PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED BY PASTORAL MINISTERS
WHEN PREPARING COUPLES WITH SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation (PP&G) have identified 21 special circumstances for engaged couples that may have implications for the validity of their marriage as well as their ability to maintain lifelong marriage. In addition to information gathered about the couple when completing the Pre-Nuptial Inquiry, the FOCCUS premarital inventory is the primary tool for pastoral ministers to determine when a special circumstance exists in an engaged couple’s relationship.

When preparing a couple with special circumstances for marriage, the pastoral minister’s primary resource is Section III—“Special Circumstances in Marriage,” pp. 32-55 of “Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation for the Catholic Church in New Jersey” (PP&G).

Steps in the Special Circumstances Process:

1. The FOCCUS pre-marital inventory can help you gain further insight about the couple’s relationship and identify strengths and weaknesses for you to address with the couple as well as determine if any of the 21 special circumstances apply to them. Often a couple can work through many issues during the months of marriage preparation with your assistance.

2. In cases where a pastoral minister cannot resolve the matter with the couple, he/she should obtain the couple’s verbal consent to discuss their situation with the pastor. This consultation may produce recommendations which may lead to the resolution of the issues involved.

3. As an additional resource, the pastoral minister may wish to consult with one of our priests, deacons or lay pastoral ministers with demonstrated expertise in particular marriage or family-related situations. To arrange for such a consultation, the pastoral minister should contact the diocesan Associate Director for Marriage Ministries at 609-403-7156 (or phensler@dioceseoftrenton.org).

4. When it is determined that a referral is advisable, please use Form E-1 to refer the couple for evaluation. Please submit with the referral, the FOCCUS Pre-Marriage Facilitation Summary Form (available at www.dioceseoftrenton.org/marriageresources).
   a. The use of Form E-1 for referral is required for the following circumstances.
      1) Marriage of minors – i.e. at least one party under age 18
      2) Pre-nuptial agreements “that severely limit the complete commitment” to marriage
      3) Choosing not to have children--refusing to be open to procreation
   b. The use of Form E-1 is not required in the following circumstances but is strongly recommended to refer couples for professional counseling after consultation with the pastor and/or a diocesan consultant:
      1) Abusive relationship
      2) Active addiction
      3) HIV/AIDS
      4) Pregnancy (Note: FOCCUS must always be used)
      5) Sexual identity problems -- conflict about sexual identity or orientation
   c. Thirteen additional special circumstances may warrant the use of Form E-1 for evaluation. Please refer to p. 32 in Section III, Special Circumstances section of the Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation (PP&G).
5. WHERE TO SEND FORM E-1:
   a. The completed Form E-1, is to be sent to:
      Diocese of Trenton Department of Evangelization and Family Life
      Associate Director for Marriage Ministries and NFP
      701 Lawrenceville Road, P.O. Box 5147
      Trenton, NJ 08638-0147
      Please be sure that the couple has signed the form

6. NEXT STEPS AND FOLLOW-UP:
   a. The Associate Director for Marriage Ministries will work with the pastoral minister to arrange for a third-party professional evaluation. Prior to their evaluation, the couple will be asked to sign an Authorization to Release Information form.
   b. The parish may consider offering financial assistance for the session(s) when a couple’s circumstances warrant.
   c. The counselor will concentrate on the areas identified on Form E-1. The counselor will provide a written report for the referring pastoral minister. A copy will also be sent to the Department of Evangelization and Family Life. The report will include one of the following recommendations:
      1. No further professional counseling recommended
      2. Further pastoral counseling recommended
      3. Further professional counseling strongly recommended

The aim of this process is to provide the pastoral minister with practical assistance and an opportunity for consultation in helping couples discern their readiness for marriage.

Questions or concerns regarding this procedure may be referred to the Associate Director for Marriage Ministries & NFP, Department of Evangelization and Family Life, 609-403-7156.