Diocese of Columbus
Policies and Guidelines for
Marriage Preparation
“Give great care to the preparation of engaged couples
and be close to young married couples,
so that they will be for their children and the whole community
an eloquent testimony of God’s love.”

Pope John Paul II
My Dear Friends in Christ,

In their recent document *Love and Life*, the Bishops of the United States of America noted that,

>Among the many blessings that God has showered upon us in Christ is the blessing of marriage, a gift bestowed by the Creator from the creation of the human race. His hand has inscribed the vocation to marriage in the very nature of man and woman…

Marriage is foundational to a healthy Church and healthy society. Through marriage, men and women reflect the love of the Triune God. Furthermore, married men and women provide a firm foundation for society through the stable rearing of families and by loving and serving God and one another as God loves us and served us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

With this in mind, then, this policy for marriage and marriage preparation for the Diocese of Columbus begins with an *a priori* understanding that marriage is a fundamental good for the world, a good that needs to be strengthened and fostered by those who serve the Church, especially those who work in the ministry of marriage preparation.

This policy outlines expectations regarding the process of immediate preparation for marriage in the Diocese of Columbus at the parish level: its prescribed steps, conditions, and timelines, and it takes effect July 1, 2010.

I thank the clergy and laity who work to foster the vocation of marriage and who dedicate themselves to the care of those aspiring to live the sacrament.

With every best wish, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Frederick F. Campbell, Ph.D., D.D.
Bishop of Columbus
Foreword

In his apostolic exhortation, Familiaris Consortio (“On the Family”), Pope John Paul II addresses the role of the Christian family in the modern world. He writes:

“Knowing that marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values, the Church wishes to speak and offer her help… In a particular way the Church addresses the young, who are beginning their journey towards marriage and family life, for the purpose of presenting them with new horizons, helping them to discover the beauty and grandeur of the vocation to love and the service of life.”

Because of the fundamental importance of marriage to the Church and society, it is essential that the Church provides the best possible preparation for couples planning to answer this vocation. The purpose of these policies and guidelines is to assist ministers of the Diocese of Columbus in accomplishing this goal. They have the following objectives:

♦ Determination of the individuals’ freedom (Canon 1058) and capacity (Canon 1095) to marry;
♦ Preservation of the sacramental character of marriage in the Catholic Church;
♦ Assurance that preparation for marriage in the Diocese of Columbus is a process of evangelization that fosters ongoing conversion in the lives of engaged couples;
♦ Assurance of solid preparation for marriage in the Diocese of Columbus that establishes a standard of pastoral care appropriate for the fulfillment of the human and spiritual dimensions involved;
♦ Provision of a diocesan policy that is thorough and that addresses today’s complexities;
♦ Assurance of consistency across the diocese in marriage preparation;
♦ Encouragement of all members of the clerical and ecclesial community to accept their roles (Canon 1063) in caring for the marriage of each couple and for the well-being of family life in the Church (Canon 1064).

Clerical and lay ministers are crucial to the marriage preparation process, and they have a serious responsibility to assist engaged couples in immediate preparation for the reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony. The goals of marriage preparation ministers are to support the love of the couples in their preparation for marriage and to challenge them to grow in their relationship and in their faith; to demonstrate that the Church cares for their welfare; to provide a process that enables community (working through clergy and the faithful) to assess their spiritual and psychological readiness for marriage; to discuss and review the practical information needed to live out their commitment; and to facilitate their greater awareness of

the sacred nature of marriage through an understanding and appreciation of its sacramental, liturgical, moral, and spiritual aspects.

In using this manual, marriage preparation ministers should note that policies are denoted with the title of “Policy” and are printed in boldface, while guidelines remain in text that is not boldface.

May the Holy Spirit continue to inspire and guide all who are involved in this vital work of the Church that blesses not just couples and families but the entire world.
Decree of Promulgation
(Complementary Legislation for Canon 1067)

On November 18, 1998, the Latin Rite de iure members of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops [now known as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, or USCCB] approved complementary legislation for canon 1067 of the Code of Canon Law for the Latin Rite dioceses of the United States.

The action was granted recognitio by the Congregation for Bishops in accord with article 82 of the Apostolic Constitution Pastor Bonus and issued by Decree of the Congregation for Bishops signed by His Excellency Most Reverend Giovanni Battista Re, Prefect, and His Excellency Most Reverend Franciscus Monterisi, Secretary, and dated September 30, 2000.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in accord with the prescriptions of canon 1067 and with due regard for canon 1068, hereby decrees that the following norms shall be observed in preparation of a couple for marriage:

1. The couple should receive appropriate education and pastoral preparation through participation in a marriage preparation program approved by the diocesan bishop;
2. Parties should be questioned as to their freedom to marry;
3. Baptized Catholics should present a recently issued annotated baptismal certificate;
4. Where necessary, additional documentation (such as affidavits of parents) attesting to a Catholic party’s freedom to marry should be presented;
5. Baptized non-Catholics should present satisfactory proof of baptism and freedom to marry;
6. Unbaptized persons should present satisfactory proof of freedom to marry;
7. Preparation for marriage should be in conformity with the prescriptions of canon 1063 (regarding what must precede marriage) and canons 1064, 1071, 1072, 1086§2 and 1125, which entrust certain situations to the special care of local ordinaries;
8. Preparation for marriage should be in compliance with appropriate civil laws.

As President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, I hereby decree that the effective date of this decree for all the Latin Rite dioceses in the United States will be December 1, 2000.

Given at the offices of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, DC, on October 20, 2000.

Most Reverend Joseph A. Fiorenza, Bishop of Galveston-Houston
President, NCCB

Reverend Monsignor Dennis M. Schnurr
General Secretary
Section 1

An Introduction to Marriage Preparation

“Marriage preparation constitutes a providential and favorable period … in which God calls upon the engaged and helps them discern the vocation of marriage and family life.”

Pontifical Council for the Family

“The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized.”

Canon 1055

The Church’s official definition, as described in Canon 1055, guides the way for marriage preparation ministers. It is the starting point as well as the goal to which the Church strives. There are certain prescribed steps, conditions, and timelines which are assigned by the priest or deacon witnessing the exchange of a couple’s consent to marry, which are fulfilled at the parish and/or at the diocesan level. However, a couple’s readiness and understanding of sacramental marriage is not accomplished solely by the priest or deacon in the weeks and months before the wedding; the responsibility is shared first and foremost by the couple as well as by parents, teachers, counselors, and clergy throughout their lifetimes. Pope John Paul II wrote in his apostolic exhortation Familiaris Consortio, that marriage preparation is a gradual and continuous process, marked by the following stages:

Remote Preparation
Remote preparation begins with our birth into our family of origin, and is ongoing throughout our childhood. “[Remote preparation] is the period when esteem for all authentic human values is instilled...”2 Parents are the first models of marriage, and the relationship they present serves as a standard in seeking a partner and creating a family.

Proximate Preparation
Proximate preparation builds on remote preparation through formal catechesis and religious formation, and is generally understood to encompass adolescence and young adulthood (but can include mid- and late-adulthood). It is the period of dating and an individual’s maturing sexuality, and his/her development of an awareness and practice of authentic human values and healthy interpersonal relationship skills. “Also necessary [in addition to parents’ model-

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2 Familiaris Consortio, n. 66.
ing in remote preparation), especially for Christians, is solid spiritual and catechetical formation that will show that marriage is a true vocation and mission...”\(^3\). “The religious formation of young people should be integrated, at the right moment and in accordance with the various requirements, with a preparation for life as a couple. This preparation will present marriage as an interpersonal relationship of a man and a woman that has to be continually developed...”\(^4\).

**Policy: Proximate Preparation**

Given the high rates of divorce and premarital cohabitation in our society, as well as the need for young people to better understand marriage as a sacrament, this stage of marriage preparation is critical to the efforts of the Church and are of special concern to clergy and religion educators. Resources to be used for the proximate preparation of adolescents and young adults can be found in the Diocesan Religion Graded Course of Study, which is available from the Office of Religious Education and Catechesis.

Specific sections to be included are:

- Content Standard III – Discover, recognize, and participate in the life of the Church through prayer, liturgy, and sacraments – Section E;
- Content Standard IV – Discover and recognize the development of the Christian person and experience the baptismal call to dignity, relationship, moral decision making, and service – Sections B and E

Beginning with the 2011-12 school year, the Revised Graded Course of Study for Religion based on the USCCB Curriculum Framework will be useful in assisting with proximate preparation. Specific sections to include will be:

- Life in Jesus Christ
- Section I, B. 3. C (Moral Life and Happiness);
- Section II, B. 6 (6th Commandment);
- Sacraments as Privileged Encounters with Jesus Christ Section IV, B (Marriage)

**Immediate Preparation**

Immediate preparation is typically understood to commence with formal engagement and to include the period of time during which the couple is engaged. The objective of immediate preparation is to assess and assist in accomplishing the readiness of engaged couples to confer upon one another and live the Sacrament of Matrimony. The Church desires to facilitate

\(^3\) Ibid. n. 66.

\(^4\) Ibid. n. 66.
an understanding that love and good intentions must be joined with practical, realistic preparation that educates in all that makes a marriage distinctly Christian.

