



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

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MARRIAGE PREPARATION POLICY



GUIDELINES FOR
MARRIAGE PREPARATION
AND LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS

DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

30 November 2008
First Sunday of Advent

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We join with dioceses throughout our country to support the USCCB's *National Pastoral Initiative on Marriage* in an effort to strengthen married life within the Church.

I am pleased to approve and promulgate the following marriage preparation policy and liturgical norms which are revisions of the diocesan 1997 guidelines. These updated documents, which are now diocesan policy, reflect a collaborative effort by the Office of Faith Formation and the Office of Worship. The revision process included research, planning, prayer and careful deliberation in an effort to ensure the ongoing faith formation of couples planning to celebrate the sacrament of marriage in the Catholic Church. The policy has been discussed with and is supported by the Presbyteral Council.

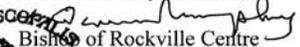
The documents are written to assist all those who minister to couples preparing for marriage in the Catholic Church. This includes Pastors, priests, deacons, pastoral associates as well as marriage preparation teams, music ministers and all catechetical leaders.

The revised marriage preparation policy addresses the comprehensive process of remote, proximate and immediate marriage preparation. The liturgical norms are a guide to celebrating the sacrament beginning the couple's married life, "By the power of the sacrament, the marriage bond is intrinsically linked to the Eucharistic unity of Christ the Bridegroom and his bride, the Church" (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 24). Both documents present a comprehensive outline regarding the key points to address when preparing couples for a sacramental marriage and the continuing pastoral care of all married couples throughout their lives.

The support of married couples and the family is of utmost concern for all Church leaders and ministers. In today's complex times it is important to acknowledge that a faith filled marriage needs a balance of pastoral support and solid catechetical formation for couples to live through the daily challenges of a secular society. It is through and with the family that the kingdom of God is fostered and revealed as a witness to others.

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide all the engaged couples preparing to be married and for those who minister to them in the name of Jesus Christ.

Yours faithfully in Christ,


Bishop of Rockville Centre

Given at Rockville Centre
this 30th day of November 2008

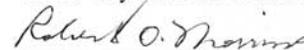

Notary



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DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
MARRIAGE PREPARATION POLICY

The Diocese of Rockville Centre acknowledges the importance of ongoing faith formation for all baptized Catholics to live more fully the gospel message of Jesus Christ. Marriage preparation is a process that invites engaged couples to deepen their faith and to grow in relationship with God and each other.

The following policy, presented to the Presbyterate and approved by Bishop William Murphy, is intended to assist church leadership both on the diocesan and parish level in the crucial and challenging task of marriage preparation in our Church. The document is meant to establish pastoral norms and guidelines as an integrative and comprehensive approach to marriage preparation in all stages—remote, proximate and immediate. This will assist couples in discerning their vocation to Christian marriage as well as preserve the sacramental integrity of marriage in the Catholic Church.

The policy reflects the Church's belief that marriage is a vocation and a source of God's grace that builds up the Body of Christ through its support of couples throughout their marriage journey. It represents the Church's wisdom, pastoral directives and in essence provides guidelines to unify the vision, objectives and goals for all marriage preparation programs throughout the Diocese.

In the 1981 apostolic exhortation, **Familiaris Consortio**, John Paul II wrote that "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."
(#66)

The Pontifical Council on the Family published a document in 1996 entitled, **Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage**. It highlighted the continued call for ongoing faith formation for couples entering Christian marriage through remote, proximate and immediate preparation. “The engagement period is set within the context of a rich evangelization process...They are therefore invited to understand the meaning of the responsible and mature love of the community of life and love which their family will be, a real domestic church which will contribute toward enriching the whole Church.” (#2)

The USCCB, Committee on Marriage and Family, began a three-phase initiative in 2005 to promote the value of marriage for the life of the Church and society. **The National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage, *Marriage: For Love, For Life*** is a call to “weave together the Catholic faith tradition and its pastoral activity...in order to promote, strengthen, sustain and restore marriages.”

