DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH

CATECHETICAL GUIDELINES
FOR
PRE-MARRIAGE FORMATION

SECRETARIAT FOR EDUCATION
Office for Adult and Family Catechesis
Office for Catechetical Ministries

and

SECRETARIAT FOR SOCIAL CONCERNS
Office for Family Life and Family Concerns

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Feast of St. Joseph
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations

Introduction

Section One
Message

A. The Sacrament of Marriage

The Fundamental Definition
The Sources of Marriage
Necessary Elements

B. Married Life

The Vocation of marriage
Self-giving
Sin and Repentance
Moral Conscience

C. Sexuality

A Catholic Vision
Conjugal Love
The Virtue of Chastity
Offenses against Chastity

D. Children

Responsible Parenthood
Natural Family Planning

Section Two
Community

A. The Role of the Church

The Teaching Church
The Sacramental and Serving Church

B. Family as Domestic Church
C. Growing in Christian Marriage

Stages in Marriage
Communication in Marriage
Dealing with Conflict

D. Practical considerations

Family Life and Work
Finances
The Issue of Domestic Abuse

Section Three
Worship

A. The Vocation of Marriage

B. Participation in Sacramental Life

C. A Spirituality of Marriage

D. Prayer

Section Four
Service

A. Family Extending Outward

B. Transforming Society

Endnotes

Appendices

A. Canonical Implications for Marriage
B. Methodological Issues for Adult Religious Education
C. The Liturgical Celebration
D. Special Circumstances
E. The Stages of Preparation

Endnotes
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td><em>Catechism of the Catholic Church</em>, 1994</td>
<td></td>
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<td>CIC</td>
<td><em>Codex Iuris Canonici</em>, The Code of Canon Law, 1983</td>
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<td>FC</td>
<td><em>Familiaris Consortio</em>, On the Family, Pope John Paul II, 1981</td>
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<td>GS</td>
<td><em>Gaudium et Spes</em>, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Vatican II, 1965</td>
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<td>HV</td>
<td><em>Humanae Vitae</em>, On the Regulation of Birth, Pope Paul II, 1968</td>
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<td>LG</td>
<td><em>Lumen Gentium</em>, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II, 1964</td>
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<td>PM</td>
<td>Preparation for Marriage Guidelines, Pontifical Council for the Family, 1996</td>
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<td>SIP</td>
<td>The Sacrament of Initiation Policies for the Diocese of Pittsburgh, 1995</td>
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INTRODUCTION

In the Diocese of Pittsburgh, pre-marriage formation has taken a number of different formats. These include the classes held at the diocesan pastoral center, the series of classes provided at both parish and deanery levels, one-on-one preparation guided by the parish priest, engaged couples retreats, and couple-to-couple approaches.

The Catechetical Guidelines for Pre-Marriage Formation have been established and promulgated as the normative guidelines to be used in every program of pre-marriage formation in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Regardless of the format used, these Guidelines provide the core, essential catechetical components which must be integrated into the pre-marriage formation being given.

As the Guidelines indicate, the primary concern is catechetical. The Guidelines are intended to direct catechetical instruction and formation in faith which is given to couples in the Diocese of Pittsburgh in preparation for the sacrament of marriage. The Guidelines are given for the purposes of assisting priests, deacons, catechists, experts on specific topics, and all those involved in helping to prepare engaged couples to receive and live out the sacrament of marriage. Those who are called to the ministry of marriage formation share in a great privilege of being able to help prepare and form engaged couples to enter into and live the sacrament of marriage. All who teach in pre-marriage catechetical programs in the diocese should study these Guidelines carefully and even prayerfully.

The Marriage Preparation Policy of the Diocese of Pittsburgh speaks of the full range of concerns the church has in leading couples toward marriage. The present set of Catechetical Guidelines presents, in the light of recent church documents, more detailed guidance concerning the catechetical instruction and formation offered to couples who are planning to enter marriage. It is important that the Guidelines be seen within the wider context of the diocesan Marriage Preparation Policy.

The Guidelines outline the major concepts of this catechetical instruction under the four components found in catechesis: message, community, worship, and service. In the endnotes are the sources on which this information is based and references for further study. It is important and necessary that each program of marriage preparation integrates these four components and shows their interrelationship, always emphasizing the essential elements of Catholic doctrine.

The objectives of marriage preparation in the Diocese of Pittsburgh are the following:

1. To offer to those preparing for Christian Marriage sound and helpful assistance that will assure readiness for the sacrament of marriage and for the life that follows.

2. To assist the engaged to discern the vocation to marriage and family life.
3. To help the engaged in assuring that their family will be a community of life and love, a domestic church, which will contribute toward enriching the whole church.

4. To offer those preparing for marriage positive models and approaches in the establishing and nurturing of successful marriages.

5. To engage couples in a process of evangelization for the purpose of maturing and deepening their faith.

Presenters are to use these catechetical guidelines in the development of their talks, responses to questions, discussion activities, and so forth. The Guidelines presented here are generic in nature and certainly not exhaustive of all that could go into pre-marriage formation. They do represent the basic elements that must be covered in every marriage preparation course in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. These subjects are not to be treated cursorily, but in some real depth, and with sufficient time. These central subjects are:

1. (a) The meaning of marriage, the marriage commitment, and the personal reflection and freedom needed to enter this great vocation; (b) the sacramentality of marriage, and the assistance Christ offers to those entering marriage.

2. (a) Human and personal elements for marriage preparation, such as the skills and virtues needed for communication and for resolution of difficulties; (b) elements of Christian life that must be grasped freshly in preparing for the Christian vocation of married life.

3. (a) The Christian vision of love and sexuality, and of sexual morality and the importance of this for married life; (b) a serious education in natural family planning, and the ways that it serves marital chastity and love.

4. (a) Guiding couples to see the necessity of growing in love and in the human understanding and skills and virtues needed to make love grow in marriage; (b) showing why growth in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and in nourishing friendship with him through prayer, sacraments, and Christian living, also serves to make their love of each other grow.

5. (a) Education in the importance of the Christian family, and in the ways the couple can shape the home, the “domestic church,” as a reality guarding their love and faithfulness to their married vocation; (b) education in the rights and responsibilities of spouses and parents on ways in which cooperation among parents is needed to serve the Christian formation of homes, and the social responsibilities of the Christian family in the world.

Substantial time must be given to each section of these five general areas. It is recommended that each of these sections should be given at least 45 to 60 minutes when they are presented to groups of couples in a series of classes. When instructions are given to individual
couples, the time might reasonably be somewhat shorter; but the subject still must be presented in sufficient depth, covering the various elements indicated in the outlines below.

While the points noted in the five areas above are essential, and must be present in every form of marriage education, there are many other areas in which instruction can be extremely important. Those preparing for marriage might well be urged to have serious formation in a number of these other areas, such as work in financial responsibility and management. Those who work in marriage preparation should cooperate to help make accessible ever richer possibilities for the fuller formation of those entering marriage.

The contemporary world with its secular and pervasive media has made it difficult for many young people to have firm possession of their faith. Many of them are not practicing Catholics and have been presented with few good reasons for believing. But in the special time of grace when they are in love and wish to marry in the Church, a spirit of evangelization throughout the process can help greatly. If we help people to see good reasons for strengthening their faith, and how their impending marriage is intimately connected to their baptism, then all we teach them about sacrament, marriage, morality, and the Christian ground for hope that their marriage will prosper will make more sense and foster openness to God's grace.

While the thrust of this effort is primarily catechetical in nature, this document has provided a useful appendix containing supplemental helps to those involved in pre-marriage preparation, regarding canonical issues, adult education methodological issues, the liturgical celebration, special circumstances, and the stages of preparation, remote, proximate and immediate.
SECTION ONE
MESSAGE

A. The Sacrament of Marriage

The Fundamental Definition

1. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* presents this definition of the sacrament of marriage: “The matrimonial covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life is by its nature ordered toward the good of spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.”¹

2. Marriage is a sacrament. In a sacrament, God takes something natural and perceivable to the human senses (e.g. water, oil, wine, and bread), and gives it a higher meaning - a divine or transcendent meaning. Marriage was raised to a sacrament of the new covenant by the Lord Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. Marriage is a sacrament unique among other sacraments in that in the Latin rite the husband and wife administer it to one another. It is through the sacrament of marriage, as in the other sacrament of commitment, holy orders, that the individuals live out their baptismal call to holiness.

4. Christian marriage is a covenantal union of one man and one woman. A covenant differs from a contract in that it goes beyond the minimum rights and responsibilities guaranteed by law, which are specified and fully spelled out. A covenant calls for a generous love that will go beyond what one might expect or think possible. A couple must grow in mature and generous love to enable their marriage to become strong. A covenant calls for unconditional love. A couple empowered by Christ’s generous love forgives each other many times and goes forward in the face of many difficult circumstances. They have the grace and power to do what love requires, and to do it with joy and faithful love.

5. When a man and a woman love each other and wish to marry in Christ, their love, expressed in a covenantal promise, is an “outward sign” of the love Christ has for us. The sacrament really “confers grace.” It causes their love to be touched by God’s love, so that they will be able to meet every challenge generously.²

6. It is most important before the marriage ceremony for the engaged couple to discuss as fully as possible how they will live their faith. While preparing to celebrate the sacrament of marriage, the engaged couple is to be encouraged to full participation in the life of the church, usually through their local parish.

7. The Eucharist is essential to help the engaged couple to prepare for marriage and to nourish their life together. The Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith. Regular weekly participation in Sunday Mass and reception of Holy Communion is to be
encouraged throughout pre-marriage preparation. Experiencing the great love of the Eucharistic sacrifice can give the couple, individually and as a couple, strength and generosity for the many sacrifices necessary in married life.³

8. Regular reception of the sacrament of reconciliation helps form a solid preparation for marriage and for their life together. The sacrament of reconciliation can strengthen their own ability to love and forgive each other.

The Sources of Marriage

1. Creation. Scripture begins with an account of the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God. God is the author of marriage. Marriage is part of the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of God. As God created man and woman, their love for each other becomes an image of the total and never failing love of God for humans.⁴

2. Redemption. Every person experiences the bitter effects of sin in the world. Relationships, including marriage, were disordered by the human choice of sin. The Son of God, becoming human and giving his life, re-ordered our relationships with God. Jesus's first miracle, at the wedding at Cana, was a confirmation of the goodness of marriage. In his public preaching, Jesus without wavering taught the original meaning of the marital union of man and woman as God willed it. With God's grace, it is possible for men and women to live marriage as God intended.⁵

Necessary Elements

1. A couple who wishes to marry in the Catholic Church needs to do so in the sense in which Christian faith understands marriage, and not some other kind of union.