**Process of Immediate Marriage Preparation**

**Policy: Immediate Preparation Steps**

Immediate preparation for marriage includes:

♦ Several meetings with a parish priest, deacon, and/or trained lay minister (often a married couple) to assess the engaged couple’s readiness for marriage, thoroughly catechize the couple about the Church’s teaching on marriage, including its sacramentality, explore critical issues that arise, and discuss other topics that may be pertinent to the couple.

♦ Administration of a premarital inventory is required. For guidance on working with inventories, marriage preparation ministers should consult with the Marriage and Family Life Office.

♦ Attendance at a marriage preparation program – at Pre-Cana (parish or diocesan), Engaged Encounter, or Remarriage Preparation (parish or diocesan).

♦ Attendance at a presentation on Natural Family Planning.

♦ A final meeting with the parish priest or deacon to review the entire preparation process and discuss and plan the wedding liturgy.

It is important to remember that the process of immediate preparation for marriage is a powerful opportunity to deepen a couple’s understanding of sacramental marriage, educate them in skills, and facilitate their awareness and personal growth through the discovery of their unique qualities, strengths, and weaknesses, while giving witness to the support of the Church. The introductory section of the *Marriage Preparation Resource Book* developed by the Department of Education, United States Catholic Conference expresses it well:

“[Immediate marriage preparation is] a process to assist couples in an analysis of their values and attitudes as they prepare for marriage in light of the Gospel message.

The preparation … should not merely be a lecture on Christian marriage. It must be an experience-centered learning process in which the individual couple listens, communicates with each other and married couples, manifests their own feelings about marriage, and, through a process of dialogue, internalizes certain basic concepts on Christian marriage.

The marriage preparation experience should be multifaceted and appeal to the engaged couples’ intellectual and emotional faculties as well as their shared value system. The involvement and the interchange of ideas between the couple and other couples is as important as the content that is presented.”
Preparing a Couple for Marriage

It is highly recommended that marriage preparation take place in the parish in which the couple will confer the sacrament upon one another and/or where they worship, and that the preparations be overseen by the cleric officiating at their wedding. However, various circumstances such as college, career, military service, or family ties may dictate otherwise, making it necessary to either prepare the couple at a parish other than where their vows will be witnessed, or to provide the parish setting of the wedding liturgy while preparation for the marriage is accomplished elsewhere. In either case, open and clear communication regarding all requirements of the couple – as well as with the other priest or deacon (and the Chancery, if necessary) – is essential.

Initial Interview & Subsequent Meetings
The initial meeting is crucial. It is a very important opportunity for the priest or deacon to begin (or strengthen) a pastoral relationship with an engaged couple. Often it is a time of welcoming or celebrating a return to the Church.

Policy: Initial Meeting
The initial meeting should occur between the couple and the marriage preparation minister at least six months before the wedding date. The initial interview should not take place via e-mail, over the phone, or be with the parish clerical staff. During this meeting, the priest or deacon welcomes the couple, gets acquainted, and does a preliminary informal assessment of possible impediments to the marriage. If there are no obvious impediments, the couple continues the marriage preparation process. If this is not a first marriage for either/both party, one partner is not Catholic, or other special circumstances exist (see Section 2: Special Circumstances/Impediments to Marriage), the discussion may continue in a second interview. If a delay is necessary in order to seek an annulment(s) and/or resolve other impediments, the couple is to be advised by the priest or deacon as to how to proceed.

Policy: Separate Interviews
At some point during the marriage preparation process, the priest or deacon is required to interview each person separately on the subject of freedom to marry and pressure to marry, as well as to determine the existence of any issue(s) such as abuse, addiction, emotional disturbances, etc. The questions to be asked during these interviews are to be found in the Prenuptial Investigation Form I. This is done in or-
order to assure that the man and woman are each able to answer freely and without pressure or coercion.

Policy: Dispensations/Permissions
In some cases, the couple will require special permissions or dispensations. It is the responsibility of the priest, deacon, or lay minister preparing the couple for marriage to examine whether or not dispensations or permissions are needed. Petitions for dispensations/permissions must be submitted to the Chancery Office no later than one month prior to the wedding in order to allow enough time for consideration of and response to the request. Permissions and dispensations include the following:

1. Dispensation from Impediment of Disparity of Cult (Catholic marrying an unbaptized person- c.1086)
2. Dispensation from Impediment of Disparity of Cult ad Cautelam (Non-Catholic is not certain he/she was baptized or cannot provide documentation of baptism).
3. Dispensation from Impediment of Consanguinity in the 4th degree of collateral line.(e.g.1st cousins- c. 1091)
4. Dispensation from Impediment of Affinity. (e.g. Mother-in-law/step daughter- c. 1092.)
5. Permission for Mixed Religion. (Catholic marrying a baptized non-Catholic and documentation of baptism has been provided- cc.1124-1125)
6. Permission for marriage to a person who has formally defected from the Catholic Faith. (c.1071)
7. Dispensation from the Catholic Form of Marriage

Policy: Nihil Obstat
The priest, deacon, or lay minister may also be required to submit the pre-nuptial file to the Chancery Office for examination and receipt of the Nihil Obstat. The circumstances in which a Nihil Obstat is required are:

1. a previous marriage of at least one of the parties in cases when a declaration of nullity has been granted for a previous attempted marriage or the death of a spouse;
2. a marriage to be validated according to canonical form;
3. permissions required by Canon 1071 §1 that include:
   a. 1º a marriage of transients (people without an established residence in this or any other diocese);
   b. 2º a marriage which cannot be recognized or celebrated according to the norm of civil law;
   c. 3º a marriage of a person who is bound by natural obligations toward another party or children arising from a previous union (alimony and/or child support obligations);
   d. 4º a marriage of a person who has notoriously rejected the Catholic faith (if the person does not intend to return to the practice of the Catholic faith; if the person has formally defected from the Catholic Church, a
petition requesting permission for mixed religion marriage must be included);

e. 5º a marriage of a person who is under a censure;

f. 6º a marriage of a minor child when the parents are unaware or reasonably opposed (in the Diocese of Columbus, the Nihil Obstat is required when one of the parties is under the age of 20);

g. 7º a marriage to be entered into through a proxy as mentioned in can. 1105.

Policy: Ohio Law
In the State of Ohio, civil law mandates that a man must be 18 years old to marry. Ohio civil law further requires that if the woman is at least 16 but not yet 18 years old, the consent of the parents or legal guardian must be given on behalf of the minor; this is to be in writing, and sworn to before a Church notary or notary public. A minor under 16 years of age may not marry in Ohio without a court order.

Priests, deacons, and lay ministers are required to observe all the requirements of the Ohio Revised Code relating to marriage. In like fashion, all priests and deacons are also obliged to function in accordance with the marriage license issued to them by the State of Ohio. The marriage license issued by the State of Ohio also obliges the recipient of the license to function in accordance with the laws of the Church to which the minister belongs. It is the responsibility of the minister to be familiar with these civil legal matters.

Policy: Marriage Banns
An announcement of the couple’s pending marriage shall be made at least once three weeks prior to the wedding in the parish bulletin of the man’s and woman’s parish(es). The cleric preparing the couple is responsible for sending this notice to the parishes involved. Parishes in the Diocese of Columbus shall publish the banns in the next available parish bulletin after receipt of the notice. For parishes outside the Diocese of Columbus, the cleric shall send the notice to said parish(es) with a written request for publication.

Number of Meetings and Sequence of Preparation
The number of meetings an engaged couple will be asked to participate in can vary. The advisable sequence is that administration and discussion of the premarital inventory precede the couple’s attendance at any marriage preparation program. The couple’s second meeting might be for the administration of that tool. Other options are that the priest or deacon administers the instrument as part of the initial meeting, or that the couple completes the inventory online. The couple would participate in additional meetings to discuss the results of the premarital inventory with a trained facilitator(s). A word of caution: *care should be exercised in speaking correctly with the couples about these instruments.* They are self-diagnostic inventories (not “tests”), designed to help couples learn more about themselves and their unique re-
As such they are “tools” to help facilitate the discussion of issues that deserve affirmation as well as others that may need time, attention, and problem-solving. *They are not meant as a predictor of success or failure in marriage.*

The next meeting would be attendance at the marriage preparation program itself – be it one-on-one with clergy or a trained married mentor couple at the parish, Engaged Encounter, parish or diocesan Pre-Cana, or parish or diocesan remarriage preparation. Another meeting to discuss the engaged couple’s experience at the marriage preparation program would follow. An additional meeting(s) may be held to continue this discussion if deemed necessary by the priest or deacon.

The focus of the final meeting can then be a more direct conversation regarding the couple’s understanding of “sacrament,” where the Catholic teaching about marriage is summarized and reinforced, and their consent is received. The couple should understand that their marriage is a model of the relationship and love that exists between Christ and His Church. It should be explained to the couple that “The Church holds the exchange of consent between the spouses to be the indispensible element that ‘makes marriage’”\(^5\). The minister helps the couple understand that this consent is essential to a sacramental marriage.

Planning their wedding liturgy could be part of this meeting, or a subsequent one. The last contact during the preparation is the rehearsal, which may include the priest or deacon as well as appropriate parish ministers who are involved with the wedding ceremony.