Pope Benedict XVI wrote in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, **Sacramentum Caritatis**, “The Eucharist, as the sacrament of charity, has a particular relationship with the love of man and woman united in marriage. A deeper understanding of this relationship is needed at the present time.” (#27)

The **Code of Canon Law** states that there should be “personal preparation for entering marriage, so that spouses are disposed to the holiness and obligations of their new state.” (Canon 1063)

I. EVERY ENGAGED COUPLE must participate in a marriage preparation program before celebrating the sacrament of marriage.

1. Christian marriage is a sacrament of vocation that requires catechetical preparation as an opportunity for further faith formation. All couples must participate in a marriage preparation program and no couple can be exempt from this requirement.
2. The Church community makes every effort to accommodate the schedules and needs of the engaged couple so that they may be properly disposed to engage in the process.
3. It is the responsibility of the couple preparing to be married or convalidate their marriage to cooperate fully and willingly as the Church community helps couples prepare for their life long journey of married life.

II. TO ENSURE THAT INTERFAITH COUPLES receive proper instruction on the expectations and responsibilities of marriage in the Catholic Church the following procedure is recommended.

4. During the initial meeting with the priest or deacon the engaged couple will be informed that a Pre Marriage Workshop is offered by the Office of Faith Formation. The purpose of this workshop is to further assist the interfaith couple to discern their decision to be married in the Catholic Church.
5. The couple will also register for FOCCUS and a Marriage Preparation program at this time.

III. MARRIAGE PREPARATION should take place in the parish where the wedding will be celebrated whenever possible.

6. The parish community is the most effective environment to prepare engaged couples for marriage. It is recommended that couples attend parish-based sessions when possible. When couples cannot participate in their parish program, the Office of Faith Formation provides opportunities for preparation such as diocesan marriage preparation sessions and engaged retreat weekends.
7. The Office of Faith Formation also assists parishes in developing and updating their marriage preparation programs as well as assists parishes on a deanery level to develop a collaborative program.

IV. THE USE OF A PRE MARITAL inventory (FOCCUS) is required for all engaged couples as a necessary component of the marriage preparation process.

8. FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study) is a nationally accepted marriage preparation tool designed to help engaged couples learn more about themselves and their relationship.
9. The FOCCUS inventory is required as a discernment tool and is an integral part of the marriage preparation process for all couples. Please see the guidelines for the administration and intended use of FOCCUS.
10. The Office of Faith Formation coordinates sessions for engaged couples as well as offers training sessions for individuals to become trained facilitators.

V. THE LENGTH OF MARRIAGE preparation is to be at least 12-15 hours.

11. It is recommended that all marriage preparation programs consist of 12-15 contact hours to afford time

for ongoing faith formation and a discernment process thorough prayer, discussions and presentations.

12. It is strongly recommended that couples participate in marriage preparation programs no later than six months prior to their marriage. Couples should be informed of this requirement at the time of their initial meeting at the parish.

VI. MARRIAGE PREPARATION IS a formative journey that includes a deepening of personal faith, the rediscovery of the value of sacraments, church teachings and doctrine, an experience of prayer and interpersonal dynamics. It invites the couple to enter more fully into the ecclesial community.

13. The statement above highlights the goal of marriage preparation as outlined in *Familiaris Consortio*. (#66) and reiterated by the Pontifical Council for the Family in its document, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*.
14. Topics of marriage preparation program must include—church teachings on married life, spirituality of married and family life, liturgical celebration of marriage, conscience formation, Christian parenting, education on natural family planning, communication skills and a discussion of practical issues such as finances, impact of family of origin and an understanding of addiction and domestic violence issues.
15. As a necessary part of the preparation for the sacrament of marriage the engaged couple should be encouraged to celebrate the sacrament of Penance. *“To receive the sacrament of marriage fruitfully, spouses are urged especially to approach the sacraments of penance and of the Most Holy Eucharist.” (Canon 1065)*

VII. THE USE OF RITUAL IS A necessary part of the marriage preparation process.

16. A celebration of Mass or prayer service that welcomes the engaged couples into the parish community is a way to further connect engaged couples into the life of the church as well as a way to evangelize the parish faith community.