2. Freedom of Consent. A man and woman who wish to enter marriage must be free to express their consent. "To be free" means not being under constraint; not being already bound by any religious vow or previous valid marriage; not being pressured by partner, parent, or any other individual and not being incapable due to immaturity or fear. Consent to enter marriage as the Church understands the nature of marriage is an act of the will. If that freedom to act is not possible, the marriage is invalid. The promises made in marriage exclude entirely the possibility of divorce and remarriage. A decision to exclude the possibility of children from marriage would also invalidate the consent.⁶

3. Unity and Indissolubility. Unity in marriage means one man and one woman joined together. It includes and yet goes beyond union in one flesh. Unity must be deeply personal leading to the formation of one heart and one soul. To foster such a unity, indissolubility (an unbreakable union or permanence) is essential. Unity and indissolubility call for continual growth through day to day faithfulness and self-giving, through recognizing equal personal dignity and through mutual and unreserved affection. Living
out the sacrament of marriage means that the couple needs to work actively not to allow any person or thing to divide them.  

4. **Fidelity**. Married love requires total fidelity. Faithfulness can seem difficult, if not impossible, for it means to commit oneself to another human being for life. The best examples for fidelity are found in God's faithfulness to his covenant and in Christ's faithfulness to his church. The fidelity of God makes possible the couple's own commitment to fidelity. The grace that comes to the couple through the sacrament enables them to live such faithfulness and witness it to others.  

5. **Fruitfulness**. Marriage is made for the good of the couple and for the procreation and education of children. In the creation story, we learn God gives man and woman a share in his creative work, telling them to "be fruitful and multiply." Children are the greatest gift of marriage and contribute immensely to the good of the couple. It is hard to remain selfish when one has children. Even couples who are unable to have children are called to be fruitful through acts of charity, justice, hospitality, and sacrifice.  

6. **Sacramental Grace**. The sacrament of matrimony gives a couple the grace to love each other as Christ loves his church. Grace is the free and undeserved help God gives us to respond to him. Such help is both desirable for and necessary to a good marriage. It is something a couple needs to pray for daily. Grace perfects the human love of the couple. Grace gives them strength and leads them to holiness.  

B. **Married Life**

**The Vocation of Marriage**

1. **The vocation of marriage**. Marriage is a divine vocation with tremendous dignity. It is a way of life to which people are called by God to live a graced life.  

**Self-giving**

1. Faith is grounded in God's self-revelation, especially in Christ Jesus. In coming to know ourselves, we recognize God's revelation in our lives. God is Triune, who always exists in relationship. God's love is always extending outward. We in turn are called to extend ourselves in love to one another. Man and woman made in the image of God are called into relationship with one another.  

2. **Self-knowledge** is the virtue that allows one to accept, love, and care for self as one is today. It enables one to know honestly one's own heart and mind, and one's limitations and hopes. Intimacy between the spouses becomes stronger as each acquires more mature self-knowledge.  

3. Self-knowledge also includes a clear understanding of the habits and behaviors one brings to the marriage. This entails an honest assessment of one's own personality, of how one's
family tended to communicate, resolve conflicts, avoid or confront problem issues, and how one expresses feelings of intimacy and autonomy.

4. Self-giving entails the willingness to reveal one's self to another. Self-giving includes the cultivation of virtues and the sharing of heart, mind, spirit, and body.

5. Mutual self-giving. From the beginning of any marriage each couple is called to work toward a growth in unity. Each should seek to think less in terms of "I, me, mine" and more in terms of "we, us, and ours." 

6. This change of thinking will take place in several areas of the couple's relationship, including the use of money and time. Deeper adjustment issues may concern each person's priorities and values, emotional responsiveness, and need for sexual expression.

7. The challenge for the couple, and part of their growth in marital spirituality, is to create a "we" that is an expression of both "I's," where each of their identities is tested and expanded, perhaps even changed, but never destroyed. Mutual self-giving involves a willingness to make sacrifices for the good of the other and for the sake of the children and the whole family.

8. Children play a crucial role in bringing the individual to greater consciousness of the other. The openness to children shows significant maturity in the move from "I" to "we." Long before marriage, partners should think prayerfully of the children they hope to have, and of their concern for the education of children in faith and in human values.

9. Attention to one's family of origin can be very valuable. It enables both parties to recognize their unique differences, assumptions, history, prejudices, and ideals, all of which they have largely received from their family of origin. Reflection on one's family of origin and on the whole system of both families helps the couple to understand emotional highs and lows during their marriage. Decisions will need to be made as to what practices will form the couple's own children.

10. One instrument to better understand the family is a genogram. A genogram is a diagram of the family tree through which the couple can look at their families and their systems of relationships. Further information about the genogram can be found in the literature of family studies.

Sin and Repentance

1. The disorder we notice in the world, life in general, and our own relationships evidenced in discord, domination, infidelity, jealousy, conflicts, hatred and separation does not stem from the nature of man and woman, nor from the nature of their relations, but from sin.
2. “To heal the wounds of sin, man and woman need the help of the grace that God in his infinite mercy never refuses them. Without his help man and woman cannot achieve the union of their lives for which God created them in the beginning.”

3. Jesus Christ is the source of grace. With grace, a married couple is meant to help one another gain holiness in their married life together and in opening themselves to and educating children. The goal of the husband and wife is to bring each other to tender and selfless love, a foretaste of the joys of heaven.

4. It is the grace of God that heals our lives and gives us the power to live in generous love. Those approaching marriage need to reflect on and know well what grace is and what it means to be in the state of grace. Being in the state of grace gives the couple the strength to take up their crosses in daily life. It enables them to begin again when they have fallen, to forgive each other, to share burdens, and to give over one’s own selfishness out of reverence for Christ. Being in the state of grace allows the couple to love each other with God’s own love.

5. Acknowledging one’s own sinfulness and sins is a vital part of self-knowledge. Mutual self-giving allows one to see the need for repentance and includes the ability to extend forgiveness to and accept the forgiveness of one’s spouse.

6. Seeking spiritual counsel when it seems appropriate, and regularly making use of the sacrament of reconciliation are two vital steps in living the sacrament of matrimony in a grace-filled, healthy and life-giving way. Preparation for the sacrament of penance includes an examination of conscience in the light of faith, true sorrow for one’s hurtful thoughts and actions, openness to God’s word and action in one’s life, confession of one’s sins to a priest, reception of absolution, and a sincere desire to make reparation for one’s sins.

7. Likewise, participation in the sacrament of reconciliation is an important part of preparation for the sacrament of matrimony itself. Catholics have a duty to be in the state of grace when they receive the sacrament of marriage.

Moral Conscience

1. Each person has in his or her own heart a law inscribed by God. Conscience is a person’s most secret core and sanctuary. There an individual is alone with God, whose voice echoes in one’s depths.

2. “Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, enjoins each person at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil. It bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn, and it welcomes the commandments. When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.”
3. Developing a well-informed conscience is the responsibility of every Christian.

4. A good moral conscience is not developed in isolation. One develops an informed conscience seeking to know and to live by the will of Christ. Conscience grows stronger by reading Scripture, especially the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament, studying and becoming more familiar with the teaching of the Catholic Church, especially in the area of morality, seeking the assistance of a confessor or spiritual director, learning from the example of holy Christians, and by prayer.

5. It must be made clear that conscience is not a "feeling," but an intelligent, prudential judgment that a Christian makes in the light of faith and the Church's teaching. Christ continues to teach in the church today until the end of time. Like all members of the church, engaged and married couples have a duty to accept the teachings of Christ and grow in the knowledge and practice of the Catholic faith.

6. An informed conscience is necessary for making the many moral decisions that will face a married couple throughout their life together. It is liberating to lead lives in conformity with the saving teaching of the Lord. Conforming to the spirit of the world, especially when it is contrary to Catholic values, always proves disappointing.

C. Sexuality

A Catholic Vision

1. The Catholic vision of love and sexuality is true and liberating. Sexuality is a wonderful gift of God. It was part of God's design that we are created male and female. Sexual intercourse in marriage between the husband and wife, when it is used to express the total gift of each to the other in generous love, is ever sanctifying, and enables couples to grow in love and holiness.20

Conjugal Love

1. The sexual act is a physical sign of the bond of marriage. It is the physical expression of the total gift of self that spouses give to each other. Lovemaking is an essential aspect of the couple's spirituality. The sexual relationship will be most satisfying when it is an expression of the special friendship of a husband and wife.21

2. God is love. God wants to be with the couple at all times, through their courtship and engagement, on their wedding day, and throughout their marriage. God who created human beings out of love also calls people to love, which is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. God's love is free, faithful, unending and sacrificial. Similarly, the couple's love must be free, faithful, permanent, and sacrificial.22
3. Conjugal love has four essential elements. It is total, giving one's whole self to one's spouse. It is exclusive, requiring an undivided faithfulness of heart and mind as well as body. Spouses always seek the good of the other. It is faithful, dedicated and constant in keeping one's given promise on one's wedding day. It is fruitful, and accepts children lovingly from God. The love of man and woman in the sacrament of marriage extends outward to family, neighbor, church and the world.

4. Sexuality was meant to serve life and love. It enriches the couple's relationship and makes them more closely united, and it can result in the gift of children. In this procreative aspect, the couple acts as God's partners in the ongoing mystery of creation.

5. Conjugal acts are directed to total self-giving and openness to new life.

6. Total self-giving involves all elements of the person. It includes the appeal of body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, giving of spirit and will, mutual and unreserved affection. Total self-giving is aimed at forming one heart and soul.

7. Openness to new life means that in every marital act the couple must be open to the possibility of new life. Marriage of its nature is aimed at the responsible procreation and education of children.23

The Virtue of Chastity

1. All baptized Christians are called to live a life of chaste love. All the followers of Jesus are called to lead a chaste life in keeping with their particular states of life. The virtue of chastity is a positive experience of grace. Embracing chastity is a discipline, one that actually makes life easier and more joyful.24

2. Premarital chastity. All those outside the married state are called to live chastity in continence. They should reserve for marriage the expression of affection that belongs to married love. They will help each other grow in chastity.25

3. Reciprocal fidelity. Mutual fidelity needs to begin with those who are engaged. Chastity during engagement manifests the love and respect each person has for the other. It can also be a time of testing. It is also an opportunity to grow in mutual respect, to learn fidelity, and to look toward the hope of living out marital fidelity with love. With prayer and God's help, this time can form an excellent foundation for marriage and growth in the discipline of chastity.26

4. As we are reminded in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, it is through conjugal chastity that a couple bears witness to the mystery of God's fidelity. The sacrament of matrimony enables man and woman to enter into Christ's fidelity for his Church.27

5. The issue of cohabitation. A couple is said to “cohabit” when, without having made the promises and commitment of marriage, they begin to live together as if they were married.
6. In recent decades the number of couples who decide to live together without being married (sometimes with the intention of marrying later) has increased greatly. Of course, the fact that significant numbers of Catholics commit fornication (i.e., engage in sexual intercourse without having taken up the commitment of marriage), or begin to cohabit (i.e., enter a state of regularly engaging in acts of fornication while residing together in one residence) does not change the immoral nature or the consequences of such acts.