**Policy: Location of Wedding Ceremony**

Because entry into the married state is part of the sacramental reality of the Church, the proper place to enter into marriage is within the sacred setting of the church – either the parish of the bride or the parish of the groom, or another church. Couples seeking an exemption from this requirement who wish to have their vows received by the priest or deacon in a place other than a church must obtain the permission of the Bishop. Their request must be submitted by the priest or deacon who is preparing them. He must outline the pastoral reasons why a change in location is deemed necessary. In the case of couples where one is Catholic and one is non-Catholic, and with the dispensation from canonical form, weddings may be held in the place of worship of the non-Catholic partner and the vows received by a non-Catholic minister (Canon 1118).

A non-Catholic minister may be present in the Catholic church, and the Catholic priest or deacon may be present in the non-Catholic church. Only the Catholic minister receives the vows when the wedding is in a Catholic church, and only the non-Catholic minister receives the vows when the wedding is in a non-Catholic setting. Canon law and Ohio law permit only one minister to receive the vows.

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\(^5\) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1626
Setting the Date

Policy: Setting A Wedding Date
The wedding date may be set if it is clear that the couple is free to marry. If one or both of the parties is not free to marry by reason of a prior marital bond, a date cannot be set (not even a tentative one) until the prior attempted marriage is declared null and the party (parties) declared free to marry. All other impediments are to be removed prior to the wedding. All requests for dispensations and permissions are to be submitted to the Chancery Office at least one month prior to the wedding date.

When the parish sets a wedding date for a couple, this can be an opportune time for reinforcing connection with the faith community. For example, bulletins can announce upcoming wedding(s), asking parishioners to pray for the couple(s); petitions can be added to the General Intercessions; the presider may publicly recognize engaged couples at the beginning of Mass; or photos of engaged couples can be put in the vestibule or a parish newsletter.

Policy: Weddings During Advent, Lent, Sundays, and Holy Days
While weddings are not prohibited during Advent and Lent, by their very nature, these seasons do not lend themselves to weddings. Therefore, clergy should do their best to avoid scheduling weddings during these seasons. Clergy officiating at weddings during these seasons should do whatever is necessary to respect the particular season. That means that when a wedding is celebrated during Advent or Lent, the tone of the season must not be suppressed, and the parish’s seasonal environment should not be replaced or modified.

In addition, while not forbidden, it is preferable that weddings not occur on Sundays or major feast days, which have their own proper focus. Therefore, clergy are asked to discourage weddings after 4:00 p.m. on Saturdays, all day on Sundays, and all day on holy days of obligation. When weddings do occur on these days, the prayers and readings of the day are to be used. The ritual does allow the use of one reading from the wedding lectionary.

Attendance at a Marriage Preparation Program
Couples should be urged to complete their marriage preparation program early in their engagement, at a minimum of three months before their wedding. Besides the advantage of putting into practice the skills and new information learned in the program, early attendance allows couples to be accommodated at date(s) of their convenience, providing ample time should the emergence of an unforeseen conflict necessitate rescheduling. Early attendance also provides sufficient time to thoroughly reflect on those greater issues that will influence and impact their married lives. In addition, it can serve as either affirmation of the wisdom of proceeding with the marriage or as impetus for additional discernment. After working through the program, couples sometimes question the advisability of their engagement and come to the decision to postpone or cancel their plans to be married; this is obviously a simpler decision to act on the sooner it is made. (Refer to Section 4: Marriage Preparation
Programs for the various options available in determining which one is best suited to the couple’s needs before recommending a particular program to the couple).

**Natural Family Planning (NFP) Instruction**

**Policy: Natural Family Planning**

There is a fundamental connection between children and marriage as defined by the Church. Openness to children is an essential element of marriage.

In this spirit, helping couples deepen conjugal love and achieve responsible parenthood is part of the Church’s total pastoral ministry to Catholic spouses. Therefore, it is the policy of the Diocese of Columbus that all couples preparing for marriage attend an introductory presentation on Natural Family Planning. Fulfillment of this requirement includes both education and pastoral care. This means “instilling conviction and offering practical help to those who wish to live out their parenthood in a truly responsible way.”

“Deliberately intervening, by the use of contraceptive practices, to close off an act of intercourse to the possibility of procreation is a way of separating the unitive meaning of marriage from the procreative meaning. This is objectively wrong in and of itself and is essentially opposed to God’s plan for marriage and proper human development. It makes the act of intercourse signify, or speak, something less than the unreserved self-gift intended in the marriage promises. The language of the body that is meant to express self-gift becomes mixed with another message, a contrary message—namely, the refusal to give oneself entirely. Thus the unitive meaning of that language is falsified.”

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is an umbrella term for certain methods used to both achieve and avoid pregnancies. NFP reflects the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life, promotes openness to life, and recognizes the value of the child. Couples who practice NFP use no drugs, devices, or surgical procedures to avoid pregnancy. By respecting the love-giving and life-giving natures of marriage, NFP can enrich the bond between husband and wife. Classes are available through the diocesan Marriage and Family Life Office (614/241-2560), online, and through local sources. (See Appendix A: Resources).

At the same time, in discussing Natural Family Planning with engaged couples it should also be remembered that not all will be able to conceive, and some may in fact be beyond childbearing years. These couples can still share their generative love with adoptive or foster

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6 Ibid. n. 35.


8 *Standards for Diocesan Natural Family Planning Ministry*, p. 23.
children, other children and families, grandchildren, and stepchildren, as well as the wider community. As Pope John Paul II has consoled these couples: “You are no less loved by God; your love for each other is complete and fruitful when it is open to others.”

Required Documentation

Policy: Required Documentation
To ensure the validity of the marriage, the couple must provide certain documents. Copies of these documents will become a part of the permanent marriage file kept in the parish where the marriage takes place. The following documents are always required:

♦ Baptismal certificate of the Catholic party issued within six months of the date of the request with appropriate notations on the back to ensure the person is free to marry (a baptismal certificate of a non-Catholic party is recommended but not required);

♦ Certificate from a Diocesan approved marriage preparation program;

♦ Prenuptial Investigation Form I (completed by the person preparing the couple and signed by the couple).

If circumstances dictate, the following forms will also be required:

♦ Any required canonical permissions or dispensations;

♦ Parental permission for an underage party (Canon 1083);

♦ Certain documents regarding a prior marriage (e.g. Decree of Nullity, death certificate of a previous spouse).

Any other documentation that may be required will depend on the specific aspects of the particular marriage, such as proof of citizenship, permanent visa, etc. In a case where a baptismal certificate is not available (e.g. loss of church records in a fire, war, natural disaster, etc.), the Chancery Office may be consulted to determine what steps to take.

The priest/deacon witnessing the marriage has the responsibility to ensure that certain documentation is completed in a reasonable time following the marriage:

♦ The marriage is to be noted in the marriage and baptismal parish registries.

♦ The marriage license form should be mailed as soon as possible. Some counties impose a fine if the marriage is not civilly registered within a certain time period.

♦ Any chancery forms should be mailed.

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9 Homily at Mass for families, Onitsha, Nigeria, February 13, 1982
All documentation to be kept in the parish file should be completed (final comments) and filed.

**Beyond the Priest & Deacon: Parish Support**

Research indicates that “marriage preparation is perceived as most valuable when it is administered as a team.”

That team should always include lay couples as well as a member of the clergy, because of the fact that engaged couples consistently judge the presence of clergy as being valuable, and their absence as being detrimental. Marriage preparation ministry contributes much to the vitality of the parish. Besides the benefits to the engaged couples themselves of an increased sense of membership in the faith community, strong sacramental preparation, a positive experience of the Church, exposure to healthy models of marriage, and the exploration of attitudes and expectations toward informed maturity, marriage preparation ministry also affords an opportunity for collegiality and marital enrichment for team member couples, as well as the opportunity for parishioners to support the engaged couples through involvement with planning, set-up, clean-up, prayer, and hospitality.

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10 Getting It Right: Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church/ A Study of the Value of Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church for Couples Married One through Eight Years, Center for Marriage and Family Creighton University, 1995.

11 Ibid.
A successful marriage requires that a couple is mature, responsible, and free to marry. There is no single, objective standard by which one can either judge a couple’s readiness to marry, or guarantee their success. However, specific, identifiable circumstances may be present which indicate a need for further assessment and growth before the final decision is made to proceed with the marriage.

Some impediments (such as the impediment of Disparity of Cult for a Catholic to marry a non-baptized person or someone whose baptism is doubtful) are resolved simply by obtaining the proper dispensation from the local ordinary. Other impediments (such as a previous marriage), can take months or years to resolve. *In all cases of special circumstance, increased pastoral care is warranted, so that the marriage can be as strong as possible.*

For clarification regarding proceeding with the preparation for marriage of couples presenting unusual or complicated circumstances/impediments, contact the Chancery Office.

The following is a partial list of special circumstances that may characterize couples presenting themselves to be married in the Church:

**Issues Impacting Freedom to Marry**

If one or both individuals demonstrate serious readiness issues, the priest or deacon should refer the couple to a professional for assessment and treatment while addressing less serious readiness issues through his pastoral work. The professional’s role is to advise the couple and the priest or deacon, not to make a final decision on whether or not the marriage should be delayed. The burden of that decision rests solely with Church authority.

