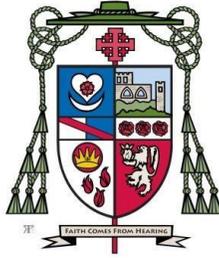




DIOCESE OF STEUBENVILLE

Marriage Formation Policy

July 26, 2017



JEFFREY
By Appointment of the Apostolic See
BISHOP OF STEUBENVILLE

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“The Joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church.” So begins the Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, written by Pope Francis to shine a light on the vocation of marriage and family life. In it, the Holy Father has invited the members of the Church to examine the current situation of marriage and the family, and to find new ways of supporting married couples and families. With hope in God’s guidance, the Holy Father writes:

“We should not be trapped into wasting our energy in doleful laments, but rather seek new forms of missionary creativity. In every situation that presents itself, ‘the Church is conscious of the need to offer a word of truth and hope... The great values of marriage and the Christian family correspond to a yearning that is part and parcel of human existence’.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 57)

Married couples and families are truly a gift from God. Along with Pope Francis, we recognize that “families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity.” They breathe life into the Church in so many ways – through active participation in the life of the Church and especially through the procreation and education of children.

However, we recognize that there is greater need than ever for pastoral accompaniment and support for married couples, for parents, for those preparing for marriage, for those in broken homes, etc. There is also a great need to foster a greater appreciation for the vocation of marriage, a deeper understanding of the gift of sexuality (with its inherent beauty and responsibilities) and to encourage our young people to embrace this calling with generosity and sacrificial love.

It is with great trust in the Holy Spirit, and deep hope that His grace will bring about much good fruit, that I promulgate this *Marriage Formation Policy* for the Diocese of Steubenville. The requirements for immediate marriage preparation contained in this policy will take effect for couples beginning their preparation for marriage on or after January 1, 2018.

I remain deeply grateful for all the priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful who work tirelessly to assist those preparing for marriage, support parents and families as they live out their vocation, and accompany those individuals and families in times of crisis. I entrust you, and all of our efforts, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Patroness of the Diocese of Steubenville.

Given at Steubenville, Ohio on this 26th day of July, 2017, the Memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne, parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, during National Natural Family Planning Awareness Week.

+ 
Bishop of Steubenville


Chancellor

INTRODUCTION

Sacramental Marriage is both a gift and a true calling.¹ Brought together by mutual love, couples united in the Sacrament of Matrimony receive the outpouring of God’s grace inviting and enabling them to share in and manifest the Mystery of Love which is always free, total, faithful and fruitful by its very nature.² As the foundation of the family and the sanctuary of life, marriage plays a vital role in the life of both the Church and Society itself,³ above all through the procreation and education of children – the greatest gift and blessings of marriage.⁴ The importance of preparing couples to embrace this sacred vocation cannot be underestimated.

“As many people realize, the current situation of marriage is precarious. In addition to the large number of failed marriages⁵, the number of marriages celebrated in the Church has decreased by 60% between 1972 and 2010 and continues to decrease.⁶ It is also of concern that only 30% of Americans raised Catholic are still practicing their faith, and 10% of all adults in America consider themselves ex-Catholics. Young post-moderns often are unchurched and/or poorly catechized and need a much different approach than what has been used in the past.”⁷

MARRIAGE FORMATION: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

In his 1980 Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope St. John Paul II had identified several stages for marriage preparation: remote, proximate and immediate.⁸ Building upon this concept, and recognizing the urgent need to expand outreach for the family, Pope Francis has placed a new emphasis on marriage preparation and the need to

¹ Referencing Pope St. John Paul II, Pope Francis observes: “*The sacrament is a gift* given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses, since ‘their mutual belonging is a real representation, through the sacramental sign, of the same relationship between Christ and the Church. The married couple are therefore a permanent reminder for the Church of what took place on the cross; they are for one another and for their children witnesses of the salvation in which they share through the sacrament’. *Marriage is a vocation*, inasmuch as it is a response to a specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church. Consequently, the decision to marry and to have a family ought to be the fruit of a process of vocational discernment.” *Amoris Laetitia*, 72 (emphasis added).

² See *Humanae Vitae*, 8-9.

³ Pope St. John Paul II once famously observed: “As the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live.” Homily on November 30, 1986, during the Holy Father’s Apostolic Pilgrimage to Bangladesh, Singapore, Fiji Islands, New Zealand, Australia and Seychelles.