7. The church has always taught that acts of fornication are objectively mortally sinful, and that it is therefore gravely wrong to “live together,” where one plans to engage habitually in acts of fornication. Such acts and practices are wrong, because they are opposed to the practice of chastity of single persons who are preparing to marry.

8. Cohabitation is a temporary arrangement, and is opposed to the public, permanent commitment to fidelity of a man and woman in the sacrament of marriage. Living together gives a false impression of permanency. It is important for priests and others who are preparing engaged couples for marriage to inquire into the willingness of the engaged couple to enter into a lifetime commitment. Likewise it is important to stress the support Christ gives to married couples in the sacrament to live their vows with faithfulness and love.

9. One who is graced with faith in Christ has a duty to form his or her conscience properly, and in accord with what Christ teaches in the Gospel and through the church. Just as one who engages in racist practices, or injustices against the poor, could not be excused by saying simply, “My conscience permits this,” so also one cannot say, “My conscience finds fornication permissible.” Conscience must be formed in truth and in faith, and one misunderstands entirely the nature of a Christian conscience if one thinks that it is permissible to reject the saving teaching of Christ, if we can manage to make ourselves feel innocent in doing so. To enter a state of cohabitation ordinarily means entering a deliberately accepted practice of engaging regularly in fornication, which is mortally sinful behavior. Even if in some unusual case, a couple would intend to live together and not engage in acts of fornication, they are not likely to realize how difficult and even strange such an arrangement would be, or to realize that they would give the impression that they are fornicating, and ordinarily would be a source of scandal.

10. Catholic teaching in this matter brings rich blessings to those couples who willingly accept it. To prepare for a happy marriage one needs to grow in that strength which chaste love brings. To engage in gravely sinful kinds of behavior, and urge one’s beloved to do so as well, does not increase the prospects for an enduring Catholic marriage.

11. Those who help to prepare engaged couples for the sacrament of marriage should seek to liberate them from the grave harms in cohabitation. If a couple refuses to give up cohabitation, it may be necessary to inquire with them more deeply on whether they understand the nature of the permanent commitment of marriage, and whether they are willing and able to undertake it.
Offenses against Chastity

1. The responsibilities pointed out in Christian sexual morality are not arbitrary rules. These duties unfold the requirements of authentic love. The world today urges people to treat sexuality as something relatively trivial and teaches that sexual acts may be engaged in even in ways that act against the good things for which God made sexuality. The teaching of the church is rooted in the Gospel and is necessary to guard good marriages and strong homes. Therefore, in a clear and adequate manner, the following issues of marital sexual ethics must be addressed during preparation for marriage.

2. Abortion. Scripture tells us, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you and before you were born I consecrated you." Life is sacred. Human life is to be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. The church has affirmed the moral evil of abortion from the first century onward. 30

3. Adultery. Adultery violates marital fidelity. It not only harms the spouses but endangers the welfare of children. It is forbidden in the sixth commandment and the Christian Scriptures. 31

4. Contraception. The church teaches, and has always taught, that contraception is always objectively and a seriously wrong act. It separates the two purposes of marriage, unitive and procreative. Contraception prevents conjugal lovemaking from being a total gift of self, as couples are holding back an important part of themselves. In addition, certain contraceptives can be abortifacients. Love as God intends it always defends life. 32

5. Homosexuality. Engaging in homosexual acts is contrary to the natural law. Homosexual acts "close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstance can they be approved." Those with tendencies toward homosexuality can, by God’s grace and with the love and assistance of the Christian community, come to lead good and generous lives in chastity. 33

6. Incest. A grave and always intrinsically evil act is the rape of children by parents or by those who are responsible for their care and education. This is a scandal and does irreparable harm to the physical and moral integrity of the young, who remain scarred for life. Incest also corrupts the family and its relationships. 34

7. Artificial generation of children. Artificial insemination, fertilization, and use of a surrogate uterus are gravely immoral and infringe on a child’s right to be born of a father and mother both known to the child and bound to each other through marriage. Such acts also violate the spouses’s rights to become father and mother only through sexual intercourse with each other. Techniques that involve only the couple may be less reprehensible but are still morally unacceptable because they separate procreation from the marital act. 35
8. **Lust.** Lustful thoughts and desires isolate sexual pleasure and separate it from the unitive and procreative purposes of marriage. Lust can also be an example of infidelity of the heart even if not acted upon.36

9. **Masturbation.** Masturbation seeks sexual pleasure outside the sexual relationship of marriage. It is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action, because it is contrary to the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation. Masturbation is objectively gravely evil, although the subjective guilt of it may be lessened by human weaknesses.37

10. **Pornography.** Pornographic material (whether books, magazines, movies, video tapes, etc.) focus on sexual gratification outside the marital relationship. Pornography offends against chastity because it perverts the true affections of the heart and does grave injury to the dignity of the participants. It is a grave offense, which offends individuals as well as society.38

11. **Prostitution.** Prostitution reduces the individual to an instrument of sexual pleasure. It removes the marital act from the marital relationship. It harms society, as well as individuals, both the one used as well as the one doing the using.39

12. **Sterilization.** Direct sterilization is an unacceptable means of birth control. It denies one of the purposes of marriage and blocks openness to new life. Legitimate intentions do not justify sterilization. Unless done for strictly therapeutic medical reasons, sterilization is also a violation of respect for bodily integrity.40

D. **Children**

**Responsible Parenthood**

1. Married couples are called to give life. Spouses share in the creative power and fatherhood of God. The Second Vatican Council states, "Married couples should regard it as their proper mission to transmit human life and to educate their children; they should realize that they are thereby cooperating with the love of God the Creator and are, in a certain sense, its interpreters."41

2. Openness to new life begins with the very inception of marriage for the couple. As a matter of fact couples should bring right attitudes toward new life with them to marriage. Children are not an "add-on" to married love. They spring from the very heart of mutual giving, and every marital act must be open to new life. Delaying childbearing for an unreasonable length of time or until all adjustments have been made or a certain stage of development has been accomplished is neither advisable nor acceptable from a faith perspective.42

3. Welcoming children into their marriage will express the couple's faith in God's plan for their marriage. Children are marriage's supreme gift. Children also keep the love fresh and growing.
4. Having children fulfills the couple's natural impulse toward generativity - to make more life, to reach beyond themselves. Children multiply the love between spouses. The love between spouses naturally finds its fulfillment in this way.

5. Before they are married, couples need to think seriously and discuss their plans for having children and raising them.

6. God calls couples to be "responsible parents." This does not mean that they must bring forth as many children as nature would allow. It does mean to remain open to the possibility of new life in every marital act.

7. Responsible parenthood means that considering physical, financial, psychological, and social factors, a couple must decide when and how often to have children. Discerning God's will for them and their family, and always respecting the moral law, they decide whether to have more children or to avoid having children for the time being or for an intermediate period of time. Since the couple's fertility will exist over many years of their marriage, they need to be aware that making decisions regarding family planning will be a continual responsibility carried out in a spirit of docility to God.43

**Natural Family Planning**

1. Natural family planning is a morally acceptable way to regulate conception by the timing of sexual intercourse. Using NFP, the couple learns to recognize the times during a woman's fertility cycle when pregnancy is possible.

2. The church teaches that all married and engaged couples should be taught realistically and thoroughly about natural family planning. Engaged couples need help to see how radically different this is from contraception. The church's teaching regarding natural family planning must be presented clearly, positively, and enthusiastically to every engaged couple as part of pre-marriage education.44

3. Natural family planning, as a method of both conceiving children and avoiding pregnancy, should be presented to all engaged couples. The special advantages of NFP, including the positive effects it has on a couple's relationship, need to be explored.
   - It is morally acceptable and in accord with the teachings of the Church.
   - It helps bring couples together in many ways, enlarging the commitment to each other and the full acceptance of all that love calls for.
   - It enriches the couple’s communication and their relationship.
   - It is natural. It works with very high effectiveness without devices, chemicals, or medicines. There are no harmful side effects.
   - It is not expensive.
Couples should be urged to receive full instruction from a certified NFP instructor who is skilled in the methods of contemporary natural family planning and in the faith vision that illumines it. Family planning is always the responsibility of both partners. Couples are encouraged to be trained in the NFP method together.45

SECTION TWO
COMMUNITY

A. The Role of the Church

The Teaching Church

1. Jesus Christ remains with the Church from the time of the apostles to the present, until the end of time. Christ continues to teach in the church through the successors to the apostles in pastoral office. In recent years the church has contributed much to the world in terms of teaching regarding human dignity and life, marriage, family, and human sexuality. In these ways, the church is able to prepare couples well for the sacrament of marriage and family life.46

The Sacramental and Serving Church47

1. Members of the Church celebrate the sacrament of marriage. The couple prepares not just for a wedding day, but for a marriage lasting a whole lifetime.

2. The sacrament of marriage is situated within the community of the church. The couple needs to experience the church not simply in its institutional sense, but more personally as a community of “fellow journeyers” who are committed not only to helping the couple prepare for marriage, but also to stand ready to be there for them as a source of continuing encouragement and support along the way.

3. Most couples experience the Catholic Church in and through their parish. The church, through the parish, its priests, ministers and assembly, assists the couple in marriage preparation, liturgy planning, support, and ongoing reflection. A special pastoral service which parishes can offer newly married couples in their first years together is opportunities to reflect on faith and their experience of married life.
B. **Family as Domestic Church**

1. *Living out God's Word.* Each family is a domestic church, where the Word of God is proclaimed, nurtured, and lived out. The qualities of God's love for each of us, especially unconditional acceptance and forgiveness, are to be found most fundamentally in the family.  

2. *Center of prayer.* Parents are the primary teachers and role models for their children. They teach values, beliefs, and attitudes by what they say and by what they do. A special way of teaching God's love is by having simple and regular times of prayer as a family. It is also important to teach and follow the regular rhythm of the church's liturgical year, the weekly celebration of the Eucharist and the seasons and feasts.