VIII. INITIAL AND ONGOING formation is required for all couples and individuals preparing engaged couples for marriage.

17. Marriage preparation is a collaborative ministry between clergy, pastoral staff and lay couples. Married couples offer a valuable contribution in sharing their faith and lived experience as witnesses to a Christian marriage.
18. All facilitators must receive adequate training in Church teachings and interpersonal skills to better serve the engaged couples. Ongoing formation is encouraged for all those involved in the marriage preparation process.
19. Pastors are to assure the quality of their parish sessions and ensure the necessary training for all marriage facilitators. The Office of Faith Formation offers training workshops, leadership courses in marriage preparation and FOCCUS for facilitators both in English and Spanish.

IX. MARRIAGE PREPARATION is the occasion to begin the ongoing pastoral care of marriage and the family.

20. Engaged couples are encouraged to become part of the life of the Church through their parish communities where they will reside when they are married.
21. The Office of Faith Formation serves as a resource to parishes in offering marriage and family enrichment opportunities.

**LITURGICAL AND PASTORAL NORMS
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE**

I. Introduction

Married Christians, in virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, signify and share in the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and his Church. (Rite of Marriage #1)

1. The purpose of these norms is to assist priests, deacons, pastoral staff, musicians, and all who prepare couples for the celebration of their wedding liturgy.
2. Each parish is strongly encouraged to establish parish norms/policies/customs based on the diocesan norms which describe the way weddings are normally to be celebrated in the particular parish church. Parish policies should be available in a written statement, to assist the couples in their preparation for the wedding liturgy.
3. The written parish policy should be clearly stated and be flexible. Arrangements cannot be more restrictive than general liturgical directives for the rite of marriage and the diocesan norms. They should be shared and explained to engaged couples as early as possible in the process of making marriage arrangements. Pastoral staff ought to be helpful in determining what is the best way to celebrate the marriage liturgy in light of existing norms and policies, particular parish facilities, including liturgical space and local circumstances.
4. This fourth edition of the Liturgical and Pastoral Norms for the Celebration of Marriage includes a policy statement concerning wedding liturgy preparation. Sample planning forms are available in the Office of Worship if needed.

II. Fundamental Principles

Liturgical services are not private functions but are celebrations of the Church which is the “sacrament of unity.” Liturgical services pertain to the whole Body of the Church. (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy #26)

5. In the Rite of Marriage, the Church receives and blesses the vowed commitment of spouses and gathers them into the mystery of Christ’s love for His Church.
6. The celebration of the sacramental marriage is a liturgical act and because of that it is also considered to be personal and ecclesial but never a private event. The preparation process for the wedding liturgy should then maintain the integrity and meaning of the wedding liturgy as an ecclesial event, while also offering appropriate opportunities for the couple to personalize their wedding liturgy.
7. Depending on the couple’s involvement in the Eucharistic life of the Church, it is an opportunity for evangelization. The spouses as ministers of Christ’s grace mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church (*cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1623*). The period of preparation and planning assists them as they commit themselves to one another in Christ.
8. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that “it is by following Christ, renouncing themselves that spouses are to be able to understand and receive the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ.” (*CCC, 1615*) The grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ’s love expressed in the cross, the source of all Christian life. For this reason the engaged couple should be reminded of the importance of maintaining their communion with God by receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Eucharist, not only in the special period of their preparation for their wedding but also in their married life.

9. All who have contact with the couple and their families, pastoral staff and parish community should make every effort to reach out to them, to welcome and encourage their participation.

III. Setting for the Wedding Liturgy

The wedding liturgy, a visible sign of God’s love and presence, is a sacramental encounter with Christ in the midst of the assembly and in the context of the couple’s covenant love. The celebration of the Eucharist is at the heart of our Catholic faith. “Marriage and the Eucharist point especially to the mystery of Christ’s union with his Church.”

Priests should show special consideration to those who take part in liturgical celebrations or hear the gospel only on the occasion of a wedding, either because they are not Catholics, or because they are Catholics who rarely, if ever, take part in the Eucharist or seem to have abandoned the practice of their faith. Priests are ministers of Christ’s gospel to everyone (Rite of Marriage, #9).