**Abuse**

Issues involving abuse of any kind warrant serious attention, with the safety of the abused party being the highest priority. Even bringing up the subject in front of both partners puts the abused party at risk. In addition, it is not uncommon for a one-on-one conversation with either/both party(ies) to result in the denial of its presence in the relationship. Once safety is assured, therapy can be helpful (there are often other issues that create an environment ripe for abuse) – but as always, ministers should exercise care in referring (not “recommending”) a competent therapist. Once married, an abused partner is never to be encouraged to remain physically present in the relationship to “save the marriage.”
Addiction
Issues involving addiction of any kind (i.e. alcohol, drugs, gambling, Internet, pornography, etc.) demand professional attention. Treatment can involve individual, couple, and/or group therapy, as well as support groups. Twelve-step programs can be effective, and are widely available. Various specialties exist within the counseling professions; as always, ministers should exercise care in referring (not “recommending”) individuals to a competent therapist.

Age
“Age” as it involves freedom to marry usually refers to young couples where at least one partner is a teenager. Currently in the State of Ohio, the minimum legal age for marriage with parental consent is 18 for males and 16 for females; the minimum legal age for marriage without parental consent is 18 for both males and females. Although state laws vary as to the legal age for marriage, maturity varies with the individual.

The preparation process should be age appropriate. Special attention should be given to the preparation of couples in which even one of them is younger than the age of 21. Many couples just past their teenaged years are not ready to take on the commitment and responsibilities of marriage, and would likewise benefit from similar extra pastoral attention. Discussion facilitated by a premarital inventory can help these couples recognize a need for more time before entering a lifelong relationship.

“Age” can also apply to older couples. Despite the tendency to believe they need less preparation because of their presumed maturity and experience, there are many special issues unique to older couples that merit discussion, such as previous relationships – especially for divorced or widowed men and women; finances; transition from a single lifestyle to a marriage partnership; and obligations to family members.

Pregnancy
Pregnancy should always be treated as a caution to marriage as opposed to a reason to speed up a wedding, because it can interfere with a person’s ability to give free consent. If the couple’s first consideration of marriage followed discovery of the pregnancy, the possibility of pressure to marry needs to be carefully explored. Regardless, “In light of our Church’s consistent witness to the sanctity of human life, the couple’s choice to embrace the pregnancy should be affirmed by the pastoral minister.”

Faith Issues
Interchurch, Interfaith, or Interreligious Marriages
Couples are urged to learn about their future spouse’s faith – not for the purpose of conversion, but for understanding, mutual respect, and family harmony.

Despite the complexity of combinations of Catholic partner and the profession/lack of profession of faith of the other partner, canon law and liturgical rites are specific about what dispensations and rites are needed.

In an interreligious marriage, the Catholic partner must make the following promise to be faithful to the Catholic Church and raise his or her children in the Catholic faith (Canon 1125):

“I reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ and, with God's help, intend to continue living that faith in the Catholic Church. At the same time, I acknowledge the respect I owe to the conscience of my partner in marriage. I promise to do all that I can to share the faith I have received with our children by having them baptized and educated as Catholics.”

The non-Catholic partner is to be informed of the promise, so that he or she is aware of the promise and obligation the Catholic partner has made. The non-Catholic partner does not need to make a promise or sign a statement. The “Decree on Ecumenism,” (n. 3) clarifies that “to do all in one’s power” recognizes the religious convictions of the non-Catholic party and implies that a decision is reached that respects those beliefs. It does not mean an absolute promise at the risk of jeopardizing the marriage itself.

**Non-practicing Catholic(s)**
While some evidence of faith is required for the reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony, the level of faith is not the question. Engaged couples must be accepted and instructed at their actual level. “As for wishing to lay down further criteria for admission to the ecclesial celebration of marriage, criteria that would concern the level of faith of those to be married, this would above all involve grave risks. The faith of the person seeking marriage in the Church can exist in varying degrees. It is the primary duty of pastors to facilitate a rediscovery of this faith, nourishing it and bringing it to maturity.” (Familiaris Consortio, n. 68).

The issue here is differentiating ignorance and/or non-practice of the faith from a direct rejection of the faith. “Rejection of the faith” means that someone sees no value in the faith, does not believe – and does not wish to believe.

**Previous Marriage/Children**
One of the first steps in marriage preparation (after hospitality) is to determine the couple’s freedom to marry so that the process can continue. In the vast majority of cases, for whatever the length of marriage, age of partner, and whether or not there were children, the couple’s attendance at remarriage preparation best serves their needs in addressing issues

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13 Diocese of Columbus Application for Marriage Dispensation Form

14 Familiaris Consortio, n. 68
unique to their situation. It is not necessary for an annulment to be granted for a couple to attend. Many times the program is helpful in the discernment process for the couple.

Because of the increased risk of divorce, more rather than less preparation is beneficial. Special attention is warranted to help the couple understand how the dynamics of a previous marriage will impact their new marriage. In addition to typical issues, marriage ministers should also address resolution of grief from the previous relationship(s), freedom to marry, role shifts and step-parenting, as well as establishment of new familial traditions.

**Divorce and annulment**

*In accordance with the previously stated policy, no wedding date (not even a tentative one) may be set for couples if one or both parties is/are still bound by a previous marriage bond not yet declared null by ecclesiastical tribunal.* It is wise to urge an appropriately long period of engagement in order to discourage couples from marrying on the rebound or without having understood responsibility for and/or contribution to the difficulties of the previous marriage.

**Policy: Vetitum or Commendatio**

The priest or deacon is to be sure to investigate as to whether there is a vetitum (prohibition) or commendatio (recommendation) attached to an annulment, which might require further counseling prior to entering into marriage in the Church. The vetitum can only be lifted by the issuing Tribunal.

**Policy: Death**

The priest or deacon is required to collect documentation of the former spouse’s passing in order to properly establish freedom to marry. This documentation should be entered into the couple’s permanent marriage file.

The form of marriage preparation can be adapted to the age and circumstances of the couple, but abbreviating preparation for couples who had happy marriages before the death of a spouse is not advisable. Mentor couples can help the engaged couple discern where they are in the grief process, and how they will deal with issues such as merged finances and obligations to children from the previous marriage.

**Validation of an invalid marriage**

Validation occurs in instances in which an invalid marriage is validated in accordance with the canons of the Church. Invalidity often occurs when one or both of the couple is/are Catholic, and they failed to have their vows received by a Catholic priest or deacon (such as being married by a non-Catholic minister or before a civil authority without proper dispensation). There are two paths that can be followed to validate an invalid marriage: convalidation and radical sanation. A convalidation is a new exchange of the marriage vows before a priest or deacon, and requires a whole new act of will on the part of the couple. Radical sanation renders retroactively valid a marriage that was invalid from its origin without the renewal of consent by either party, provided that both the man and woman were free to marry at that
Children from this or a previous marriage
Children from a current or previous relationship are in and of themselves neither a reason to marry nor to refrain from marrying. Of primary concern is that the parent recognizes his or her responsibility to support children from a previous relationship financially, emotionally, and spiritually. Because of the strain on the couple and the children, special counseling is especially important, including remarriage preparation if appropriate.

Moral Issues
Abortion
Abortion is one of the most traumatic experiences a woman can have. Even so, it should not be presumed that the mother alone deals with post-abortion trauma. Should the acknowledgment of an abortion during the current or a prior relationship be made during marriage preparation, take the opportunity to pastorally demonstrate how the Church is loving and forgiving by reaching out with concern and utmost sensitivity. The issue can be a complicated one: rape or incest might have been involved; hence great care should always be used in extending Christ-like compassion.

Feelings of guilt, fear, anxiety, and panic are common for someone who has experienced an abortion, or who has encouraged or coerced a partner to do so. There may also be additional layers of guilt and/or regret if the mother made and acted on the decision without consulting the father, or if she proceeded against the father’s wishes. In addition, every relationship can be gravely impacted: besides the baby’s father, grandparents, extended family members, and the parents’ friends can also suffer. The pain of abortion may be intensified by a sense of alienation from God and the Church. It is possible that shame may cause the parent(s) to keep the matter to him/herself, even for many years.

Invite the woman who has been involved in an abortion to participate in Project Rachel (a national post-abortion counseling program provided locally through Catholic Social Services) or Bethesda Post-Abortion Healing Ministry. (For information see Appendix A: Resources). Generally, these processes include counseling, prayer, and Scripture reflection. At the appropriate time in the healing process, invite reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as an experience of God’s forgiveness and grace.

Policy: Cohabitation
The Church strikes a balance on the issue of cohabitation. On the one hand, clergy should be welcoming and see this as an opportunity for evangelization, yet at the same time they must uphold in absolutely clear terms the Church’s teaching that sexual intimacy is only made authentically in the context of valid marriage.

The following steps are to be used when dealing with cohabiting couples:
Approach the couple with patience and concern.

Explore with them why they are cohabiting, and discuss the sociological and psychological ramifications of their situation. Address the problems cohabitation causes married couples. Help them understand that cohabitation can and does touch on issues of fear and fidelity. There are ample resources on these issues available, and clerics may turn to the Marriage and Family Life Office in order to access such materials.

Explore with them the reason that they are now approaching the Church for marriage (as with pregnancy, the risk of divorce is lessened if the decision to marry was made prior to the cohabitation).