3. *Family as educator.* Children are a natural and supernatural expression of the couple's love for each other and for God. Parents are the primary teachers of Christian faith for their children. In a loving family, the children will develop their first image of God. The parish, especially through the Sunday Eucharist, the liturgy, and the religious education programs, supports the education of children and families.

4. The family's openness to children is a great blessing. Raising children will challenge the couple to expand their own capacity for generous love and personal growth and maturity.

5. *Role in society.* The family is the basic unit of society. Families build up the reign of God in society by teaching and carrying out the virtues of hospitality, justice, charity, service to those in need, and participation in government. Likewise, the family is where the children will best develop their sense of identity, self-esteem, being needed and loved, concern for others, and security.

6. *Participation in the communal life of the Church.* Parents teach the best lessons by their example and witness. Parents need to involve their families in the communal life of the Church throughout their marriage.

7. *Family, by nature a community.* Marriage is a profound personal commitment of spouses to each other. But marriage also initiates a new society, a family, looking forward to both new young life and a new social life of the home. The greatest happiness of men and women is normally found in their homes. The family serves not only parents and children but is other-directed serving the whole of society and the Church.

C. **Growing in Christian Marriage**

**Stages in Marriage**

1. In married life the couple is called to grow. Human wisdom and Christian experience are both necessary for growth in maturity. Over time, married life offers the possibility of each partner growing in Christ's life and in their love for each other. All couples go
through similar stages of marriage. Knowing and recognizing these stages helps the couple to successfully adjust. It is helpful to present these stages to assist couples in their journey of faith.\footnote{51}

2. \textit{Stage one, the early years.} Marriage begins with a romantic phase, a phase of infatuation, filled with incredible excitement and discovery. At the same time, there is a tendency to see one another in an idealized image that does not portray who the other truly is.

3. \textit{Stage two, disillusionment.} This is a time when disappointment and hurt are felt as the couple is confronted with the divergence between their ideals for the marriage and the reality they find. Unexpected problems, illness, unemployment, or other difficulties can sometimes cloud the couple’s vision of love for one another.

4. \textit{Stage three, renewal of commitment.} A more realistic commitment and authentic love can develop when the couple realizes that each of them has traits that really distress the other, but each of them also has very wonderful traits which please the other. The state of committed love is one in which commitment allows each spouse to cherish the other, even in times of hurt and disappointment, and to accept the things about the other that cannot be realistically changed. This gives each the strength to challenge the other on behaviors and habits which can be modified, and find a compromise when that is called for.

5. \textit{Stage of growth in intimacy.} Growth in mutual intimacy starts on the intellectual level, then deepens through the gift of sexuality. True intimacy is experienced when each spouse trusts the other enough to allow him or herself to be truly known, revealing both good and bad. This is possible when each spouse realizes that he or she is loved no matter what.

6. \textit{Stage of parenthood.} The birth of the first child will be the beginning of a whole new stage in the couple's journey. At the outset of their relationship, the couple's gaze was toward each other. But after an appropriate period of time devoted to mutual intimacy, their focus will expand and turn outward, thus fulfilling their natural impulse toward creativity -- to make more life, to reach beyond themselves. It is important to note that with an attitude of openness to new life, this stage may coincide with any of the above stages.

7. This same movement to an outward focus can also be realized by couples who for whatever reason cannot or do not have children. In God's providence, they will be called upon to choose other forms of fruitfulness. Mutual assistance of couples, and continuing education, are invaluable in attaining the growth all married couples need in the vocation of marriage.

\textbf{Communication in Marriage}\footnote{52}

1. Effective communication involves growth in holiness and virtue. Good communication is rooted in one’s ongoing conversion to life in Jesus Christ. It involves far more than skill in the art of communication or an occasional willingness to give up insistence on one’s own
way. It involves cultivating a spirit of generosity, a willingness to take in not only the concerns of one's spouse but also a genuine willingness to look for and listen to what God is asking for the best of both spouses and the entire family.

2. *Maturation of values.* Communication is a process of growth. Working toward a certain maturity of values is necessary for good communication. This effort involves cultivating generosity and other Christian virtues, such as peace, patience, courage, endurance, hope, and a willingness to make sacrifices for a greater good.\(^5\)

3. *Friendship* is one such value. Marriage is enhanced when spouses are also good friends. *Dialogue* is another such value, which entails the ability to open oneself to another and receive the openness of the other in return.

4. Marriage involves *sharing and negotiation.* Couples need to make wise and right decisions, guided by faith and in conformity to God's will. These are not just personal agreements as to a best course of action. Decisions must always be guided by one's Christian faith and prayer.

5. God is always speaking to his people. This comes through Scripture, sacraments, the teachings of the church, and the lived experience of holy men and women. The voice of God is most clearly understood as self-giving love. Communication in the sacrament of marriage should model itself on this self-giving love.

6. *An essential skill.* Communication is an essential skill for marriage. Good communication is needed in every aspect of a relationship in order to build a successful marriage. Important communication skills for marriage are listening, empathy, and self-disclosure.

7. *Listening* means that one actively listens to the other, alert to the full context of the other's message, both verbal and nonverbal. Each partner pays attention to what the other is communicating by having a receptive, rather than a passive, attitude. When listening, it is important to pay attention to the feelings as well as the content of the communication.

8. *Empathy* allows one to understand the other's message from his/her own point of view, without filtering it through the listener's own attitudes, opinions, and defensive mechanisms.

9. *Self-disclosure* means overcoming one's hesitancy to reveal intimate information about self, whether due to fear, doubts or shame.

10. *Verbal* communication is how one says something and how one hears what is being said. It includes the relative ease with which the couple exchanges thoughts and feelings with each other. It also includes each partner's interest in truly understanding the other's point of view, not just planning a rebuttal. With good communication, each partner is able to accurately express his/her feelings and to actively listen to what the other is trying to communicate.
11. *Non-verbal* communication is sometimes referred to as body language. It includes gestures, facial expressions, how one carries oneself, etc. Experts in the field of communication say people communicate more information non-verbally than verbally.

12. In an analogous way, the need for quality communication in a marriage is modeled in the communication of the ritual action of our sacraments. When the Christian community comes together in prayer, we listen attentively to the Word of God, we open ourselves to conversion, and we are present to our sisters and brothers through gesture, song and silence. The human dimension of our sacraments demands good communication skills so that we are more open to God's communication with us.

13. The couple needs to be aware that the many forms and opportunities of communication in a relationship will affect other aspects of their relationship. For example, a couple's general verbal and non-verbal communication will influence their sexual relationship and their ability to deal with conflict.

Dealing with Conflict

1. *Attitudes and Dispositions*. Every relationship faces times of conflict. What makes a sacramental marriage different is the perspective of faith the couple brings to dealing with conflict. Our age encourages much selfishness. It usually focuses on what I desire, on things and acquisitions, on the drive for success that can bring a wedge into the marital relationship. Couples are encouraged to face every conflict with a spirit of generosity. Skills can be most helpful in working out peaceful solutions. However, they are only means to ensure that each spouse values his/her partner. Each married couple is called by God to share life and mutual well being. Dealing with conflict demands a generous love.

2. Conflicts will arise as the result of perceived differences between expectations for the marriage and its reality. As part of preparation for marriage, couples need to discuss ways they will face typical marital challenges.

3. Two basic responses to conflict are *avoidance* and *engagement*. Avoidance, while it may arise out of noble motives, such as fear that admitting a conflict could harm the relationship, does not solve real problems. Engagement means the couple is willing to confront areas of conflict. It can be beneficial if it leads to a resolution of the difficulty. It is destructive if it only escalates the tension.

4. It is necessary to find the right time and place for bringing up issues on which spouses disagree. Where there is conflict, there must be found a way of reconciliation.

5. *Reconciliation*. Forgiveness is the core Christian virtue, and within the sacrament of marriage, the couple will be called upon to reflect to each other the quality of God's love that is accepting and forgiving. Taking advantage of the sacrament of reconciliation frequently can be very helpful in wisely facing the difficulties of married life, and
encourage other, human expressions of forgiveness. Mature, forgiving love takes considerable effort.

D. Practical Considerations

Family Life and Work

1. It is important to affirm that in every decision about work and finances, the context is the union in Christ of husband and wife. The book of Genesis offers this instruction from God, “It is not good that man should be alone.” The wife is his equal and counterpart. Together they are to work out the practical decisions regarding their marriage and family.54

2. Newly married couples must make many important decisions. One of these is whether one or both partners will work outside the home. In the cases where the couples decide that one spouse will stay home and care for the family while the other will work outside the home, it is important that such couples be supported in their decision.55

3. It is likewise important that the spouse who stays at home is valued for that important contribution, and that together the partners come to some mutual agreement about shared responsibilities.

4. In today’s world it is increasingly the case that both husband and wife have a career. This reality presents challenges in a marriage and in the formation of children. Balancing career and marriage is a difficult task. Building a good marriage and raising children takes a lot of time, as does advancement in a career. It is especially important that the couple makes their needs known to each other and is willing to compromise for the good of the marriage and the family. In this situation, Christian marriage calls couples to make their marriage and their children the priority, as they are faced with difficult decisions regarding work.

5. Likewise, traditional male and female roles are changing in our society. Partners need to negotiate who will perform the various tasks necessary for the smooth running of the home. In all decisions, it is important to recall and reclaim the Christian virtues mentioned above.

Finances

1. It is important to recognize that money and finances are means to an end. They should be discussed by engaged and married couples in light of the values of Christian marriage and the principles of Catholic social doctrine on the economy.

2. The transition from being single to being married calls for a paradigm shift in the way money is managed. Whether the partners come from a family of "spenders" or "savers," whether each is accustomed to paying cash or buying on credit, how each views such
things as saving for a house, finishing an education, helping older parents, etc., are areas where the couple will need to share, negotiate and compromise.

3. Important financial topics (such as making and living within a budget, making a will, and values such as sharing with those who are less fortunate) will need to be discussed and acted upon. Presentations by experts in the fields of personal finance, work and careers should be part of pre-marriage preparation.

The Issue of Domestic Abuse

1. While it is not a pleasant topic or one which a couple preparing for marriage would readily want to talk about, domestic violence has become an ever-growing reality in our society. The Catholic Church condemns abusive behavior in all its forms, and encourages those who are at risk to act to ensure their own safety and that of their children. People must know that abusive behavior is not the norm and is never acceptable. Priests and other leaders in pre-marriage formation should be educated in noticing signs in the behaviors of engaged couples that may be predictors of abusive behavior. 56

SECTION THREE
WORSHIP

A. The Vocation of Marriage

1. Marriage is a vocation. God initially calls two people together into a sanctified union and then continues to call them to a life of mutual sanctification. Couples say "yes" to God's call by living their marriage as an image of God's love, showing that love overcomes sin. They are responsible to God for each other, for those their lives touch, and for the care of the world. Marriage lived according to God's plan is an act of worship.