10. The most fitting context for the marriage of two practicing Catholics is the Eucharistic celebration. At the Eucharistic celebration, it is the responsibility of the priest celebrant both to preside at the Eucharist and to officiate at the rite of marriage, which includes the receiving of vows and the blessing of rings. When the marriage is celebrated outside of Mass, either the priest or deacon presider officiates throughout the entire rite of marriage, which includes the receiving of vows and the blessing of rings. (*Rite of Marriage, 53*). Holy Communion is not given at celebrations of marriage outside of Mass.
11. Marriage preparation offers the opportunity to speak with couples about their place in the faith community, the degree of their ordinary Eucharistic participation, and to discern together the appropriate context for the Rite of Marriage: at the Eucharistic Liturgy, or a Liturgy of the Word.

12. Even though the celebration of marriage should normally be within the Mass (Ritual of Marriage #7), due to local pastoral circumstances, it is permissible for parishes to limit the number of ritual Masses that can be celebrated on a Sunday.

IV. The Gathering and Entrance Rites

“At the appointed time, the priest goes with the ministers to the door of the church, or if more suitable, to the altar. There he meets the bride and bridegroom in a friendly manner, showing that the Church shares their joy. If there is a procession to the altar, the ministers go first, and then the bride and the bridegroom. According to local custom, they may be escorted by at least their parents and the two witnesses” (Rite of Marriage #19-20).

13. Hospitality is an important component at weddings. As guests enter the church, care should be taken to help all people feel welcome and warmly greeted. Ushers assigned should seat them close together and toward the front of the church, encouraging everyone to interact and form a cohesive assembly.
14. Another aspect of hospitality is to begin the celebration at the scheduled time to show regard both for those who have gathered, as well as for other events scheduled in the parish church. The couple should be responsible to stress this with limousine drivers, photographers, videographers and any other persons involved in the immediate preparation for the wedding. The priest, deacon, or pastoral minister ought to stress these issues during their conversations with the couple.
15. Even though there is strong attachment to the “traditional” procession format of the bridal party and bride, the liturgical entrance procession might be considered and suggested to the couple. The procession at a wedding is an extended form of the entrance of the priest and ministers at the Sunday Mass celebration and places the marriage liturgy in the context of the church’s normal order of worship, pointing to its ecclesial

character. The Church’s understanding that the bride and groom are equal and complementary in marriage is also reflected in a liturgical procession.

16. All those contributing to the formation of the bride and groom leading up to their wedding day may be included in the procession, including parents, grandparents and godparents. This reflects the reality that a new family is being created from two existing families.
17. The participation of small children should be carefully considered.

V. The Liturgy of the Word

The Lectionary for the Rite of Marriage provides a variety of scripture readings for use at weddings. All the readings during the Liturgy of the Word, including the Responsorial Psalm, must be taken from the Scriptures (cf. Rite of Marriage #11).

18. The parish should provide the couples with a suitable resource that includes the texts of Scripture for marriage, and encourage them to participate in the selection process.
19. The couple may choose readers for the liturgy. Those chosen to read should be practicing Catholics, faith filled people and familiar with proclaiming God’s word in the liturgical assembly. Readers at the wedding liturgy should be prepared, rehearsed, and helped to appreciate the dignity of their ministry. Parish lectors may also be invited to serve. Bishop Murphy grants delegation to priests and deacons to give permission for members of other Christian Churches or Ecclesial Communities to read Scripture at a Nuptial Mass or wedding ceremony for prudent pastoral reasons (*Ecumenical Directory 133*).
20. The Scripture readings should be proclaimed at the ambo from the Lectionary and Book of the Gospel, not from wedding booklets or loose papers.
21. The Responsorial Psalm should normally be sung, preferably from the ambo, and always taken from the Lectionary.

22. Whenever marriage is celebrated during Mass, white vestments are worn, and the wedding Mass is used. If the marriage is celebrated on Sunday or a Solemnity, the Mass of the day is used. However it may include a nuptial blessing and special final blessing. On Sundays of the Christmas season and throughout the year the wedding Mass may be used if it is not a parish Mass. The Ritual Mass for weddings (collects and reading) is not permitted on Solemnities, the Sundays of Advent, Lent, Easter, on the days within the octave of Easter, on the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed, on Ash Wednesday and during Holy Week, taking due account of the norms given in the ritual book or in the Mass itself (*GIRM #372*)
23. The liturgy of the word as adapted to the marriage celebration is a highly effective means for catechesis on the sacrament of marriage and its responsibilities. Therefore when the wedding mass may not be celebrated, one of the readings from the texts provided for the marriage celebration may be chosen, except from Holy Thursday to Easter, on the solemnities of Epiphany, Ascension, Pentecost, or Corpus Christi, or on holydays of obligation (*Rite of Marriage, #11*).