Help the couple to understand the wisdom behind the Church’s teaching on sexual intimacy within the Sacrament of Marriage.

Encourage the couple to live separately and chastely before their marriage as a spiritual preparation for marriage (exceptions are made for those with children).

“Today many couples are living together in a sexual relationship without the benefit of marriage. Many cohabiting couples believe that their desire for each other justifies the sexual relationship. This belief reflects a misunderstanding of the natural purpose of human sexual intercourse, which can only be realized in the permanent commitment of marriage… Couples offer various reasons for cohabiting, ranging from economics to convenience. Frequently, they have accepted the widespread societal belief that premarital cohabitation is a prudent way to determine whether they are truly compatible. They believe they need a trial period before proceeding to the lifelong commitment of marriage. Social science research, however, finds that cohabitation has no positive effects on a marriage. In some cases, cohabitation can in fact harm a couple’s chances for a stable marriage. More importantly, though, cohabitation involves the serious sin of fornication. It does not conform to God’s plan for marriage and is always wrong and objectively sinful… Clearly, there is no substitute for the binding lifelong commitment of marriage, and by definition, there is certainly no way to ‘try it out.’ Only the public and legal commitment of marriage expresses the complete gift of self that is the basis of marriage. To refuse the full commitment of marriage expresses something distinctly less than the unconditional trust required of complete self-giving. At the heart of cohabitation lies a reluctance or refusal to make a public, permanent commitment. Young people need to develop the virtue required for sustaining such a lofty commitment.”\(^{15}\)

Two extremes are warned against: (1) immediately condemning the couple’s behavior; and (2) ignoring the cohabitation. As Pope John Paul II stated: “Pastors and the ecclesial com-

Community should take care to become acquainted with such situations and their actual causes, case by case. They should make tactful and respectful contact with the couples concerned, and enlighten them patiently, correct them charitably, and show them the witness of Christian family life in such a way as to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation.”

The following are core questions and partial responses given in “Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples,” found at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ web site (www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/cohabiting.shtml).

(1) *If a couple is cohabiting, can marriage be denied or delayed?*
Cohabitation and/or premarital sex are not canonical impediments to marriage. A couple may not be denied a wedding for these reasons alone, although additional time might be needed to address the issues raised by cohabitation such as the impact of cohabitation on the couple’s freedom to marry and their understanding of the Church’s teachings on marriage and sexuality…

(2) *Should cohabiting couples be encouraged to separate prior to the wedding?*
Yes, but the couple is not to be refused marriage if they fail to separate.

**Policy: Intention to be childless**
A decision by the couple or one party to permanently exclude children invalidates a marriage. If such a statement is made to the priest or deacon, he must inform them of the seriousness of their decision, and strive in a pastoral manner to bring the couple to the point where they understand the Church’s teaching toward their agreement on openness to children. If, after this good faith effort, either/but parties still refuse/s to be open to children, the priest or deacon must inform the couple that they cannot be married in a Catholic Church.

**Cultural Considerations**
Cross-Cultural/Interracial Marriages
It is wise for the priest or deacon to help couples identify cultural assumptions that may not be apparent to one another.

**Miscellaneous**
**Policy: Sexual Identity**
For a sacramental marriage to be possible, the presumption is that a man and a woman asking to marry must understand themselves as a heterosexual man and a heterosexual woman. When either person expresses doubt or conflict about sexual identity or sexual orientation, careful attention must be given to both parties. If the

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16 *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 81
couple has not dealt adequately with this issue, further assistance from a counseling professional is strongly recommended before proceeding with the wedding.

“Marriage is a unique union, a relationship different from all others. It is the permanent bond between one man and one woman whose two-in-one-flesh communion of persons is an indispensable good at the heart of every family and every society… Male-female complementarity is intrinsic to marriage. It is naturally ordered toward authentic union and the generation of new life. Children are meant to be the gift of the permanent and exclusive union of a husband and a wife. A child is meant to have a mother and a father. The true nature of marriage, lived in openness to life, is a witness to the precious gift of the child and to the unique roles of a mother and father…”

Citizenship Status
Situations that may affect a couple’s ability to contract a marriage include: (1) marrying in order to remain in the U.S. or to gain citizenship (which impacts consent); and (2) couples who freely want to marry but one or both are in the U.S. illegally. Consult with the Chancery and/or civil legal counsel for legal clarification. *All priests and deacons of the Diocese of Columbus are reminded that they are not to knowingly witness a marriage that violates civil law.*

Impotence and/or Infertility
While infertility is not an impediment to marriage, if known in advance it should be discussed by the couple with openness and candor. Although antecedent impotency is an impediment to marriage, it must also be remembered that medical technology means some forms of impotence are treatable or curable. The priest or deacon must explore carefully and thoroughly when this issue is disclosed. Permanent inability to have intercourse nullifies marriage, but where there is doubt, the marriage is not be impeded on that ground (Canon 1084).

Long-distance marriage preparation
Long distance preparation or attendance at a marriage preparation program as individuals (rather than as a couple) is sometimes necessary. Couples may reside in separate cities or at a great distance from the city where they will be married. Military or college chaplains can often provide independent preparation, but the presiding minister needs to coordinate the process. The couple should meet with him at least once, even if most of the preparation will be done long distance.

If the couple is unable to attend a marriage preparation program together, the priest/deacon or designated trained lay minister(s) can instruct and facilitate it one-on-one during a window of time that is opportune. If the bride and groom are prepared independently by different individuals (the least advisable option), care should be taken that they use the same marriage preparation program curriculum. The couple should be encouraged to thoroughly discuss

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17 *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, p. 21
when they are together whatever self/couple discovery emerges, as well as the material presented in the program. Separation is a challenge, but not a reason to omit completion of a marriage preparation program.

Non-registered Catholic(s)
Canon Law does not make parish registration a prerequisite for marriage in the Catholic Church (Canon 1115). Consequently, parishes are discouraged from requiring the couple’s registration and/or prior/ongoing financial support. Each situation is to be handled separately and delicately. The presumption of the Church is that people have a natural right to marry. The Church, therefore, is to provide a welcoming presence regardless of whether or not the couple is registered as parishioners.

Person(s) with Disabilities
Disabilities can be physical or mental. As with questions of readiness, the priest or deacon should utilize the counsel of professionals who are knowledgeable about the particular disability if he has questions or reservations regarding the wisdom of proceeding toward marriage. Physical disability itself is not an impediment to marriage. With regard to mental disabilities, the priest or deacon needs to assess the couple’s ability to give consent and to assume the essential obligations of marriage. (See also “Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities,” USCCB, 1995).

Prenuptial Agreements
A sacramental marriage is based on an enduring committed love and partnership for the whole of life – which implies a comprehensive sharing of both spiritual and temporal goods. Because prenuptial agreements commonly provide for the division of property in the event a couple divorces, they can potentially invalidate marital consent. However, a prenuptial agreement is not automatically a cause of invalid marital consent. An evaluation of such an agreement is necessary to determine if there are any conditions limiting consent. Particularly for remarriages, the difference between prenuptial agreements and wills is to be understood: a will provides for the management of one’s estate upon death.

Sexually transmitted/communicable diseases
The Church understands Christian marriage to be a covenantal relationship based on openness and honesty. Therefore, both people entering a marriage have a right to information that has major ramifications for their marriage. Being a carrier of a sexually transmitted and/or communicable disease is obviously something that needs to be disclosed to one’s future spouse.

Unwillingness to participate in a Marriage Preparation Program
Unwillingness to participate in a marriage preparation program can be considered a sign of lack of commitment to marry in the Church. However, the Church has a responsibility to provide adequate and varied options so there is no reasonable obstacle to participation (Canon 213).
Section 4

Marriage Preparation Programs

The following is a brief description of the various marriage preparation programs currently available in the Diocese of Columbus. (Contact information for the various programs can be found in Appendix A: Resources). The general content of every program is comparable and covers the topics of family of origin, communication, moral decision making, intimacy/sexuality, and spirituality/sacramentality. In a similar fashion, presenters at each program deliver remarks and facilitate skill-building, the couple’s enhanced understanding of what constitutes a sacramental marriage, and a deeper exploration of their relationship. Upon fulfillment of attendance requirements a certificate of completion is presented to the couple, which is to be added to their wedding file at the parish.

Policy: Number of Marriage Preparation Programs the Couple Must Attend
Couples need attend only one of the programs listed; care should be given in recommending the one which best meets their individual circumstances. If in doubt about what is an appropriate recommendation for a couple, contact the Marriage and Family Life Office at 614/241-2560 for guidance.

Parish-Sponsored Pre-Cana Program: The parish in which the engaged couple worships can be the ideal setting for a couple’s marriage preparation, primarily because of the sense of support and community they can experience. If the parish has a Pre-Cana team or the clergy member preparing the couple has competency with a particular marriage preparation curriculum in order to work with them one-on-one, the couple’s attendance at their parish’s marriage preparation program can be preferred.

Diocesan Pre-Cana Program: Couples attending a diocesan program have the advantage of experiencing community and support on a wider scale, as well as the benefit of the witness of the relationships of various presenting couples (as opposed to one-on-one parish mentor couples) through “snapshots” of their marriages, which are typically in different stages. Diocesan Pre-Cana is an option for engaged couples whose parish has no Pre-Cana team, or their own schedule and that of their parish program do not coincide. (A current schedule for diocesan Pre-Cana is available online at www.FamilyLife.colsdioc.org).