2. Couples need to pray that God blesses and preserves their union and helps them to grow in communion as the years unfold. 57

3. Parents provide the first image of God for their children and school them in basic attitudes of prayerfulness and participation in the sacraments.

4. All vocations are intimately connected to one another. Vocations to religious life and priesthood depend on the existence of healthy families to foster them as well as parents who value, are open to, and promote a vowed religious life or ordination in the priesthood. Likewise, families need to open their doors and be a family to those who choose or find themselves in a single life. 58
B. Participation in Sacramental Life

1. *Baptism and Confirmation.* Some engaged couples approach marriage as active Catholics. Others find marriage formation has been something of a return to the appreciation and practice of their faith. All engaged couples need to stir up in their hearts the faith and life of grace Christ gave us in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, and draw on this life of grace in new situations.  

2. *Eucharist.* As has been said before, regular, weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist is necessary for growth in Christ and full participation in the church. All engaged couples are strongly urged to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion regularly, to participate actively, and to grow in conscious awareness of the richness of sacramental life. Regular, weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist also serves as an excellent example for children in practicing the Catholic faith.

3. *Reconciliation.* The sacrament of reconciliation is a most fruitful source of God’s forgiving love. Engaged and married couples are to be encouraged to participate regularly. It is important that marriage preparation catechists not only urge others to go to confession, but that they themselves do so, and be willing to share their experience of this expression of Christ’s love. The regular exercise of examination of conscience also serves couples well as they try to grow in love in their marital relationship.

4. *Parish.* Engaged couples are to be encouraged to join a parish soon after their wedding ceremony. Parishes could hold regular gatherings of hospitality to welcome newly married couples into their community. It is most often in the parish church that married couples are nourished by the Word of God and strengthened by the sacraments. It is here also that they and their children can grow in knowledge of the faith and see opportunities for serving the church and the world in works of charity and justice.

5. *Preparing the Wedding Liturgy.* An important part of preparing for marriage for each engaged couple is prayerfully planning the ceremony itself. The priest or deacons who will preside at the wedding liturgy should strongly encourage the engaged couple to choose the readings, prayers, music, petitions, devotional options, etc., in conjunction with the parish staff. Participation in the liturgy’s planning will allow the couple to invest themselves in the ceremony. It is also a moment of evangelization and catechesis in the riches of our liturgical tradition and prayer. This preparation can help the couple to grow in understanding about the living out of the covenant into which they are about to enter. (See Appendix C.)

C. A Spirituality of Marriage

1. Couples need a solid spiritual life to face the challenges of marriage. A spirituality of marriage finds God not as existing apart from the couple. Rather, the couple experiences
God's presence within their relationship, as someone very close to them and concerned with their marital hopes.

2. Those who enter marriage are entering a "journey of faith." Their love, their generosity, and God's grace can enable them to start the journey well. But it is a journey. Formation in marriage is itself ongoing. The couple must develop and grow in their spirituality with the years.

3. Married spirituality is concerned with and sanctifies the daily lived experience of the couple, as they become increasingly aware of the sacredness of the ordinary. Marital spirituality helps couples to see God's presence in every aspect of their lives together — their communications, their adjustments, their love-making, and their sharing of joys and sorrows.

4. Growth in spirituality requires an openness to make use of opportunities for adult Christian education, such as classes on growth in faith and Christian living, Catholic parenting, assistance for special difficulties, Bible study, and faith-sharing groups. These are important for all who wish to have strong and growing relationships.

D. Prayer

1. Married spirituality includes learning to pray together and belonging to a parish community. Couples need to develop their own individual prayer life, to pray together as a couple, and to pray as a family when children come along.  

2. The family is the first school of prayer for children. It is important to create times and space for prayer. It is likewise helpful to engage in informal prayer during the day and throughout the week, integrating one's life with God.

3. Basic prayer includes an attitude of gratefulness, praising and acknowledging God for the gift of life and the good things he gives us.

4. Another basic form of prayer is petition or asking. We implore God's light and strength for times of difficulty and suffering.

5. Christian Hope. Faith and spirituality require a basic trust in God. This trust goes beyond the belief that God can and does bring about good. Such optimism relies on the belief that God will give us the strength to face whatever lies ahead. This trust needs to be reflected in individual and family prayer, and our choices. We look to the classic scripture passage of the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. "They do not reap or sow, are here today and gone tomorrow, yet Solomon in all his splendor was not arrayed as such as these."  

6. Families need to pray not only for their own blessing and spiritual growth but for God's blessing on and growth of all vocations. Parents need to respect the life to which God
calls their children, and encourage their children to follow it. Their conviction must be that the first vocation of every Christian is to follow Christ.\textsuperscript{62}

7. Couples need to pray, individually and together, to the Holy Spirit for guidance as Christians, as a married couple, as parents, and for the education and formation of their children.\textsuperscript{63}

\section*{SECTION FOUR
SERVICE}

\subsection*{A. Family Extending Outward}

1. Family is by its very nature a community. Marriage is geared toward forming a community, within which the procreation and education of children occurs. Parents reach beyond themselves to new life. The family together reaches out to the wider world.\textsuperscript{64}

2. The family prepares children to enter into the full life of the Church and also allows the universal Church to enter the lives of the new generation. The family is the first and most vital cell of society.

3. One way families exercise the baptismal call of all believers is by engaging in acts of charity. Modeling God's self-giving love, we reach out to others.

\subsection*{B. Transforming Society}

1. \textit{Attitudes.} One way that families transform society is through expressing Christian attitudes and virtues. In the family "one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous--even repeated--forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life."\textsuperscript{65}

2. \textit{Evangelization.} The mission of the family is to nurture and evangelize the children. As the first and most important school of humanity and faith, each Christian family has the potential to evangelize others, and further spread the good news.

3. \textit{Defense of Human Life.} Each family is called to defend human life in all its forms. Within the family this means protecting life from the moment of conception, providing for the care of the elderly and dying, and guarding the dignity of persons with disabilities. Beyond the family this means taking a stand, guided by the teaching of the Church, on such issues as abortion, assisted suicide and euthanasia, and medical and scientific technologies that trivialize God's intentions for life.\textsuperscript{66}

4. \textit{Collaboration with other Families.} To provide support for themselves and others, to increase their effectiveness in spreading the faith, and to perform acts of charity, a family needs to collaborate with other families. One way to accomplish this collaboration in faith

28
and service is through active memberships in groups, associations, movements, programs and projects set up for the human and Christian benefit of the family.67

1 CCC1601; TTOC 445-448.
2 CIC 1055; CCC 1621-24; TTOC 442, 452-3.
3 CCC 1324-27, 1343-44; TTOC 453.
4 Genesis 1; GS 48; CCC 371-3, 1603-6, 2331; PM 47; TTOC 53, 442.
6 CIC 1057, 1625-32; TTOC 450-1.
7 Matthew 19:6; FC 19; CCC 1610-17, 1643-45, 2382; TTOC 446-9.
8 GS 49; CCC 1646-48; TTOC 446, 447.
9 Genesis 1:28, 2:18; GS 50; CCC 1652-54, 2366-7; TTOC 442, 447, 448.
10 CCC 1641-43, 1661, 1996-7; TTOC 446-7.
11 GS 52; PM 9, 33.; TTOC 452.
12 GS 49; PM 36, 46; TTOC 151, 452.
13 CCC 1643, 1646; PM 40; TTOC 446.
14 CCC 827, 1606-7, 1622; PM 41, 52; TTOC 443.
15 Genesis 3:21; quotation from CCC 1608; TTOC 452-3.
16 CCC 1641-2; TTOC 453.
17 CCC 1642; TTOC 447, 452-3.
18 GS 15; CCC 1706, 1776; PM 36; TTOC 241.
19 CCC 1777; TTOC 241-2.
21 HV 9; CCC 1643, 2364-5; TTOC 281, 446.
22 CCC 1604; TTOC 445-7, 453.
23 GS 51; CCC 1643, 1645, 1652, 2360-3; TTOC 282-3, 447-8.
24 CCC 2348-9; PM 241; TTOC 445.
25 CCC 2350; PM 39; TTOC 269.
26 CCC 2350; TTOC 454.
27 CCC 1640; TTOC 446-7.
28 CCC 2390-1; TTOC 298, 454.
30 Jeremiah 1:5; Job 10:8-12; Psalm 22; 10-11; Psalm 139: 15; Didache 2,2 sch 248, 148; CCC 2270-1; TTOC 279-80.
31 CCC 2380-1; TTOC 109, 284.
32 HV 9; CCC 2368-70; TTOC 286-7.
33 CCC 2357; TTOC 284-5.
34 Matthew 5: 28; CCC 2388; TTOC 281.
35 CCC2335, 2362-3; TTOC 283.
36 CCC 2351; TTOC 109, 265, 269, 281, 330.
37 CCC 2352; TTOC 285.
38 CCC 2354; TTOC 280-1.
39 CCC 2355; TTOC 280-1.
40 CCC 2397, 2399; TTOC 287.
41 GS 50; CCC 2367; TTOC 283, 447-8.
CCC 2366; TTOC 282-3, 447.
43 HV 10; TTOC 447.
44 CCC2370-2; TTOC 287-8.
45 CCC 2368-71; TTOC 281.
46 CCC 823-6; PM 29-30; TTOC 452.
47 CCC2208; TTOC 157-8.
48 LG 11; FC 21; CCC 1655-6, 2204-6; TTOC 452.
49 CCC 1913-7, 1939-42, 2207-13; TTOC 296.
50 CCC 2201-3, 2206-7; TTOC .447, 452
51 FC 66; PM 40, 46, 73; TTOC 452.
52 PM 36; TTOC 446-7.
53 PM 7, 35, 46; TTOC 452.
54 Genesis 2:18; CCC 1605; TTOC 446.
55 CCC 2426-7, 2434; TTOC 298-9.
56 CCC 1929-35; TTOC 450.
57 FC 13, 56; CCC 1601, 1603, 2331, 2335; TTOC 452.
58 CCC 542-3, 1620, 1658, 2231-3, 2349; TTOC 444-5.
59 LG 40-1; CCC 1253-5; TTOC 331, 444, 452-3.
60 CCC 1657, 2685; TTOC 452.
61 Matthew 6:26; CCC 2657-8; TTOC 257.
62 CCC 1656, 2232; TTOC 312-3.
63 CCC 2670-2; TTOC 334-5.
64 GS 30; CCC 1939-42, 2208, 2212, 2232; TTOC 296, 447, 452.
65 CCC1657; TTOC 452.
66 GS 27; EV 92; PM 49; TTOC 272-3; see also, "When I Call for Help," National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1992.
67 FC 66; PM 46; CCC 1882; TTOC 294-5.
APPENDICES

Introduction

Preparation to enter into the sacrament of marriage is a journey, a pilgrimage for those who seek it with faith. The foundation for this journey is the fundamental proclamation of the teaching of the church. The Guidelines above spell out this necessary and basic catechesis. These Appendices address some of the particulars and cautions that can facilitate or hinder the journey. Like any well-planned journey preparation for marriage takes considerable attention to detail. Yet any seasoned traveler can tell us the attitude one brings is half the venture. The priest or deacon who is working with an engaged couple is charged by the church with presenting full catechesis. But it is also necessary to respond to the uniqueness of the couple, their religious strengths, their catechetical weaknesses, and their human needs. It is important to foster in the candidates for the sacrament of marriage a joyful anticipation and Christ-like generosity, as well as a willingness to deal with the bumps ahead. We invoke the Trinity, the model of communion, as our guide.