VI. The Rite of Marriage

24. The Rite of Marriage consists of four elements:
- ♦ the series of preliminary questions – concerning the couple’s free will, lifelong intention, and the acceptance of children along with rearing them in the Catholic church
 - ♦ the giving of consent
 - ♦ the blessing and exchange of rings
 - ♦ the general intercessions
- Each of these actions embodies and reveals the covenant theology of the rite: the equality of the partnership and the self-giving love that imitates the love of Christ.
25. The Rite of Marriage includes two forms of consent, one in which the couple pronounce the vows directly to one

- another, or repeat the formula after the officiant, and the other, in which they respond to questions posed by him. The couple should be encouraged to choose the form more expressive of their intent.
26. The vows are spoken according to one of the formulae in the Rite of Marriage. These ritual words bind us in faith to the whole church, and may not be set aside for vow formulae which are private or individual.
27. The blessing of the rings indicates that they are the symbols of the couple’s love and fidelity. Noting their importance in the life of the couple, they should be cared for properly before and during the celebration, emphasizing the integrity of symbols and its sacramental meaning. Using substitutes and duplications of rings (i.e. plastic rings carried in a pillow) should be discouraged at any point of the liturgical celebration.
28. The Best Man and Maid of Honor are witnesses of the marriage, and with the Bride and Groom, should be encouraged to participate as fully as possible in the liturgy. The attention and prayerful attitude of all in the wedding party sets a tone for the quality of the participation of the other members of the assembly.
29. The General Intercessions follow the order suggested in the Ritual of Marriage. (*Rite of Marriage 29, 49*)
30. Additional elements
- a. Customs which may pertain to particular cultures are at the discretion of a parish, and may be incorporated in a proportionate way, while preserving the primacy of the exchange of vows and rings.
 - b. Cultural signs introduced to support the primary symbol of the exchange of vows and rings (unity candles, flowers to the Blessed Mother) are clearly seen as secondary. Suggestions could be made to couples along with the staff’s help in planning such a moment at a more appropriate time and place. For example, flowers to mothers may be presented at the rehearsal dinner; the candle ceremony could be fittingly done as

the “grace” before the meal at the reception. This can also help carry the theme of their commitment to God as a couple into the rest of the day.

- c. Recognizing the reception of the Eucharist as the clearest sign of the unity of all the faithful, the appropriateness of the candle when the marriage takes place during the celebration of the Eucharist should be carefully considered. The altar is intended for the eucharistic elements of bread and wine. It is appropriate to provide a small table for the holy water vessel, the rings, and the unity candle if used. None of these items should be placed on the altar.

VII. The Liturgy of the Eucharist

31. The bread and wine may be brought forward by family members or guests. No other gifts are brought forward at this time.
32. During the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the attention of the assembly is on the Eucharistic action. As members of the assembly, the posture of the wedding party is to be the same as the rest of the worshipping community.
33. Communion may be distributed under both forms. Guests at the wedding who are commissioned as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (with the permission of the parish priest) or ministers from the parish may be invited to serve.
34. Only Catholics receive Holy Communion at Mass. There is a possibility of Eucharistic Communion between Christian spouses at their marriage celebration in the Catholic Church. Although it can only be exceptional, in certain cases the permission is granted through the Chancellor’s Office.

VIII. Concluding Rites

35. The liturgy concludes with the final blessing and dismissal following the ritual.

IX. Music at the Wedding Liturgy

Weddings present particular challenges and opportunities. It is helpful for a diocese or a parish to have a definite but flexible policy regarding wedding music. This policy should be communicated to couples early as a normal part of their preparation in order to avoid last-minute crises and misunderstandings (Sing to the Lord, #219 ff).