Engaged Encounter: Engaged Encounter (an international Catholic lay ministry, with a local community in the Diocese of Columbus) is a weekend program of dialogue, writing, and reflection, during which married couples and a priest facilitate an examination of marriage through sharing their own life experiences. As with all other marriage preparation programs, the engaged couples are encouraged to question, reflect upon, and deepen their
relationship with each other and with God, as well as to understand the role of this sacrament in community. *(A current schedule for Engaged Encounter dates in the Diocese of Columbus is available online at www.Engaged.org).*

**DIOCESAN REMARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM:** This program is designed specifically for couples who are marrying after one or both have experienced a previous marriage, to assist them in addressing issues peculiar to their situation. The topics covered are similar to those in other marriage preparation programs, but also include unique topics that those who remarry may face. Generally speaking, if it is not a first marriage for either partner (regardless of the length of time of the prior marriage, whether or not there are children – no matter their parentage, or if the marriage ended because of death or divorce) they are candidates for Remarriage Preparation. One pastoral concern for those middle-aged or older is that typically they are intensely uncomfortable spending the day with couples half their ages (or more). But age is not the sole determining factor as to which program is most appropriate: younger individuals entering a marriage that is not their first often have serious issues which have not been dealt with; Remarriage Preparation can help facilitate this process. Oftentimes, the greatest difference between expectations and experience is felt by the partner who has never been married. We know that remarriages have a higher rate of divorce than first marriages. Therefore, a thorough exploration of potential problem areas, a facilitation of the resolution of issues of closure of prior relationships, and an exposure to the same foundational subjects discussed in Pre-Cana (all of which Remarriage Preparation provides) best prepares these couples with what they need and deserve. *(A current schedule for diocesan Remarriage Preparation is available online at www.FamilyLife.coldsdioc.org).*

**DEANERY MODEL:** Under consideration is a deanery model in which parishes within a deanery would combine resources and ministers in hosting sessions. It is a particularly attractive option for those parishes at longer distances from Columbus (the typical location for Engaged Encounter and Diocesan Pre-Cana), and/or those with few weddings.
Section 5

Wedding Liturgy

The final phase of preparing a couple for marriage is planning the liturgy. This should take place only after any issues identified in Sections 1-4 have been successfully resolved.

First and foremost, a wedding in the Catholic Church is an act of worship. The couple is entering into a sacred, sacramental experience. The bride and the groom are the chief ministers of this experience. As such, they are leading the congregation in this act of worship.

In planning the liturgy, it is important to recognize that there is a measure of responsibility on the part of both the parish and the couple. Given the sacredness of the Sacrament of Matrimony, great care should be taken to ensure that proper liturgical practice is the foundation of the liturgy planning. This calls for appropriate catechesis well in advance of the actual wedding ceremony.

Policy: Responsibility of the Parish

The parish is to assist couples preparing for marriage to understand the wedding liturgy, and to use the options that are available for a prayerful, joyful, and more meaningful celebration of their marriage. Those preparing the couple are to offer a fundamental understanding of liturgy in regard to both the sacramental-covenantal nature of marriage and how the celebration of the ritual begins their marriage. The couple should be made aware of the several options available in the rite and encouraged to choose the options that have a special meaning for them.

Every parish should have clearly defined, written policy for the celebration of weddings, a copy of which should be provided to the couple. These policies are to include (but are not limited to) the following:

♦ Whether or not someone other than the parish music director will be providing music for the celebrations, and what rehearsals are necessary for visiting musicians (provide a copy of the Diocesan guidelines for wedding music, or refer them to the Office of Liturgy’s web page);
♦ Photography and videography;
♦ Floral arrangements;
♦ Environmental guidance that respects the liturgical season;
♦ Rehearsal etiquette;
The expectation that attending the wedding means celebrating with the couple through prayer, not merely passively witnessing a social event (suggested wording for a brief note on the wedding invitation could be provided);

Fees for the church services and hall rental, including when they should be paid.

The couple must gain an understanding of the Church’s teaching on marriage in order to have a fruitful celebration that reflects the inclusion of Christ in their married life. They should demonstrate their willingness to become living signs of God’s love. Finally, they should recognize that marriage has placed them in a new and unique role within the faith community, and that in that role they are witnesses of a special kind of service to the community.

“Married Christians, by 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; they help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children; and they have their own special gift among the people of God.”

Policy: The Liturgical Forms of the Marriage Rite

There are three liturgical forms for the Rite of Marriage. Which one is most appropriate depends on a number of circumstances, such as a marriage of a Catholic and a non-Catholic, how many of the wedding guests are Catholic, whether this is a convocation, a second marriage, etc. The options should be thoroughly discussed to ensure that the ritual is celebrated with proper dignity. If a couple is seeking an exception to the norms listed below, the priest or deacon preparing the couple must obtain the approval of the ordinary of the diocese on their behalf.

Form I – The Rite for Celebrating Marriage During Mass is the norm for a marriage of two practicing Roman Catholics.

Form II – The Rite for Celebrating Marriage Outside Mass is the norm for the marriage of a Catholic and a Christian baptized in another denomination.

Form III – The Rite for Celebrating Marriage Between a Catholic and an Unbaptized Person with certain adaptations is the norm for the marriage of a Catholic and an unbaptized person, or of two catechumens. This rite is celebrated outside of the Mass.

Wedding Rehearsal

Whether the wedding takes place within or outside Mass, a rehearsal should be scheduled, usually a day or two before the wedding. All ministers, including the musician(s), lector(s),

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18 The Rite of Marriage, Ave Maria Press, 2002.
ushers, and Extraordinary Ministers of Communion (EMs), should be present at the rehearsal to ensure that the progression of the liturgy flows in proper order. Lectors (and psalmists) are encouraged to practice their readings with a live microphone (if one is used in the parish). If possible, the photographer/videographer should attend the rehearsal to learn the parameters involved in recording the wedding. The person leading the rehearsal should ensure that each lector (psalmist) is familiar with the Lectionary so as to avoid any embarrassment at the wedding itself. EMs and servers should practice their respective movements.

Because we are rehearsing for a sacred event, the rehearsal would ideally begin with prayer. The prayer may be led by the couple or by the person directing the rehearsal. There is no one particular form of prayer that can be recommended, as prayer is highly personal. However, if as part of the prayer any members of the wedding party are asked for invocations, the person leading the rehearsal should note that the solemnity of the occasion should be preserved. Also, everyone should keep in mind that the rehearsal is taking place in church, and that proper respect for the worship space should be maintained.

The rehearsal should consist of practicing all the movements, from the procession at the beginning through the final procession out of the worship space. Practicing with the music can be helpful, especially for the procession, as it enables a sense of timing.

For the actual wedding ritual, everything should take place at the foot of the altar, whether it is a wedding within Mass or outside Mass. There are two basic positions the couple can take for the wedding ritual.

First (and the more traditional), is for them to stand at the foot of the altar, facing the altar, with the bride to the groom’s left. The priest/deacon would be one or two steps up (depending on the design of the church), facing the couple and the assembly.

Second, the positions of the priest/deacon and the couple are reversed, with the couple on the step, the priest/deacon on the main floor, his back to the assembly.

In both cases, the priest/deacon and other ministers should avoid obstructing the view of the assembly.

(Note: Usually there is some kind of social gathering or celebration the evening/night prior to the wedding that may involve some kind of social gathering. It should be made clear that on the day of the wedding everyone involved should arrive on time, ready to begin, and in a condition appropriate to the sacredness and dignity of the sacrament.)

**Sacrament of Reconciliation**

Marriage is a sacrament of the living, and must therefore be received while in the state of grace. The Catholic parties involved in the wedding (especially the couple) should be apprised of this and encouraged to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to the wed-
ding, preferably at a time normally scheduled in their own parishes. However, at his discretion, the celebrating priest or deacon may also make arrangements for any Catholic parties involved in the wedding to receive the sacrament at their mutual convenience, possibly before or after the rehearsal.

**Liturgy Considerations**

Many marriage preparation programs provide a booklet with information on planning the marriage liturgy. These booklets generally contain several options regarding the vows, exchange of rings, etc. Often, a selection of readings with some commentary enables the couple to choose readings that have a special significance to them. Most include a form on which the couple can specify their selections. With or without such a form, the liturgy should be planned with the help of the person preparing the couple to ensure that proper liturgical practice is followed.

The ministers may be chosen by the couple, but care should be taken that those chosen are fully capable of the particular ministry. All ministers, including the musician(s), should attend the rehearsal prior to the wedding. For ministers from another parish, permission of the pastor is required.

**The role of ordained clergy during Wedding Masses**

These roles are governed by Church liturgical norms and are described in the Church’s liturgical documents. Directions regarding the role of deacons during wedding Masses are also provided in section 4002.0 of the *Diocese of Columbus Guidelines for Deacons*. On special occasions, and with approval of the ordinary and receipt of delegation from the pastor, a deacon may preside over the reception of consent. If the deacon is the father of the bride or groom, he may, with the same approval and delegation, preside over the Rite of Marriage from the questioning through the exchange of rings. Full details about these matters are described in the aforementioned section of the diocesan guidelines.