These Appendices present canonical issues regarding the sacrament of marriage, methodological issues relating to adult religious education, the need for preparation and awareness of the liturgical celebration, attention to certain special circumstances, and the remote, proximate and immediate stages of marriage preparation.
APPENDIX A
CANONICAL PERSPECTIVES

1. Canon 1063 of the Code of Canon Law states, "Pastors of souls are obligated to see to it that their own ecclesial community furnishes the Christian Faithful assistance so that the matrimonial state is maintained in a Christian spirit and makes progress toward perfection." The canons further indicate that this preparation should encompass educational, personal, liturgical and canonical aspects of marriage, so that the couple is made aware of marriage as a sacrament of the church.

2. The Catholic Church considers marriage an institution of divine origin both in the order of creation and in the order of redemption. The Second Vatican Council taught, "Marriage forms a relationship, which by divine will and in the eyes of society is a lasting one." The council describes marriage as a "community of love" and an "intimate partnership of life and love."¹

3. The laws of the Catholic Church as found in the Code of Canon Law describes marriage in this way: "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."² For this reason a matrimonial contract cannot validly exist between baptized persons unless it is also a sacrament by that fact.³

4. The parties to a marriage covenant are a baptized man and woman, free to contract marriage, who freely express their consent. To be free to express consent the parties cannot be coerced into marriage and must be free of any natural or ecclesiastical impediments. Thus, for example, a couple is not free to marry if one of the parties has been in an existing previous valid marriage.

5. The Catholic Church holds that the exchange of consent between the spouses is an indispensable element that makes the marriage. If consent is lacking there is no marriage. The consent consists in a human act in which the partners mutually give themselves to each other. The consent must be an act of the will of each of the contracting parties, free from coercion and grave external fear.

6. The church teaches that the essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility. Thus a marriage before the church is presumed to be valid unless the contrary is proven.

7. The church also teaches that the consent of a couple involves their promise to live in a faithful, permanent union and be open to the gift of children. The exclusion of any of these aspects of marriage renders the marriage invalid before the Church.

8. The consent of the couple must be made before a properly delegated priest or deacon and two qualified witnesses. It is required that the priest or deacon accepts and receives the
consent of the spouses in the name of the church. The mere presence at a ceremony or the reception of the consent from one of the parties by a priest or deacon does not constitute valid consent. The presence of the church’s minister and two witnesses visibly expresses the fact that marriage is an ecclesial reality.

9. If one of the parties to be married is a member of the Catholic Church, but not of the Latin rite, the parish priest and the couple are to adhere to all pertinent canonical procedures. Great respect is to be given to all rites of the Catholic Church and their marriage (and canonical) traditions.

10. Prior to any marriage preparation, the priest or deacon who is to witness the marriage must ascertain the freedom of the parties who wish to marry. The couple must meet with the priest or deacon and complete the pre-nuptial investigation as prescribed by law and diocesan policies.

11. The issue of mixed marriages (a marriage between a baptized Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic or a non-baptized person) requires particular attention on the part of couples and their pastors. In cases of mixed marriages, the couple should have recourse to their parish priest who can assist them during this time of preparation.

12. In marriages in which one of the parties is baptized in some other ecclesial confession or one party is not baptized, the permission or dispensation of the diocesan bishop is required so that the marriage can be permitted in the Catholic Church.

13. In the case in which one party has been baptized in some other ecclesial confession, permission for the marriage to occur in the church is required in order that the marriage is considered lawful.

14. In the case in which one party is not baptized, a dispensation is required for the marriage to occur in order that the marriage is considered both lawful and valid.

15. Since there may be other canonical questions that need to be addressed, the couple must contact the parish priest prior to beginning marriage preparation so that all the canonical issues can be resolved.
APPENDIX B

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES
FOR ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The Candidates for the Sacrament of Marriage

1. Baptistized and Catechized. Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio, indicates how grave are the problems facing many couples as they enter marriage, and how important excellent pre-marital instruction is. In its recent instruction the Pontifical Council for the Family spells out the reasons why excellence in the instructions and in the personal formation before marriage are especially important in our time.

2. Preparation for entering the married vocation by a couple who are baptized and catechized in the Catholic Church can be a great joy because of the formation they have already received. They may be more aware that as they are about to receive the sacrament of marriage they are entering a new form of life, an authentic vocation. It is important for them to realize that living this excellent vocation well is essential both for their happiness now and for their eternal salvation. That they live their married lives well is of greatest importance both for these spouses, and for society and the church. However, even with couples who received many years of catechesis in Catholic schools or religious education programs, it cannot be taken for granted that those about to marry will know well or understand fully the greatness of the step they are taking and the duties they assume in entering the married state.

3. Baptistized and Uncatechized. For a variety of reasons individuals may find themselves in circumstances where they have been baptized but not formed in the Catholic faith or not having participated in the other initiation sacraments.

4. For this reason marriage preparation for such persons is to have the spirit of the catechumenate, and of preparation for the great vocation to which God has called them. Hence they are to be assisted (and given support in this by witness couples) by the realistic forms of evangelization and support needed to learn to pray together, to attend Mass regularly with each other, and to have the courage to draw near to Christ in the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist. When Christ called people to faith, he gave them signs which enabled them to approach faith intelligently and responsibly. It is vital that the ministers of the church help those who, in approaching marriage, need stronger faith to see reasons that make faith attractive.

5. Those Unbaptized and Unevangelized. The time of preparation for marriage is a time of grace, a time of evangelization, of strengthening faith, and of calling to holiness of life. Some who approach marriage will be unbaptized and unevangelized. Thus, the time of marriage preparation is a natural time for evangelization. The church makes very clear how much a spirit of evangelization should penetrate marriage preparation today. The
information given about Catholic teaching must be offered in that Christian spirit that helps couples believe and love what is taught.  

Formation and Readiness

1. In order for openness for pre-marriage formation to be cultivated, the following readiness issues need to be addressed.  

2. **Questions, Problems and Hopes.** Couples come to pre-marriage formation with a variety of real questions, serious problems, and earnest hopes for their marriage to succeed. Some of these questions and hopes they share in common; others will be prompted by individual circumstances. The priest or deacon and the catechists need to create an atmosphere in which the questions, problems and hopes can be acknowledged and addressed. Sometimes questions will be directly asked during a presentation, sometimes concerns will surface in discussions, and other times hopes or problems will be raised through individual conversations with mentoring or presenting couples. Catechists need to be prepared to provide intelligent answers to questions, and witness to the truth of faith by their example and possible stories from their own lives.

3. **Christian Living.** Good reasons need to be provided for living a Christian way of life. These include reasons that come from the catechist couple or witness couple’s hearts. Such sharing of faith speaks to both the human and sacred dimensions of people's lives. Couples need to see how living the faith can make them happier people.

4. **Gospel Values.** Couples must be helped to identify and appreciate Gospel patterns for expressing and living love as God intended it.

5. **Faithful Teaching.** Catechists must be faithful to the teaching of Christ and his church. While the experience and special talents of different people will lead each to different approaches, all are expected to present the teaching of the church fully and clearly, and to cover effectively the points noted in these Guidelines. Catholics need to have the full truth presented to them in order to live faithful lives.

6. **A Time of Grace.** Pre-marriage formation needs to be a time of prayer as well as learning. Through prayer couples can come to appreciate marriage as a vocation in which God calls them to great love of each other, greatness of heart, and a life of grace.

Instruction and Formation

1. The instructions and formation given to prepare Catholics for marriage are not merely an academic exercise. Neither are they simply an education in secular skills, rooted in psychology or in various social studies. While they must make use of human skills and disciplines, which can be of very great value, Catholic preparation for marriage requires a context of faith and prayer, and the confident encouragement of authentic Christian living. "Especially where the environment has become paganized, it will be particularly advisable
to offer [marriage preparation tasks] as a journey of faith which is similar to the
catechumenate." Concern for the happiness of the soon-to-be-married couple needs to
include urging the partners to take personal possession of their faith, to learn to pray, to
use well the sacrament of reconciliation, to appreciate Christ's saving presence in the
Mass, and to desire to receive him worthily in Communion. 9

Hospitality and Adult Education

1. Marriage preparation is a form of adult education in faith. The principles of adult learning
are important for the success of marriage preparation. Consideration should be given to
each of these points:
   • The ability of adults, because of their richer experience, to understand more fully
     the message of faith;
   • The expectation of adults for clear, organized, and relevant presentations by
     presenters;
   • Evident respect for the couples attending: always speaking to them, and not
     simply at them; welcoming the interest expressed in asking questions and offering
     comments;
   • Greeting couples as they come to sessions; seeking to get to know them well,
     and to show gracious interest in them as persons; when possible, providing the
     hospitality and light refreshments that encourage personal interaction;
   • Honoring their right to receive not simply our personal views, but the teaching of
     Catholic faith itself;
   • A comfortable and hospitable setting for adults;
   • Some variety in the forms of presentation;
   • Presenters sharing life experiences as well as content of the presentation;
   • Opportunities for one-on-one interaction between couples and mentors;
   • Opportunities for prayer;
   • Adhering to beginning and ending times.