Both musicians and pastors should make every effort to assist couples to understand and share in the planning of their marriage liturgy. Since oftentimes the only music familiar to the couple is not necessarily suitable to the sacrament, the pastoral musician will make an effort to demonstrate a wide range of music appropriate for the liturgy. Particular decisions about choice and placement of wedding music should grow out of the three judgments proposed in Music in Catholic Worship (Sing to the Lord, #218, 220).

36. To determine the value of a given musical element in a liturgical celebration a threefold judgment must be made: musical, liturgical, and pastoral.

Liturgical Judgment

The nature of the liturgy itself will help to determine what kind of music is called for, what parts are to be preferred for singing, and who is to sing them. A certain balance among the various elements of the Liturgy should be sought, so that less important elements do not overshadow more important ones. Textual elements include the ability of a musical setting to support the liturgical text and to convey meaning faithful to the teaching of the Church (*Sing to the Lord #128*)

Pastoral Judgment

This judgment takes into consideration the actual community gathered to celebrate in a particular place at a particular time. In our diocese liturgical assemblies are composed of people of many different nations. People have their own musical tradition which plays a great part

in their religious and social life. For this reason their music should be held in proper esteem and a suitable place is to be given to it. (SC 119) The question finally is this: Will this composition draw this particular people closer to the mystery of Christ, which is at the heart of this liturgical celebration? (*Sing to the Lord #133*)

Musical Judgment

This judgment asks whether this composition has the necessary aesthetic qualities that can bear the weight of the mysteries celebrated in the Liturgy. Is the music technically, aesthetically, and expressively worthy? To admit the cheap, the trite, the musical cliché often found in popular songs is to minimize the sacredness and the power of the liturgy, to expose it to ridicule, and to invite failure. Older music is not inherently suitable, nor is newer music inherently unsuitable (*Sing to the Lord #135*).

37. The selection of music for the wedding liturgy is guided by the same norms as apply to the gathering of the Church on Sundays:
- a. Participation by the whole assembly is preferred to solo singing. Soloists may sing alone during the Preparation of the Gifts or after Communion, and should never usurp parts of the Mass designated for congregational participation. Music and texts ought to be provided to facilitate the singing of the assembly.
 - b. Cantors/musicians should endeavor to engage the assembly, as they would on Sunday. The cantor should take a position that will enable the assembly to see and respond to their invitation to participate.
 - c. Secular music, even though it may emphasize the love of the spouses for one another, is not appropriate for the Sacred Liturgy. The parish might prepare a listing of appropriate selections from the parish worship aid for reference.
 - d. Recorded music is not permitted.

38. In summary, the musical elements of the wedding liturgy are:

The Entrance Rite

- ♦ Processional: accompanied by a suitable song or instrumental music. If instrumental music is played, the assembly may join in a song once all have taken their places.

The Liturgy of the Word

- ♦ Responsorial Psalm: must be a psalm text sung from the ambo in a responsorial fashion, the refrain by the congregation, the verses by a cantor.
- ♦ Gospel Acclamation: sung by the congregation, appropriate to the liturgical season.

The Rite of Marriage

- ♦ An acclamation or hymn of praise may be sung after the exchange of vows and rings.
- ♦ Depending on the local custom and the culture of the families, the veiling of the bride and groom and other customary actions may be added, during which an appropriate psalm or song may be sung.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

- ♦ The Preparation of the Gifts: hymn, solo or instrumental.
- ♦ Acclamations in the Eucharistic Prayer: a setting used in the parish liturgies should be sung.

The Communion Rite

- ♦ Lamb of God: a setting used in the parish liturgies.
- ♦ Communion Processional: a congregational hymn.
- ♦ A thanksgiving hymn may be sung after the distribution of Communion.

Concluding Rite

- ♦ Recessional: congregational hymn or instrumental.

X. Environment

39. The decoration of the Church building should respect the nature of the sacred space, the sacred action occurring there, the cycle of feasts and seasons of the Church year, and the assembly that gathers to worship.
40. Norms of simplicity, good taste and proportion should be the guide, as well as a respect for the nature and tone of the different liturgical seasons. The dignity and beauty of the event should be encouraged without ostentation and garish display.
41. Seating plans for the wedding party should facilitate their participation as members of the assembly. Parishes ought to explore seating options for the whole wedding party to be directed toward the sacramental action.