**Policy: The role of Catholic clergy at a non-Catholic wedding and recording such weddings**

If a dispensation from Canonical Form of Marriage has not been granted, no Catholic clergy may assist in such a wedding ceremony in any way. When a Catholic cleric has been asked to represent the Catholic Church at a wedding ceremony for which a dispensation from Canonical Form has been granted, he is never to serve as the canonical witness of the marriage; the non-Catholic minister must receive the vows. The Catholic cleric may read from Sacred Scriptures, assist with the exchange of rings, or give a blessing. The marriage file is to be kept at the Catholic church of the parish at which the couple was prepared. Marriages of this type must be recorded in the marriage register of the parish of the Catholic party, and in the official records of the Chancery. Notification of the marriage is to be sent to the parish of baptism of the Catholic party. It is civilly and canonically unlawful for Catholic clergy to receive the vows in full or in part in a marriage celebrated outside of canonical form.
Policy: The role of non-Catholic clergy or ministers at a Catholic wedding
Occasionally a couple will request that a non-Catholic minister participate in their wedding. The Catholic cleric should take steps to establish contact with the minister of the other church or community to make arrangements. The non-Catholic minister may offer a prayer, read from Scripture, or give a brief exhortation.

Other Liturgical Ministers
Per normal liturgical practice, each ministry should be done by someone not fulfilling another ministry. Typically, the ministers are people who have some significance in the lives of the couple. If no one is available to fulfill a particular ministry, the parish should provide someone.

♦ The wedding party (maid/matron of honor, best man, bridesmaids, groomsmen) – There is no requirement that any of these be Catholic. However, prior to the wedding, any non-Catholics in the wedding party should understand that they may not receive Communion if the wedding is within Mass.

♦ Lector(s) – One or more persons may be asked to lector, depending on the number of non-Gospel Scripture readings used. For a wedding within Mass, a lector must be a baptized Christian and, ideally, trained as a lector. Typically, the lector reads the selections from the Old and New Testaments, and in the absence of a psalmist/cantor, the Responsorial Psalm. The proclamation of the Gospel is reserved to the priest/deacon.

♦ Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMs) – When the marriage is celebrated within Mass and additional ministers are often needed for the distribution of Holy Communion. EMs may be selected from the guests provided that they are practicing Catholics. An EM is commissioned for his or her own parish. If they are not commissioned EMs from the parish where the wedding is taking place, they may be commissioned for this Mass only by the celebrating priest. Members of other churches or ecclesial communities may not minister as EMs.

♦ Servers – Only trained servers should assist in this capacity. Ideally, the servers are from the parish in which the Mass is celebrated to ensure familiarity with normal parish practice.

♦ Psalmist – The Responsorial Psalm is Scripture and is normally sung, led by a psalmist/cantor. If the psalm is sung or if it is read by a lector, the policy noted above for lectors must be followed.

♦ Cantor – For a wedding within Mass, a cantor should lead the service music. Because of the nature of the music, the cantor must be someone who is properly trained. Ideally, the cantor is from the parish in which the Mass is celebrated to ensure familiarity with normal parish practice.
Gift Bearers – Those to bring up the bread and wine for the preparation of gifts may be chosen from the assembly prior to the day of the nuptial Mass. They should not be any members of the wedding party, nor the couple themselves.

Ushers and Greeters – Typically, ushers and/or greeters are taken from among the groomsmen. However, others specifically designated for those ministries may be chosen. Other people may be called for non-liturgical roles at the wedding. These include, but are not limited to, ring-bearers, flower girls, a guest book attendant, and worship aid distributors.

The Statement of Intentions and Exchange of Vows
Policy: The Vows
This part of the marriage rite is essential to the sacrament. Therefore, there can be no errors. Otherwise, the validity of the marriage is endangered. Accordingly, only the vows prescribed in the ritual may be used. The couple is not permitted to alter the prescribed forms in any way, nor are they permitted to substitute other forms. Because the vows are part of the ritual, couples may not write their own.

Following an introductory address, the priest/deacon asks the couple to state their intentions by responding to the prescribed questions. One of two forms of the Exchange of Consent then follow, both of which consist of two options – the couple will either repeat the vows after the priest/deacon, or the priest/deacon presents the vows in the form of questions to which the couple will respond, “I do” (not, “I will”, because the effect of the vow is immediate, not sometime in the future). In either case, the couple should respond in a loud, clear voice so that they are heard by the assembly.

Cultural Practices and Traditions in a Catholic Wedding
The Church today enjoys a wide range of cultural diversity. Most cultures carry with them certain practices or traditions that reflect their history. Some of these may be appropriate in the liturgy, while others may be appropriate at other times. Those preparing the couple for marriage should try to identify and recognize these practices and traditions and discern how they might affect the ceremony. It is important to understand the couple’s relationship to their cultural background. Some may adhere to the older aspects of their culture, while others may be more modernized. Another consideration is when each party comes from a different cultural background.

Because marriage is a sacred event, great care must be taken to ensure that the sacredness of the sacrament is assured during the rite. This may require careful, pastoral counseling of the couple to ensure that they understand why certain traditions are not permitted.

Policy: Unity Candles
A unity candle is not permitted during the liturgy. The common symbolism of the unity candle is that the side candles represent the family, the center candle the couple. Candles used in a liturgy properly represent only Christ, so to use the candles otherwise creates a conflict of symbolism. The appropriate place for the use of unity candle is at the reception.

Other Cultural Considerations
The Receiving Line is more appropriately set at the reception. When a receiving line is formed at the church immediately following the wedding, it can cause undue delays in making the church available for other functions.

A Wedding Planner may not be involved in the liturgy. Preparation of the liturgy demands an understanding of liturgical practice, an understanding few wedding planners have. The proper province for a wedding planner is the reception following the wedding. This role is distinguished from that of a Parish-Appointed Wedding Coordinator who works closely with the officiating cleric and may assist with the liturgy.

An Extravaganza is to be avoided. The secular, social influence on weddings too often suggests that the wedding belongs to the bride, making her the focus of the planning and execution of the wedding. Catholic tradition and theology recognize that the bride and groom share equally in all aspects of the wedding. The focus of the marriage is the sacrament, never the dress, the flowers, the color scheme, etc.

Offering Flowers to Mary is a custom that goes back to when single women belonged to the Sodality of Mary. When a woman married, she had to leave the sodality. The flowers represented the woman’s appreciation of that particular association with Mary. If there is a special devotion to Mary, and this practice is important for the woman (or even the couple), an appropriate place for this reverent act would be at the rehearsal.

Aisle runners are a safety issue, and should not be used.

Stipends/Fee Scales
In the Diocese of Columbus stipends and wedding liturgy fee scale(s) are set by the pastor, and are not dictated by diocesan policy.
The Final Stage of Marriage Preparation: Support after Marriage

Support after the marriage is sometimes referred to as “aftercare” or “Post-Cana.” Whichever terminology is used, this is actually the final stage of marriage preparation. In *Familiaris Consortio* Pope John Paul II explains the importance of this stage:

“The pastoral care of the regularly established family signifies, in practice, *the commitment of all the members of the local ecclesial community to helping the couple to discover and live their new vocation and mission*. In order that the family may be ever more a true community of love, it is necessary that all its members should be helped and trained in their responsibilities as they face the new problems that arise, in mutual service and in active sharing in family life (emphasis added).

“This holds true especially for young families, which, finding themselves in a context of new values and responsibilities, are more vulnerable, especially in the first years of marriage, to possible difficulties such as those created by adaptation to life together or by the birth of children ... thus within the ecclesial community ... there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families, each one putting at the service of the others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace.”

Some ways to incorporate pastoral care of the newly married include:

♦ Congratulations cards from the parish and/or marriage preparation team (Wedding, Anniversary)

♦ Evenings of reflection for the newly married

♦ “Refresher courses” of some of the skills taught in marriage preparation sessions

♦ Workshops on topics not covered in marriage preparation sessions

♦ Social time for young married couples in the parish community

♦ A reunion brunch for each group of engaged couples

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19 *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 69
Subscription to “Marriage” magazine (800/627-4243) or “First Years and Forever,” an electronic monthly newsletter for newly married couples from the Archdiocese of Chicago (www.familyministries.org/FirstYearsForever).

The Marriage and Family Life Office of the Diocese of Columbus is available for consultation and resources to assist a parish with developing and maintaining a “Post-Cana” or enrichment program for newly married couples.

**Enrichment for All Married Couples in the Parish**

“We all want truly strong and vibrant marriages that endure. The truth of the matter is that the only marriages that last are those in which the partners are committed to continually building the relationship. Yet, time and time again, we know that this can only be realized if the couple is committed to developing open and honest communication, to ongoing couple and individual growth, to adjusting to the many changes and unforeseen events that will come their way, and to seeking help and support when it’s too much to handle alone. If these are the attitudes the couple develops, then marriages will endure. There are no guarantees but each of us can help make a difference by making marriage enrichment possible.”

Pastoral care for all married couples takes a similar form as that described for the newly married. When made on the parish level, these efforts are invaluable in spiritually supporting couples.