Program Models

1. Many kinds of pre-marital programs are offered in this diocese, and undoubtedly many
shall continue to exist. Sometimes instructions and a measure of formation are given by
the pastor or another priest or deacon. Sometimes one married couple works with one couple about to marry. Sometimes instructions are given in a pre-marital retreat (e.g., Engaged Encounter).

2. The 1996 Vatican Instruction makes many important suggestions for the planning necessary to see that all receive the excellent kind of preparation the church calls for and knows to be needed. This outline of material is not intended to exclude variety or to hinder creativity, but to see to it that all that is essential is indeed provided to all couples about to marry. 10

3. At times, marriage preparation teams are formed so that a variety of pastoral workers and experts provide instructions. Some instructions are based in a single parish; others in a group of parishes or in a deanery; there is also a diocesan program for providing pre-marital instructions.

4. Multiple meetings are strongly preferred over one all-day meeting. But regardless of the specifics in any given situation, these Guidelines apply.

Proposed Methods and Techniques

1. Recent research tells us that the most effective form of marriage preparation is the team approach in which there are clergy, married couples, parish staff and possibly experts in various fields.

2. “It would be useful to create a group, on different levels, of pastoral workers who are aware of being sent by the Church. This group should be composed of Christian married couples in particular, and include experts possibly in medicine, law, psychology, finance, natural family planning, with a priest who will prepare them for the roles they will play.” 11

3. Experience shows the value of such groups or teams. Even when instructions are given by a single priest, deacon, or married couple, some elements of team presentations are useful. If the individual or couple giving instructions is not skilled in certain special areas, it may be wise to use an expert for such areas; and very commonly the testimony of a witness couple is very important.

4. Similarly, research has borne out the fact that lecture alone is not the most effective approach to take in adult education. Different elements of presentation might include lecture, videos, slides, handouts, focused discussion, opportunities for questions, and prayer.

Time

1. The importance of the marital vocation, and the great obstacles found in contemporary culture that make good and enduring marriages difficult for many to achieve, suggest
considerably longer periods of time in preparation than have been given generally in the past.12

2. Pastors of souls, and priests and deacons who guide couples toward marriage, must seek to encourage people to receive all the instruction and assistance they need to provide good hope for the success of their marriages. This is true even if for practical reasons a limited number of hours of preparation are mandated.

3. Substantial instruction in a number of the most important areas is required for all. These instructions will cover the essential elements noted at the beginning of these Guidelines as important for all to learn. Further instructions are required for some who face special challenges.

4. Other areas of instruction, which may be very important for most couples or for certain groups of couples, should be made accessible as far as this is possible. For example, an expert may be invited to explain briefly to the couples why certain kinds of financial planning can be critically important.

5. While each team of presenters will choose to order their material in the way that best meets their needs, they should plan for the engaged couples to meet between four to eight times during the catechetical process.
APPENDIX C
THE LITURGICAL CELEBRATION

1. The priest or deacon is responsible for preparing with the couple for the liturgical rites of marriage, in conjunction with other parish staff according to local circumstances. General procedures for the celebration of weddings should be developed by the appropriate liturgical leaders of the parish (e.g., clergy, pastoral musician, parish liturgical committee) with careful reflection on the *Order for Celebrating Marriage*, and due regard for the need for specific preparations in each case.

2. The wedding liturgy is not the only event in the celebration of the marriage of the bride and groom. But it is the turning point, the “threshold event” of the celebration. The couple should be encouraged to consider the following four basic concepts when approaching the task of preparing the wedding liturgy.

3. *The wedding liturgy is an act of worship.* The community gathers as the church in order to worship God. The religious setting is not the background for a merely human event. Rather the faith community sees the handiwork of God in the love of the bride and groom. So the church gathers to worship the awesome God of love (revealed so perfectly in Christ Jesus), to present our hopes and needs before God, and to invite God’s transforming action in our lives – especially in the couple whose relationship will be consecrated in the course of the liturgy. This God-centered point of view will affect every other aspect of planning for this liturgical event.

4. *The wedding joins two real human beings in the holy covenant of marriage.* Marriage is not make-believe; no one is pretending. There should be no “pretense” in the celebration. The liturgy needs to be honest, direct, and (with all its solemnity) *simple.* It is not a spectacle. Flowers, clothing, ornamentation, etc. cannot be primary, nor can they distract from the real meaning of the event.

5. The bride and groom lay down their lives – in the pattern of Christ who gave his life for us all. The bride and groom are God’s creatures (even if, perhaps, they have not always acknowledged this fact); as God’s daughter and son, they open their lives to divine grace and with joy and humility seek divine blessing. They come before the community of their free choice, stand together as equals before God, and are joined to the community by deep bonds of life and care. These realities must not be obscured by superficial display.

6. *The “primary actions and signs of the liturgy” need to be clear.* The first sign of the liturgy is *the gathering of the community.* This gathering is not a group of spectators. From the beginning – including the greeting of ushers and the music heard in the background – it needs to be clear to the participants that they are welcomed into an event of faith, a time of prayer, an encounter with the divine love that undergirds all other true love. (The “welcoming of the bride and groom” in the procession and greeting is part of this action – it is not a parade of dignitaries or a fashion show.)
7. Next comes the *listening to the word of God*. In the liturgy God really *is* speaking to us. If we are attentive, we can hear what God is saying. (So we should not be distracted.) Hopefully, the bride and groom have spent time in prayer and dialogue about these biblical texts as they planned the event. Readers need to be chosen who take that word seriously themselves and are able to bring it to life for the assembly. (Casual or anxious readers will not be able to perform this ministry well. It is always better to have readers who have experience with this role.)

8. Then there is the *marriage rite* itself. The bride and groom state their intentions. Each answers *individually* the three questions that reveal the heart of Christian marriage (reflecting God’s love in the free and unreserved gift of themselves to one another; imitating God’s fidelity by promising to remain faithful in love despite challenge and sacrifice; expressing their willingness to cooperate with God’s creative power in the most intimate moments of their marriage by remaining open to the gift of children). They then exchange the vows that bring the marriage into existence, and rings, tangible reminders of their pledge. (This is all quite “real;” it is not a performance for pictures or videotape.)

9. Finally, the community indeed *prays*. We praise God in Jesus Christ. We intercede for the couple and, together with them, pray for the whole world. With trust, we surrender ourselves to God along with Christ – especially evident when the Eucharist is celebrated. (Generally, the Eucharist is always celebrated when both bride and groom are Catholic. When there is good reason, the Eucharist may also occur in the case of a Catholic person who marries a baptized Christian of another church. When one party is not baptized, the Eucharist is never celebrated.)

10. These primary actions of the liturgy need to be planned well and carried out with care. (Secondary things like sharing flowers, private prayers of the couple, the so-called “unity candle,” etc., should not appear to have the same import.)

**Planning Standards**

1. The standard for “planning a wedding” is the same as good planning for a parish Sunday Mass: At Sunday Mass, planning is done for *the assembly as a whole* – that all may take their proper role as participants in the liturgical action of the Church. The congregation is not an audience, nor are the ministers “performers.” A *variety of ministers* serve the assembly. At a wedding, the action and prayer of the whole community, led by the priest (in some cases by a deacon) frames the action of the bride and groom, the readers, greeters/ushers, musicians, etc.

2. The *nature of different elements* in the wedding liturgy is the same as at Sunday Mass. The “entrance procession” is just that; it should include servers, the priest, readers, etc., along with the bride and the groom and their witnesses (and other family and friends who accompany the couple.) For the liturgy of the Word, all are seated except for the reader, and all stand for the proclamation of the Gospel. All sing the responsorial psalm and the alleluia. This is the nature of the ritual itself.
3. *Music* is important in the liturgy. But it is not done just for the sake of doing it, nor is it “intermission.” Sometimes music accompanies another action (like the preparation of the altar or the communion procession). At other times, the music is part of the actual rite (like hymns, the psalm, the “Holy, holy, holy,” the Lord’s Prayer, or even the congregation’s “acclamation” of the new marriage by singing a short hymn right after the exchange of consent).

4. In all of these cases, the music is in the service of worship and is chosen because it fosters the prayer of the community at that moment in the service. At a good Sunday Mass, appropriate music is chosen for the people to sing together, or to sing in cooperation with the cantor or with a choir. If, at certain appropriate times, musicians play or sing on their own, the music is not for its own sake or to showcase the musician, but to enrich the liturgical focus of the moment. This standard of “a good Sunday Mass” is the proper guide for figuring out how music works in the wedding liturgy (and why some “favorite music” of the bride or groom is best used at the rehearsal dinner or reception).
APPENDIX D
MARRIAGE AND SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Ecumenical and Interfaith Marriages

1. Each person’s religious background, spirituality, and level of religious practice affects the whole relationship. Couples should foster discussion of their differences in faith and practice.

2. Each person can be a witness to God’s love. Each person’s religious background needs to be understood, respected, and shared. Both the husband and the wife influence whether children are baptized Catholic and whether children grow up to become practicing Catholics.

3. The negative possibilities of religious differences need to be acknowledged. Statistics indicate that couples who do not share religion or faith tend to be more likely to break up. Religious indifference is to be avoided.

4. Other issues which need to be addressed and dealt with in the time of preparation for marriage are the Catholic party’s promise to live out the faith and to bring up child/ren in the Catholic faith, the need to look for experiences to support one another’s faith, and determination of what religious customs to celebrate and how to do so.

5. The issue of Christians who are not Catholics desiring to receive Holy Communion in a Catholic Church, and Catholics who wish to receive in a non-Catholic setting, needs to be addressed by the priest or deacon who is working with the engaged couple. It is important to communicate to the engaged couple and their families the teaching of the Church with regard to Holy Communion and the reasons for this teaching. This applies both to the wedding ceremony and to ecclesial life.15

Interracial and Intercultural Marriage

1. Marriage between a man and woman of different races or cultures involves the same kind of proximate and immediate pastoral care as does every marriage. Interracial couples may also face additional familial, societal, and cultural pressures, in addition to possible ecumenical or interfaith concerns unique to their situation.

2. Pre-marriage catechists need to examine their own attitudes and actions in light of the Church’s teaching on the dignity of every human being and against racism. The support of faith-filled and mature interracial couples who have already lived through many difficulties would be most appropriate and helpful.

Marriages of Persons with Disabilities

42
1. As with every other area of education, couples with disabilities are to be included in
typical programs offering pastoral care prior to marriage. It is important to use church
facilities, which are handicapped-accessible, and to be sensitive to the special needs of
individuals (e.g., sign language interpreter, Braille instruction, etc.)

2. Offering to have a mentor or sponsor couple meet with a couple with disabilities can be a
caring and supportive pastoral service.