XI. Rehearsals

42. The wedding rehearsal is an opportunity for all those who will participate in the wedding liturgy to gather to rehearse each part of the liturgy. The rehearsal may include a time of prayer for the couple and their families.
43. Policies regarding photographers and videographers might make provision for recording the occasion without intruding on the participation of those present at the wedding.
44. The offering for the church should be clearly stated to the couple when they begin their marriage arrangements. The current Diocesan maximum offering is \$500.00, exclusive of musicians. (For the most current information, please consult the Chancellor's Office). If a couple is unable to afford the stated offering, they may not be prohibited from celebrating their marriage in the church. The fees for musicians ought to be separate from the church

offering. Every parish should clearly state the fees for the various musicians, and their policy concerning visiting musicians.

45. If a couple wishes to prepare a booklet as a way to encourage prayerful participation in the wedding liturgy, they are required to secure the necessary copyright permissions, with the assistance of the parish. A printed booklet may include an outline of the service, and names of participants. Music for congregational singing may be printed, assuming copyrights given, but not the texts of prayers or readings.

MARRIAGE PREPARATION MINISTRY

Topics for Marriage Preparation Programs

All topics covered in Marriage Preparation are addressed both in a formational and experiential manner to assist couples to grow in relationship with God and each other.

Theology of Marriage

- Scriptural foundations of marriage
- Marriage as Covenant
- Marriage As Vocation
- Marriage As Sacrament
- Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Spirituality of Marriage

- Community of Love
 - Trinity as communion of love
 - Family as a Community of Love (Domestic Church)
- The Paschal Mystery
- Sexuality-free, total, faithful, fruitful
- Marital Intimacy
- Prayer and Worship as a couple

Church Teachings on Marriage and Family

- Impact of society on decision making
- Moral decision making/Conscience Formation
- Social responsibility
- Role of Christian family
- Christian parenting

Interpersonal Dynamics (Couple)

- FOCCUS- Pre Marriage Inventory
- Couple Communication
- Conflict Resolution/ Listening Skills
- Family of Origin
- Finances/Careers
- Recognizing Abusive Behaviors

Wedding Liturgy

- Liturgy of the Word
- Rite of Marriage (Consent, Exchange of Vows, Rings)
- Liturgy of the Eucharist

FOCCUS GUIDELINES

The FOCCUS instrument is a valuable tool used at the beginning of the marriage preparation process to enhance communication between the couple preparing for marriage.

FOCCUS is a required component of the marriage preparation process for all parish and diocesan Programs.

- Only individuals specifically trained in the FOCCUS instrument should be facilitating sessions with the engaged couples.
- FOCCUS is **not** a test and is not be used as an indicator or a predictor of marital success. It is a self-diagnostic inventory.
- The role of the facilitator is to work with the couple to look at patterns in their responses, discuss issues and problem solve. (*FOCCUS Manual, 1*)
- The results of the FOCCUS instrument reflect the responses measured at the particular time the couple took the instrument and therefore the results should be discussed with the engaged couple in a timely fashion after its administration. The report is not a permanent measure of the couple's relationship.
- Confidentiality issues and the copyright laws of FOCCUS Inc. prohibit the results being sent home with the engaged couple.
- The FOCCUS results can be sent to a priest or deacon for further discussion at the request of the engaged couple.
- The identification of specific circumstances, such as impediments listed in the Code of Canon Law 1066-1095, or of revealed abuse would necessitate that these results be sent to the priest or deacon who is to officiate at the wedding after discussing this matter with the engaged couple. It is the responsibility of a FOCCUS facilitator to do so because such factors may indicate an area for further discussion which may impede the freedom of the individual to marry and thus follow up by a priest or deacon is necessary.

STAGES & COMPONENTS OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE PREPARATION

These three stages of marriage preparation provide an ongoing process of faith formation for an individual. (*Familiaris Consortio*)

I. Remote Preparation

“Catechesis leads people to enter the mystery of Jesus Christ, to encounter him, and to discover themselves and the meaning of their lives in him.” (National Directory for Catechesis)

1. This time period includes childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. The influence of the family, as well as societal factors, plays a pivotal role in the spiritual development of the individual. Therefore intentional, integrated and ongoing formation is necessary on the diocesan and parish level to sustain all family members as they grow in faith.
2. This can be accomplished through encouragement of active participation in the sacramental life of the Church; by helping parents learn how to best be teachers and models of the faith for their children; and by providing opportunities for all individuals to learn more about the Catholic faith. Formation opportunities in the parish include Religious Education programs, RCIA, Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Baptism Preparation Programs and all ministries designed to promote the knowledge of faith, strengthen prayer life, foster active participation in Mass and sacramental life of the Church.
3. The parish community of faith strengthens families as they provide an atmosphere to discern their vocation as members of the Body of Christ.

