experience, also, shows that even when the marriage does not fail, a severe strain is often placed on the growth of the marriage relationship. Therefore, pregnancy dictates the need for a special ministry of care and concern for all involved

D. Non-Practicing (Inactive) Catholics

Policy: If the only Catholic involved in the proposed marriage is a lapsed or inactive Catholic, there is no basis for the priest to accept an invitation to officiate at the wedding. The mere promise of a return to lived Catholicism is not sufficient. A person must establish the willingness and ability to embrace the Catholic life-style before the process begins, e.g., through weekly Mass attendance.

If one party is a practicing Catholic and the other is a lapsed or inactive Catholic, the latter is to be considered in the same fashion as a non-Catholic and the appropriate steps should be followed, including the permission required for a Mixed Religion (canons 11243 and 1125).

E. Validation

Goals:

1. To emphasize the significance of the Sacrament of Marriage in the pastoral practice of the Church;
2. To foster adherence to the common policy and to avoid any implied encouragement of civil ceremonies;
3. To assist priests in discerning motivation for validation, e.g., if the validation is sought as a remedy for marital problems.

Policy: If a couple has attempted marriage contrary to the Laws of the church, a validation is permitted only after the cause for the original lack of compliance has been addressed and resolved.

Pastoral concern and sensitivity is essential in cases involving Church validations of civil marriages. Regardless of the age or circumstances of the couple, they are to participate in the Formation and Assessment Process. It is recommended that couples seeking to validate their marriage be encouraged to attend a Catholic Marriage Encounter.

If, however, such a union has been in existence for five (5) years or more and gives evidence of stability, actual participation in the full Formation and Assessment Process shall be at the discretion of the parish priest (in consultation with the Bishop's Office).

In any event, no validation is to take place until at least a full year after the date of the civil marriage.

F. Non Residents, Military Personnel, Migrants and Tribunal Situations

Policy: Special circumstances are presented by individuals who are not residents of the Lafayette Diocese but who wish to be married within the Diocese. Likewise, included are those in Military Service, migrants, and some individuals with marriage cases pending before a Matrimonial Tribunal. Persons in these categories should note:

1. Subjects of other Dioceses who wish to be married in the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana shall be governed by the regulations of the Diocese which grants the Matrimonial Dispensation (if an interfaith marriage) of to which the Catholic belongs. Competency is based on geography and/or residency. This is particularly of concern in those parishes which touch the boundaries of the Diocese. Responsibility for preparation of the parties and for securing any Dispensation/Permissions lies fully with the parish in which the Catholic party resides;
2. Individual judgment shall be made about those who are in Military Service. Military Personnel are to conform to the directives of the Archdiocese for the Military Services;
3. Those in the migrant stream are not bound by these regulations;
4. Those who have a Marriage Cause pending before a Marriage Court are bound by the same rules applicable to other marriages and validations celebrated in the Diocese. Specific restrictions or conditions mandated by the Marriage Tribunal can be lifted or

modified only by the Tribunal which imposed the restriction or condition.

Section FOUR: Appeal

Goals:

1. To safeguard the rights of all parties involved.
2. To provide the Bishop with the necessary discretion required in the governing of the Diocese.

Policy: In reaching a decision to delay a marriage, there is room for human error or mistaken judgment on the part of all parties. If a couple disagrees with the decision to delay their marriage, they may have recourse through the Office of the Dean. The priest shall assist them in their appeal. The Dean may review the case and recommend further consideration. Final determination rests with the Bishop's Office. The approval of the Bishop's Office is required for a priest to proceed with a marriage after the marriage has been delayed by another priest.

Section FIVE: Exceptions

Goals:

1. To acknowledge those instances where the specifics offered by this policy may not be of sufficient benefit to the couple.
2. To provide the local priest with the necessary discretion and guidance for certain pastoral situations.

Policy: Certain exceptions to this policy may be made at the discretion of the local priest. These exceptions are limited to the following:

1. Marriages of couples when each of the parties have reached their fortieth (40) birthday;
2. The validation of civil marriages that have been in existence for five (5) years or more.

No other exceptions will be made without the approval of the Bishop's Office.