⁴ See *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.

⁵ Accurate statistics on failed marriages are difficult to calculate since the factors are vastly complex. According to recent research, however, Catholic marriages may have approximately 30% rate of failure. See *The Truth About Divorce Statistics*: <http://www.foryourmarriage.org/the-truth-about-divorce-statistics/> and *Catholics Continue to Have Lowest Divorce Rates*: <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/catholics-continue-to-have-lowest-divorce-rates>.

⁶ *Frequently Requested Church Statistics*, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) 2014.

⁷ *Recommendations Toward the Development of a Marriage Preparation Policy for the Diocese of Steubenville*, Diocesan Marriage Commission of the Diocese of Steubenville, June 30, 2016.

⁸ *Familiaris Consortio*, 66. The need for pastoral care of families is also discussed at length in Part IV of *Familiaris Consortio*. Pope Francis has stated that he did not intend to create a new pastoral plan (see *Amoris Laetitia*, 199), but rather to draw more attention to the challenges faced by the family and to encourage local Churches and Christian communities to embrace a more dynamic, and more missionary, approach to the needs of the family.

accompany families as they live out their vocation. An overview of these stages of marriage preparation, along with the ongoing formation and accompaniment highlighted by Pope Francis, will provide the necessary framework for these marriage formation guidelines.

Remote Preparation

Remote preparation for marriage refers to the initial human formation that each person receives from their infancy and childhood. Commenting on this stage of formation for marriage Pope Francis explained: “For every couple, marriage preparation begins at birth. What they received from their family should prepare them to know themselves and to make a full and definitive commitment.”⁹ The role of parents and a healthy family environment are crucial to this initial formation.

The role of the Church in this initial stage of formation is becoming increasingly important. As Pope Francis notes: “Those best prepared for marriage are probably those who learned what Christian marriage is from their own parents, who chose each other unconditionally and daily renew this decision. In this sense, pastoral initiatives aimed at helping married couples to grow in love and in the Gospel of the family also help their children, by preparing them for their future married life. Nor should we underestimate the pastoral value of traditional religious practices.”¹⁰ With the large numbers of broken and dysfunctional families in our society, the need for more pastoral activities and programs aimed at assisting parents and providing formation for the youth is imperative.¹¹

Proximate Preparation

Proximate preparation for marriage takes place in adolescence and early adulthood (or more specifically, up to the period of engagement). This stage of formation is meant to be a time of intellectual, emotional and spiritual development that will equip those called to marriage with a proper understanding of the sacramental nature of this vocation, and the interpersonal skills and virtues necessary for married life.

Of great importance is the catechetical and human formation received during this stage of development. Pope John Paul II called for a renewal of catechesis that would offer a proper understanding of the human person, as made in the image of God, a deeper understanding of the sacraments, and a presentation of the gift of human sexuality with its moral obligations. The role of the Church in providing this catechetical and human formation cannot be overlooked. Nor can we overlook the role of those faithful and

⁹ *Amoris Laetitia*, 208.

¹⁰ *Amoris Laetitia*, 208.

¹¹ Data from a Pew Research Center analysis in 2013 reveals that less than half (46%) of children in the U.S. live with two married heterosexual parents in their first marriage. This number has decreased significantly since 1960 (73%) and 1980 (61%). See <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/22/less-than-half-of-u-s-kids-today-live-in-a-traditional-family/>.

zealous Catholic families (dubbed “missionary families” by Pope Francis) who earnestly seek to live in fidelity to the Lord’s call, and provide a profound witness to the beauty of marriage and family life.¹²

Moreover, in our current culture where false visions of marriage have become commonplace and many have rejected the notion of marriage altogether¹³, there is urgent need to boldly proclaim the Christian vision for marriage (the Gospel of the family¹⁴). Pope Francis declares: “The Synod Fathers stated in a number of ways that we need to help young people discover the dignity and beauty of marriage. They should be helped to perceive the attraction of a complete union that elevates and perfects the social dimension of existence, gives sexuality its deepest meaning, and benefits children by offering them the best context for their growth and development.”¹⁵ Given the centrality of marriage and the family, greater efforts to promote, support and even defend the Gospel of the family must be carried out. “It is not enough to show generic concern for the family in pastoral planning,” Pope Francis writes. The proclamation of the Gospel of the family, as a well as pastoral care for the family, must be carried out in ways that are dynamic, that connect to the everyday lives of people, and that actively involve families as missionary agents.

