

CATHOLIC
DIOCESE *of*
JACKSON

MARRIAGE
PREPARATION
POLICY





Marriage preparation is a formation and education process that begins early in life and continues throughout. It is not just limited to the period of time close to a couple's wedding. The church supports couples planning to be married by giving them an opportunity to grow in their relationship through preparation that is designed especially for them as engaged couples. Marriage is a lifelong, faithful union of a man and a woman, mutually committed to sharing life and love together. Indeed, Christ enhanced the dignity of marriage by making the Christian marriage relationship a sacrament.

Like the other sacraments, marriage requires that the parties involved understand what they are about to undertake as they enter into the sacramental union. Christian marriage is more than a socially acceptable way to be married; Christian marriage is a covenant relationship, modeled after God's love for His people.

Because of the dignity of Christian marriage and the commitment the couple makes to each other and to others, each parish community has the primary responsibility to nurture the love relationship of its engaged couples from the time of their engagement to the day of the wedding as well as throughout their married life. These couples are the building blocks of community. Diocesan and area programs are offered only as a supplement to parish programs. The support the Diocese offers is only an assistance.

The emphasis needs to be within the parish on the preparation for the lifelong relationship of the couple. These are the building blocks of our community and church. The family is the domestic church. The emphasis should be on the marriage not the wedding itself. The wedding is only for a day. It is the ceremonial, holy celebration of the couple's love for each other. The marriage is for a lifetime.

Thus, this Marriage Preparation Policy is a call to each parish community to encourage engaged couples to embrace a vision of Christian marriage. It is a guide to help insure adequate preparation for marriage, so that all couples may find the fullness of life possible for them through their chosen vocation of marriage. This Marriage Preparation Policy is not meant to be seen as a set of rules that restrict the celebration of a wedding but as an enhancement of marriage. It is a public declaration of the Church's care, love and support for Christian marriage.

MARRIAGE PREPARATION

In order to insure that sufficient time is available for adequate marriage preparation and pastoral counseling, couples should contact their priest/deacon/lay ecclesial minister at least six months in advance of the anticipated date of their wedding. The proposed date for the wedding will be considered conditional and dependent upon completion of the marriage preparation. This amount of time is usually necessary in order that a couple may adequately prepare for marriage. The preparation has both pastoral and educational components.

A. The Pastoral Component

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The priest/deacon/lay ecclesial minister welcomes the couple with genuine hospitality and understanding. This is even more necessary if one or both have been remiss in the practice of the faith. The priest/deacon/lay ecclesial minister explains the process of marriage preparation as an expression of the Church's



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conviction that good preparation can help to give the couple the motivation and skills to live happily as a sacramental couple. He/she should work with the couple throughout the preparation process.

- 2 Use of the preparation instrument FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication Understanding & Study) is **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**. It is available in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. It will assist in enriching the educational component for the couple. This instrument can be very helpful to the couple as they explore their relationship and to the priest/deacon/lay ecclesial minister in counseling them.
- 3 Work on the pertinent marriage forms can also be an occasion to show the Church's care and concern for the couple.
- 4 The priest/deacon/lay ecclesial minister meets with the couple on at least one occasion to plan the wedding liturgy. Materials such as Together for Life (Juntos para toda vida) or Planning Your Wedding Ceremony are provided to the couple for study and prayer prior to this session.
- 5 Contact with the couple after the wedding, as well as invitations to become involved in parish life, are also encouraged.

B. The Education Component

- 1 Couples preparing for marriage in the Diocese of Jackson are **REQUIRED** to participate in a parish or diocesan-based marriage preparation program.
- 2 Since the primary obligation of preparing couples rests with the pastor and parish community, parish-based programs such as: "For Better and For Ever, En las buenas y para siempre," is the most desirable. Participation of the priest/deacon/lay ecclesial

minister in these programs is expected. If an individual parish is too small, it is recommended that neighboring parishes join together or perhaps even a Deanery can come together to form a team to do marriage preparation in the area. The Office of Family Ministry will offer training to couples and priests/lay ecclesial ministers involved in these programs. To be avoided are one day or short programs that simply provide a lot of information with little or no time for conversation or reflection.

- 3** The diocese offers Engaged Encounter on a regular basis. These are over the course of a weekend and are offered several times during the year.
- 4** Every preparation program, whether parish or diocesan-based, **MUST** offer at least one presentation of Natural Family Planning. There are trained NFP Educators throughout the Diocese that are available to assist in these components. The Office of Family Ministry can put you in touch with an Educator near you or willing to travel to you. There are other materials on Natural Family Planning also available from the Office of Family Ministry. It is important that these Educators be certified through one of the approved methods and not simply a practitioner.





- 5 After completing the marriage preparation program, the couple meets with the priest/deacon/lay ecclesial minister to prepare for and ascertain readiness for marriage.
- 6 In an interreligious marriage, the couple should attempt to understand each other's beliefs while at the same time respecting the conscience of each other.
- 7 It is also important for the priest/deacon/lay ecclesial minister to discuss with the couple the Church's position on the religious upbringing of their children.