II. Proximate Preparation

Pastors of souls are obliged to ensure that the church community provides... preparation for those entering

marriage, so that the spouses are disposed to the holiness and the obligations of their new state. (Canon 1063)

Initial Meeting With Priest, Deacon or Pastoral Minister

- During this period the engaged couple discerns their vocation to the married life, grows in understanding and appreciation of their faith, and gains a deeper understanding of what it means to live out a vocation to Christian marriage.
- This initial meeting between the engaged couple and the priest, deacon or pastoral minister is an evangelizing opportunity for the couple to learn about the process of celebrating marriage in the Catholic Church.
- This meeting provides the opportunity for the church minister to complete the Pre Nuptial Inventory (PNI) and to assess the couple's readiness for marriage and determines any special circumstances that need to be addressed. Moreover it reflects Christ's love through the parish community's concern and support for the couple.
- Information about the parish's guidelines for the celebration of marriage is also discussed during this meeting. It is important to emphasize that couples must attend a marriage preparation session at least six months prior to being married as well as complete the FOCCUS instrument. Diocesan marriage preparation sessions facilitate FOCCUS during the marriage preparation sessions as an integral part of the communication section.
- Every engaged couple must participate in a marriage preparation program before celebrating the sacrament of marriage. Various preparation programs are provided through the Office of Faith Formation to meet the needs of engaged couples; weekend and evening sessions, Engaged Encounter Weekends, sessions designed for second marriages or older couples and programs conducted in Spanish.

FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study) is a nationally accepted marriage preparation tool designed to help engaged couples learn more about themselves and their relationship.

- *FOCCUS is a self-diagnostic tool designed to help couples learn more about themselves and their unique relationship. It is not a test, nor meant as a predictor of success or failure in marriage.” (FOCCUS Introduction)*
- The categories reflected on this inventory include religion and values, parenting issues, readiness for marriage, marriage covenant, friends, finances, sexuality issues, commitment, communication, family of origin, conflict resolution, lifestyle expectations, personality, and careers. There are also three additional topics where applicable-cohabitation, interfaith issues and second marriages.
- FOCCUS is available in Spanish and also in an abridged version for those with language or learning challenges.
- FOCCUS is a mandatory component of the marriage preparation process for all diocesan and parish programs in the Diocese of Rockville Centre. Please see the FOCCUS guidelines for specific issues and considerations.

Natural Family Planning classes are formational classes facilitated by trained couples who teach the specific method of natural family planning.

The class also presents the Church’s teaching on married sexuality as an invitation to become informed and transformed by the message of God’s love through intimate couple communication.

III. Immediate Preparation

“It would be desirable if the favorable moment of marriage preparation could be transformed, as a sign of hope, into a New Evangelization for the future families.” (Pontifical Council for the Family 1996)

- This is the period in the weeks and days before the wedding celebration. It is a time of further spiritual reflection, a discussion of their marriage preparation experience, final liturgical planning and completion of the Pre Nuptial Inventory and any necessary canonical forms.
- The wedding rehearsal is an important part of the immediate preparation process and offers an opportunity for evangelization for the bridal party and families. It sets the tone for the solemnity and sacredness of this celebration and explains the parts of the Mass so that all may participate fully in this joyous sacramental celebration.

IV. Pastoral Care after Marriage

Pastors of souls are obliged to ensure that the church community provides ...help given to those who have entered marriage, so that by faithfully observing and protecting their conjugal covenant, they may day by day achieve a holier and fuller family life. (Canon 1063)

- A sacramental marriage is a journey of faith that continues through the many stages of family life. The church community needs to provide support and faith formation opportunities for newly married couples as well as for all families throughout their lives.



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