Immediate Preparation

Immediate preparation for marriage is commonly recognized as the period of formal instruction, discussion and reflection that take place in the months leading up to the reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony. This stage of marriage preparation has been the focus of much discussion and discernment in recent years.

“Marriage preparation programs have taken various forms over the years within the Diocese of Steubenville. Many of these efforts have proven successful for countless marriages and families, and the diocese has been very blessed to have the generous efforts of so many priests, deacons and lay leaders. However, ***more work needs to be done to provide a stronger formation for today’s engaged couples (who are confronted***

¹² See *Amoris Laetitia*, 208 and 289. Pope Francis also highlighted the need to recognize families as “agents” in the work of revitalizing the family. See *Amoris Laetitia*, 200.

¹³ Pope Francis notes, “...we live in a culture which pressures young people not to start a family, because they lack possibilities for the future. Yet this same culture presents others with so many options that they too are dissuaded from starting a family”. In some countries, many young persons “postpone a wedding for economic reasons, work or study. Some do so for other reasons, such as the influence of ideologies which devalue marriage and family, the desire to avoid the failures of other couples, the fear of something they consider too important and sacred, the social opportunities and economic benefits associated with simply living together, a purely emotional and romantic conception of love, the fear of losing their freedom and independence, and the rejection of something conceived as purely institutional and bureaucratic”. We need to find the right language, arguments and forms of witness that can help us reach the hearts of young people, appealing to their capacity for generosity, commitment, love and even heroism, and in this way inviting them to take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage.” *Amoris Laetitia*, 40.

¹⁴ This term is used by Pope Francis in several of his writings including *Amoris Laetitia*.

¹⁵ *Amoris Laetitia*, 205.

with more challenges, confusions and temptations than ever before) and to ensure a greater continuity between parishes.”¹⁶

Ongoing Formation and Accompaniment

A continuing theme of Pope Francis’ writings and speeches is the need to provide support to couples beyond their initial reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony. The Holy Father gives considerable attention to this topic, especially in *Amoris Laetitia*. He writes: “The Synod Fathers observed that ‘the initial years of marriage are a vital and sensitive period during which couples become more aware of the challenges and meaning of married life. Consequently, pastoral accompaniment needs to go beyond the actual celebration of the sacrament.’”¹⁷

Pope Francis goes on to highlight many areas where pastoral care and support is needed for families. He encourages Pastors and Christian communities (especially parishes¹⁸) to help married couples recognize that “married life is a process of growth, in which each spouse is God’s means of helping the other to mature,”¹⁹ and that even though “the life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises ... surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship; instead, it can improve, settle and mature the wine of their union.”²⁰ Married couples need to be encouraged to “develop a routine that gives a healthy sense of closeness and stability through shared daily rituals,”²¹ to improve their abilities to communicate and deal with conflicts,²² and to grow and develop their faith, particularly through “frequent confession, spiritual direction and occasional retreats” and through “family prayer during the week, since ‘the family that prays together stays together.’”²³

The Holy Father urges that more efforts be made to encourage married couples “to be generous in bestowing life.” Furthermore, he insists that the Church’s teachings on the need to respect the “personal and fully human character of conjugal love” through the promotion and use of natural family planning “ought to be taken up anew, in order to counter a mentality that is often hostile to life.”²⁴

¹⁶ *Recommendations Toward the Development of a Marriage Preparation Policy for the Diocese of Steubenville*, Diocesan Marriage Commission of the Diocese of Steubenville, June 30, 2016 (emphasis in original).

¹⁷ *Amoris Laetitia*, 223.

¹⁸ See *Amoris Laetitia*, 223. See also *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28-29.

¹⁹ *Amoris Laetitia*, 221. He also observes in this section: “In the life of married couples, even at difficult moments, one person can always surprise the other, and new doors can open for their relationship, as if they were meeting for the first time. At every new stage, they can keep “forming” one another.”

²⁰ *Amoris Laetitia*, 232. See 232-238 for a lengthy and thoughtful reflection on facing family crises.

²¹ *Amoris Laetitia*, 226.

²² “Communication is an art learned in moments of peace in order to be practised in moments of difficulty. Spouses need help in discovering their deepest thoughts and feelings and expressing them.” *Amoris Laetitia*, 234.

²³ *Amoris Laetitia*, 227.

²⁴ *Amoris Laetitia*, 222.