C. Special Pastoral Circumstances

- 1 **MARRIAGE OF MINORS**
Special care and concern will be given to very young couples because of the difficulty early-age marriages experience. Therefore, if either party is not yet eighteen years old, consideration of marriage in the Church will be given after the priest/deacon/lay eccle-

sial minister has completed adequate pastoral preparation, which will include some form of evaluation of maturity, and consultation with the parents.

2 PREGNANCY

The fact of pregnancy does not diminish the need for the preparation outlined in this Policy. Indeed, it is even more vital in cases of pregnancy that the usual help be given. Additional counseling (pastoral or professional) will also be needed when there was no engagement to marry prior to the pregnancy.

3 REMARRIAGE

Couples who are entering a subsequent marriage where the first spouse is deceased or the marriage was declared invalid (annulment), need to be provided special consideration because of their differing circumstances and past experiences with marriage. Those who have been married before may not be immediately free to enter a subsequent marriage in the Church. The priest/deacon/lay ecclesial minister will address the circumstances of each particular situation and assist the couple accordingly. A preparation program designed specifically for those entering a second or subsequent marriage is offered on a parish or diocesan level. In a Redeeming State is available through the Office of Family Ministry. ReFOCCUS is also a very useful resource. The Parish Based – “For Better and Forever, En las buenas y para sienpre” program also has a component to assist in this area.

4 VALIDATION OF MARRIAGE

If a couple marries contrary to the laws of the Church, a validation is permitted only after the couple has completed adequate preparation and pastoral counseling. Again, ReFOCCUS and “For Better and For Ever, En las buenas y para sienpre” are excellent resources in these situations and have components designed specifically for these situations.

REASONS FOR DELAY OF MARRIAGE

All couples have a right to be married. However, the priest/deacon/lay ecclesial minister may delay, for just cause, the witnessing of a wedding as long as such cause continues and he/she offers continued pastoral care. Just cause would include, but is not limited to the following:

- A. Non-practice of the Catholic faith by a Catholic party or parties with no intention of returning to the practice of the faith.
- B. Lack of readiness and maturity for marriage.
- C. Refusal of the parties to participate in the preparation that applies to them.
- D. Substantial lack of appreciation for the spiritual and sacramental aspects of marriage.

APPEAL

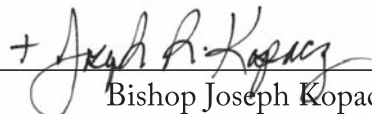
If the marriage is delayed, the couple may first appeal to the Vicar Forane of their area. Final appeal may be made to the bishop of the diocese or his official delegate. No priest/deacon may witness the marriage of a couple whose marriage has been delayed by another, unless the Vicar Forane, Bishop, or his official delegate has given the necessary approval.

EXCEPTIONS

In rare and unusual circumstances a request for exception to this Policy may be referred to the bishop of the diocese, or his official delegate.

The marriage Preparation Policy for the Diocese of Jackson will become effective April 1, 2015 and reviewed April 1, 2020

Given at Jackson, Mississippi on this the 22nd day of February 2015


 Bishop Joseph Kopacz

CANONICAL COMPONENTS

Canon 1055 - § 1. The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life, and which of its own very nature is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children, has between the baptized, been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament. § 2. Consequently, a valid marriage contract cannot exist between baptized persons without its being by that very fact a sacrament.

Canon 1056 - The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility; in Christian marriage they acquire a distinctive firmness by reason of the sacraments.

Canon 1057 - § 1. A marriage is brought into being by the lawfully manifested consent of persons who are legally capable. This consent cannot be supplied by any human power. § 2. Matrimonial consent is an act of will by which a man and a woman by an irrevocable covenant mutually give and accept one another for the purpose of establishing a marriage.



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ENGLISH RESOURCES

*FOCCUS- Facilitating Open Couple Communication,
Understanding, and Study*

FOCCUS Inc.

Nazareth Hall, Omaha , NE

FOCCUS@focusinc.com

A Redeeming State

A Handbook for couples planning remarriage in the Catholic Church

Judith Tate O'Brien and Gene O'Brien

Engaged Encounter

www.engagedencounter.org

Good News about Sex and Marriage

Christopher West

Planning your Family Naturally

Introduction to Natural Family Planning

Diocese of Rockville Centre

Office of Faith Formation

Rockville Centre, NY

For Better and For Ever

A resource for couples preparing for Christian Marriage

Robert A. Ruhnke CSS.R. D.Min

SPANISH RESOURCES

En Las Buenas y Para Siempre Robert Ruhnke

Un Compromiso para Todo la Vida (DVD set)

Liguori El Matrimonio en Perspectiva Liguori -- Workbook contains thought provoking exercises to help promote, stimulate dialogue, deepen understanding and direct insight. 88 pages

El Matrimonio: una jornada para toda la vida: Familias de origen.

La comunicacion en el matrimonio. Técnicas de comunicacion en el matrimonio (DVD)

Un Compromiso para todo la vida Liguori

Now a complete program this work shows how to improve communication DVD 68 minutes

Buena Nueva Sexo y Matrimonio Christopher West

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