Continually providing up-to-date resources for the parish’s married couples will help convey that the Church supports marriage and family. To this end, you may want to use the parish web site, bulletin boards, and “community” bookracks to circulate information, as well as to publicize the USCCB’s web site www.ForYourMarriage.org, parish and diocesan enrichment programs, and any literature related to marriage enrichment. The Marriage and Family Life Office’s web site has reproducible resources on their web page (www.FamilyLife.colsdioc.org, “Marriage and Family Enrichment Resources”) which make excellent bulletin inserts.

In addition to scheduling parish programs and providing print and web site resources that affirm and encourage married couples, many diocesan programs and events are available to them, as well. World Marriage Day (the Sunday before Valentine’s Day) and Marriage Week USA (annually, February 7-14) are perfect occasions to provide support. Couples in healthy marriages seeking to make their marriages stronger can be encouraged to attend a Marriage Encounter weekend (www.wwmecolumbus.org). The Diocesan annual Jubilee of Anniversaries is co-sponsored by the Marriage and Family Life Office, Office of Liturgy, and the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women (DCCW). Parishes and staffs are encouraged to publicize this event honoring couples who are celebrating the significant anniversaries recognized. All of

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these efforts are investments in the future of our families and are sure to bear fruit for generations to come.

**Ministry to Those Who are Divorced**

Sadly, the occurrence of divorce must be acknowledged. God intends for marriage to be a lifelong covenantal union. Yet nearly 50 percent of couples in our society who attempt marriage will experience divorce. While the Church’s clergy and lay ministers must reiterate faithfully that divorce is not in keeping with God’s divine plan and that God’s plan for marriage persists for all time, it must also be taught that God extends mercy and healing grace.

“We understand the pain of those for whom divorce seemed the only recourse. We urge them to make frequent use of the sacraments, especially the Sacraments of Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation. We also offer encouragement to those who have divorced and remarried civilly. Although the Church cannot recognize such subsequent unions as valid marriages, she hopes that people in this situation will participate in parish life and attend the Sunday Eucharist, even without receiving the Sacrament.

“We encourage divorced persons who wish to marry in the Catholic Church to seek counsel about the options that exist to remedy their situation, including the suitability of a declaration of nullity when there is no longer any hope of reconciliation of the spouses. Such a declaration is a finding by a church tribunal, or court, that no valid marriage bond was formed because the requirements for valid consent were not met at the time of the wedding. If a declaration of nullity is granted, and there are no other restrictions, both parties are free to marry in the Catholic Church. Although the purpose of this canonical process is to determine whether or not a marriage bond truly existed, nonetheless, the process can often result in healing and closure to a painful part of one’s past.”

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Appendix: Resources

Chancery
198 East Broad Street
Columbus, OH  43215
614/224-2251
www.colsdioc.org
E-mail: CHOmailbox@colsdioc.org

Marriage Preparation Programs
Marriage and Family Life Office/
Diocese of Columbus
(Pre-Cana and Remarriage)
197 East Gay Street
Columbus, OH  43215
614/241-2560
www.FamilyLife.colsdioc.org
E-mail: FLOmailbox@colsdioc.org

Catholic Engaged Encounter (International lay ministry; Columbus Team)
www.Engaged.org

For more resources, call the Marriage and Family Life Office (614/241-2560)

Premarital Inventories
Readiness for marriage cannot be scientifically measured, but an inventory helps engaged couples make sure that they have discussed the most important issues. These are NOT tests, but rather instruments that prompt discussion on sometimes sensitive issues. Facilitator training varies and may be required.

FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study)
FOCCUS, Inc.
3214 North 60th Street
Omaha, NE 68104-3495
402-551-9003, 877/883-5422
www.foccusinc.com
E-mail: focus@foccusinc.com

PMI (Premarital Inventory)
RMI (Remarital Inventory)
VMI (Validating Marriage Inventory)
IMI (Intermarriage Inventory)
Intercommunications Publishing, Inc.
8657 Callahan Trail
Inver Grove Heights, MN  55076
800/ 999-0680
www.intercompub.com

PREPARE/ENRICH
Life Innovations
P.O. Box 190
Minneapolis, MN 55440-0190
612/635-0511, 800/331-1661
www.prepare-enrich.com

To Trust Again Inventory (Remarriage)
ACTA Publications
4848 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60640
800/ 397-2282
www.actapublications.com

Supplemental Resources:

www.ForYourMarriage.org
(Web site of the USCCB's Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth and the Catholic Communication Campaign)

The First Dance
Helps engaged couples and their parents manage the people stress of wedding planning.
Website, DVD, online coaching
www.TheFirstDance.com

www.SmartMarriages.com
(Web site of The Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education)
For more resources, call the Marriage and Family Life Office (614/ 241-2560)

Marriage Enrichment Resources:
General Marriage Enrichment
Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (ACME) – An international nonprofit, nonsectarian organization that provides enrichment opportunities and resources to strengthen couple relationships and enhance personal growth, mutual fulfillment, and family wellness.

Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (ACME)
Marriage Alive – Video-based programs include “10 Great Dates,” a fun and innovative approach to marriage education, and “Second Half of Marriage,” to renew empty nest marriages. David & Claudia Arp
888/690-6667
www.marriagealive.com
E-mail: Info@marriagealive.com

PREP (The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program) – Based on over twenty years of research, PREP teaches marital/premarital couples how to communicate effectively, work as a team, solve problems, manage conflict, and preserve and enhance love and commitment. (Also available in Spanish.)
Howard Markman, PhD, Scott Stanley, PhD, Directors
PREP Inc.
P.O. Box 4793
Greenwood Village, CO 80155-4793
800/366-0166
www.PREPinc.com
E-mail: info@prepinc.com

REFOCCUS (marriage enrichment in a group setting led by counselors, clergy, or lay ministers)
FOCCUS, Inc.
3214 North 60th Street
Omaha, NE 68104-3495
402-551-9003, 877/883-5422
www.foccusinc.com
E-mail: focus@foccusinc.com

For more resources, call the Marriage and Family Life Office (614/241-2560)

Faith-Based Marriage Enrichment
Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME) is a weekend experience that teaches a technique of loving communication to promote intimate and responsible relationships and offers community support for the sacramental lifestyle modeled by the presenters. Offered in English, Spanish and Korean.
Administrative Office
Worldwide Marriage Encounter, Inc.
2210 East Highland Avenue, Suite 106
San Bernardino, CA  92404-4666
909/863-9963
www.wwmecolumbus.org
E-mail: office@wwme.org

**Teams of Our Lady** – An international movement of married couples that promotes the spiritual growth of the couple and the family through a program of prayer and study.
P.O. Box 4638
Tyler, TX 75712
Phone: 903-535-7864
E-mail: info@teamsofourlady.org

**Christian Family Movement** – This network of families supports each other in living their faith in daily life at home, in the workplace, and in their communities.
CFM USA National Office
P.O. Box 925
Evansville, IN 47706-0925
812/962-5508
E-mail: office@cfm.org

*For more resources, call the Marriage and Family Life Office (614/241-2560)*

**Diocese of Columbus Religious Education Curriculum**
*(as regards remote preparation)*
Office of Religious Education and Catechesis/Department for Education
Diocese of Columbus
197 East Gay Street
Columbus, OH  43215
614/221-4633
www.cdeducation.org
E-mail: office@cdeducation.org

**Support for Addictions**
Twelve-Step programs can be effective, and are widely available. Various specialties exist within the counseling professions; ministers should exercise care in referring (not “recommending”) individuals to a competent therapist.

**Support for Troubled Marriages**
Diocese of Columbus Catholic Social Services
197 East Gay Street
Columbus, OH  43215
614/221-5891, 800/536-5891
www.colscss.org
Retrouvaille ("Rediscovery") is a weekend experience combined with a series of 6-12 post-weekend sessions over three months. The main emphasis of the program is on communication in marriage between husband and wife. There are neither group dynamics nor group discussion on the weekend.
800/470-2230
www.Retrouvaille.org

For more resources, call the Marriage and Family Life Office (614/241-2560)

Support for Victims of Abuse
For emergency situations call 911
CHOICES
24 hour Domestic violence hotline
224-4663

The Columbus Coalition Against Family Violence was created to improve the way individuals and institutions in Central Ohio think about and respond to family violence. They have formed alliances with corporate, medical, law enforcement and social service agencies, as well as faith communities.
655 East Livingston Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43205
614-722-5985
www.ccafv.org

National Domestic Violence hotline
800/799-7233

Post-Abortion Resources
Diocese of Columbus Catholic Social Services
197 East Gay Street
Columbus, OH 43215
614/221-5891, 800/536-5891
www.colscss.org

Bethesda Post-Abortion Healing Ministry
197 East Gay Street
Columbus, OH 43215
614/241-2555
www.colsdioc.org
E-mail: COMMmailbox@colsdioc.org

Project Rachel
www.HopeAfterAbortion.com
E-mail: noparh@juno.com
An interactive map will locate the nearest location

National Office of Post-Abortion
Reconciliation and Healing (NOPARH)
www.noparh.org
800/5WE-CARE

Notes
Special thanks are extended to the Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women & Youth of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for their resources in analyzing and developing diocesan policies on marriage, which are part of the National Pastoral Initiative on Marriage (NPIM), a multi-year collaborative effort begun in 2004 to “promote, preserve, and protect marriage, understood as both a sacramental reality and a human institution.”