Post-abortion

1. It is likely that a few women and men who attend marriage preparation programs have
been involved in procuring or assisting to procure an abortion. Oftentimes women who
have had abortions may have suppressed their emotional reactions for a period of time. A
time such as marriage preparation can bring those feelings to the fore.

2. If this is the case, the woman may be experiencing a sense of loss, a feeling of guilt,
loneliness or alienation, anxiety, depression and/or separation from God. It is important
for the woman in this circumstance to deal with the situation before moving ahead into
marriage.

3. Healing and reconciliation is available through Project Rachel. All calls to Project Rachel
are confidential. The phone number in the Diocese of Pittsburgh is 412-456-3167. It is
also appropriate to refer to a priest with special counseling skills.

Couples under 19 years of age

1. Research indicates that those who enter into marriage at a young age (namely, those who
have not yet reached their 20th birthday) face especially high odds that their marriage will
fail. It is difficult for such young people in our culture today to understand the degree of
maturity needed to make such a commitment as that called for in marriage.

2. If such a couple asks for marriage, meetings with them and their parents are strongly
recommended to help determine the advisability of proceeding with their plans.

3. Other professional counseling may also be advisable.

Older couples

1. Just because a couple is older does not automatically indicate a readiness for the
sacrament of marriage. An older couple preparing for marriage will face some of the same
issues a younger couple faces but, to be sure, they will also face other issues. This would
indicate different marriage preparation needs.

2. Some issues that might be considered are aging parents, relationships with adult children,
and adjustments from independent living experiences.
Re-marriage

1. Persons who are remarrying are entering a new relationship, distinct from their previous marriage. This applies to a marriage that has ended due to death or divorce and an annulment. It is important that individuals and couples evaluate their readiness to enter into this new marriage. A pre-marital inventory especially designed for couples who are remarrying is available and is highly recommended.

2. Many issues need to be considered before the couple moves ahead with plans to remarry. Some of these issues include grieving the end of the previous relationship, blended families, differentiation of new partner from previous partner, and financial obligations from a previous marriage.
APPENDIX E
THE STAGES OF PREPARATION

Recent Vatican documents speak of three stages of marriage preparation: remote, proximate and immediate. 

Remote Preparation

1. *The Community.* The whole parish and wider church community are responsible for the formation of those who will marry. They do this in many ways. They value the sacredness of marriage and sacramental life. They support families, especially couples who face difficulties in their marriage. In their actions and structures they encourage the formation of virtue in persons. The church offers an alternative to attitudes in the world around us that diminish the precious gift of life, flaunt the sanctity of marriage, and trivialize the meaning of human sexuality. The Christian community teaches by witness, example, and active caring, and through instruction and enrichment provided through homilies, classes, Catholic schools and parish religious education programs, and prayer for vocations. Parishes not only prepare current couples for marriage, but in doing so are also beginning to influence the next generation.

2. *The Family.* In a more personal way the family prepares an individual for marriage by the very attitudes the parents brought to their own marriage as well as the love of the child from the first moments of existence. In a direct and on-going way, the family influences and forms the individual's attitudes and values. They do this through witness and example, directing and monitoring activities and companions, discussing values and correcting misconceptions, challenging selfishness and fostering generosity, defending life, guiding the healthy and rightful use of human sexuality, praying for God's guidance of their children and their children's openness to God's will.

Proximate and Immediate Preparation

1. The basic catechesis of preparation for marriage and the marriage vocation, which are treated in these Guidelines are "proximate" instruction. The proximate preparation is concerned with experiences of prayer, appropriation of the proximate catechetical instructions for the engaged couple, suitable liturgical preparation, and appropriate talks with the parish priest.

2. *The Bishop.* The provision of marriage instructions is not simply a private task, to be designed entirely in accord with what individual teachers or groups prefer. It is a public task, a responsibility of the bishop, who is the chief shepherd and teacher of the local church entrusted to him.

3. It is the bishop's responsibility to ensure that pre-marital programs contain all the elements needed to guide couples toward strong Christian marriages. Many current programs indeed provide, together with instruction, rich elements of prayer, skilled guidance in
personal reflection on the human and Christian aspects of marriage, and close contact with devoted Catholic married couples, and with experts who help them reach a deeper understanding of what they do when they enter marriage. They also encourage couples to seek to stir up the generosity marriage requires.

4. When these programs contain all the instruction and formation elements mandated by the bishop, they can of course be certified as approved forms of pre-marital instruction. But if any program does not cover all the essential elements noted in this outline, those conducting the program must inform the couple that this particular program does not fully satisfy diocesan pre-marriage requirements. The priest or deacon who will preside at the marriage is also to be informed, and he is to arrange with the couple ways in which they can complete the requirements. The appointed staff of the bishop will have the task of seeing to it, as far as possible, that all programs preparing couples for marriage do contain all the elements that these Guidelines designate as essential.

5. Priests and Deacons. As the engaged couple approaches the church to be married, the parish priest should welcome the couple warmly. Once the couple has expressed their desire to receive the sacrament of marriage, as well as their basic understanding of Christian marriage and their willingness to grow in it, and the priest or deacon has determined their suitability, he should refer the couple to an appropriate marriage preparation program at the parish, deanery or diocesan level.

6. The Code of Canon Law points out that: "Pastors of souls are obliged to see to it that their own ecclesial community furnishes the Christian faithful assistance so that the matrimonial state is maintained in a Christian spirit and makes progress toward perfection." In part this duty is fulfilled by preaching and catechesis, aimed at instructing the Christian faithful "concerning the meaning of Christian marriage and the duty of Christian spouses and parents." But they are to see also to "personal preparation for entering marriage so that through such preparation the parties may be predisposed toward the holiness and duties of their new state." This "personal preparation" is instruction in the formation given precisely to couples about to enter marriage. It is the duty of the local bishop to see to it that the assistance given to those about to marry "is duly organized, even after consulting men and women of proven experience and skill, if this seems appropriate."

7. If the priest or deacon who will preside at the wedding is not involved in giving the instructions, certain teamwork is essential. He should know what is and what is not being taught by those assisting in preparing the couple for marriage, as well as any special circumstances facing the couple that he should address.

8. A premarital inventory such as FOCCUS, PMI or Prepare is strongly recommended to assist the couple in strengthening their relationship prior to marriage. A pre-marital inventory is not a psychological test, but rather an instrument to assist in knowledge of oneself and one's intended spouse. Such an instrument offers a basis for discussion on
many pertinent topics. It should be used during the time of pre-marriage preparation by a priest, deacon or couple trained in its use.

9. By personal dialogue with each couple, and also through the use of suitable instruments, the priest, deacon, and the marriage instructors/catechists can assess how well couples know and appreciate their faith, and recommend urgently supplementary formation in faith practices for those who need them.\(^{20}\)

10. Other issues may also surface during the interview or dialogue process. Contrary to the virtue of chastity, the practice of cohabitation, which has been on the increase in recent years, is a sensitive question in the area of marriage preparation process. It provides the priest or deacon who is approached to perform the wedding with a difficult pastoral dilemma. The minister must be faithful to the teaching of the church at the same time that he is compassionate and understanding.

11. In *Familiaris Consortio* the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, offers sound guidance. He recommends that pastoral ministers take each situation on an individual basis, try to discover the facts of each case, enlighten the couple as to the moral implications, and help them regularize their situation.

12. During the process of discernment which must take place, the minister must examine with the couple the church's teaching, their reasons for cohabiting, their attitude toward marriage, and their readiness for sacramental marriage.

13. The Catholic Church rejects cohabitation as moral behavior for those preparing for the sacrament of marriage. However, cohabitation itself is not a canonical impediment to marriage.

14. The use of a good premarital inventory can also be very useful in assessing attitudes and behaviors that partners may exhibit in regard to domestic violence. In cases where domestic abuse is suspected, it is recommended that the couple be seen individually, thus allowing for greater openness and honesty on the part of the abused party. All necessary support must be offered to the party who is suffering from domestic abuse (counseling, confidentiality, information on agencies which offer help, etc.). Of course, civil laws regarding the "responsibility to inform" proper authorities when abuse is revealed or suspected must be familiar to all priests, deacons, and marriage preparation team members.

15. Priests and deacons are also responsible for duly preparing the couple for the celebration of marriage and the liturgical rites, inviting them to full, active and conscious participation.

16. *Catechists*. Catechists play a dual role in pre-marriage formation, that of instructor as well as witness and mentor.\(^{21}\)
17. The individuals and groups who offer instructions will understandably have different styles and approaches. But there is also a certain essential unity to be safeguarded. Certain elements are of such basic importance that they must be covered well in every program of marriage preparation in the diocese. All those who present programs in this diocese are to see to it that the instructions given in this document are carefully followed.

18. It is important that the pre-marriage ministers witness to active and full participation in the life of the church, both at the local parish and in the diocese as a whole.

19. Formation in marriage is itself ongoing. Catechists can provide service to couples by giving some information on the kinds of helping available in the future, such as classes on parenting, and on some special sorts of assistance available (e.g., in programs such as Retrouvaille), plus ongoing opportunities for spiritual growth in the life of the parish.

20. Even in the critical area of skilled instruction of natural family planning, knowledge of which the Church has judged important for all engaged and married couples, it is possible to give a substantial introduction to the importance of natural family planning and its essential nature in the core instructions. Further instructions will need to be given in classes outside the core formation sessions. It is important to give full encouragement to couples to take the NFP course.22

21. Likewise it is important for the catechists to know their own strengths and weaknesses. For some topics it may be necessary to bring in experts for these portions of the presentation. Finance is one example of such a topic. Some attention may be given this topic during the instructions and it would be wise to alert couples to available opportunities for further study and help in the future. Great care will need to be taken so that opportunities for other classes do not become one-sided or focus on a particular educational source or interest.

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1 GS 48, 49.
2 CIC 1055 #1.
3 CIC 1055 #2.
4 FC 6-8; PM 9-20.
5 SIP 48.
6 SIP 47.
7 GS 52.
8 PM 9; TTOC 331.
9 PM 50-4; quotation from PM 68; TTOC 453.
10 PM 42-5.
11 PM 42; TTOC 287-8.
12 PM 37.
14 FC 66; PM 21.
15 GS 49; PM 22-31; TTOC 442-54.
16 CCC 1632, 2206; PM 28; TTOC 452.
17 PM 50;.
18 CIC 1063-4; CCC 1632; PM 32-59.
19 CIC 1063, #1, #1, #2, 1064.
20 GS 49; CCC 1621-37; TTOC 445-52.
21 PM 34-8, 52-4.
22 FC 32-3; PM 35; TTOC 331.