This outreach must not be directed solely to new families or even to families that are on the verge of crisis,²⁵ but also to families that have already broken apart. He explains, “In any event, while realizing that reconciliation is a possibility, we also see that ‘what is urgently needed today is a ministry to care for those whose marital relationship has broken down.’”²⁶ Pastoral care must be offered to those who are “separated, divorced or abandoned,”²⁷ and particularly to single-parent families.²⁸

Realizing the great need of families, and their essential place in the life of the Church and of society, Pope Francis has called on wide involvement in their support. “Parishes, movements, schools and other Church institutions can help in a variety of ways to support families and help them grow.”²⁹ The important place of mentor couples is repeatedly singled out by the Holy Father,³⁰ as well as whole families whom he calls to be “principal agents” for promoting and strengthening this vocation through their own witness and activities.³¹ However, “given the pace of life today, most couples cannot attend frequent meetings; still, we cannot restrict our pastoral outreach to small and select groups. Nowadays, pastoral care for families has to be fundamentally missionary, going out to where people are. We can no longer be like a factory, churning out courses that for the most part are poorly attended.”³²

Although the challenges faced by married couples and families in our world can, at times, be overwhelming, the Holy Father encourages us to face these challenges with great faith and immense hope. “We should not be trapped into wasting our energy in doleful laments, but rather seek new forms of missionary creativity. In every situation that presents itself, ‘the Church is conscious of the need to offer a word of truth and hope...The great values of marriage and the Christian family correspond to a yearning that is part and parcel of human existence’.”³³

Confident in the truth of the Gospel, and the grace that we receive through Jesus Christ, there is need to adopt a “missionary approach” to the family, one that boldly proposes the Christian vision for marriage and family life and seeks creative and dynamic initiatives in support of married couples and families.³⁴

²⁵ “The answers given to the pre-synodal consultation showed that most people in difficult or critical situations do not seek pastoral assistance, since they do not find it sympathetic, realistic or concerned for individual cases. This should spur us to try to approach marriage crises with greater sensitivity to their burden of hurt and anxiety.” *Amoris Laetitia*, 234.

²⁶ *Amoris Laetitia*, 238.

²⁷ See *Amoris Laetitia*, 242.

²⁸ See *Amoris Laetitia*, 252.

²⁹ *Amoris Laetitia*, 229.

³⁰ See *Amoris Laetitia*, 224-225, 230. and 232.

³¹ See *Amoris Laetitia*, 200.

³² *Amoris Laetitia*, 230.

³³ *Amoris Laetitia*, 57.

³⁴ See *Diocese of Steubenville Resource Guide for Marriage Formation* for a thorough listing of pastoral suggestions for supporting married couples and families.

FIVE STEP MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROCESS

Recognizing the challenges faced by the family, and that “the welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church,”³⁵ Pope Francis has invited local Churches to develop creative ways to provide a relevant and valuable *initiation to the Sacrament of Matrimony*³⁶ through carefully crafted marriage preparation programs. Responding to the call of the Holy Father and the needs of our couples, the Diocese of Steubenville establishes the following policies and corresponding steps:

Policy for Step 1 - Meetings with Priest or Deacon: *Six to twelve months prior to the anticipated wedding date, the engaged couple will meet with the priest or deacon who will be preparing them for marriage.*

Policy for Step 2 - Comprehensive Introduction to the Theology of the Body: *The engaged couple must complete an introduction to the Theology of the Body.*

Policy for Step 3 - Marriage Life-Skills Workshop or Retreat: *The engaged couple must attend an approved marriage life-skills workshop or retreat. A certificate of completion is to be placed in the couple’s file.*

Policy for Step 4 - Course in Natural Family Planning: *Each couple must attend a diocesan-approved course in natural family planning. A certificate of completion is to be placed in the couple’s file.*

Policy for Step 5 - Finalize Preparations: *One to two months prior to the wedding date, the engaged couple will meet with the priest or deacon who will be officiating at the wedding to finalize all preparations.*

Each of these steps is explained in detail in the following pages.

³⁵ *Amoris Laetitia*, 31.

³⁶ In the words of Pope Francis: “Precisely because she is mother and teacher, the Church knows that among Christians there are those who are of strong faith, formed out of love and reinforced by good catechesis and nourished by prayer and a sacramental life, while others are of weak faith, overlooked and unformed, poorly educated or simply forgotten....The Church, thus, with a renewed sense of responsibility continues to [propose] marriage in its essential elements — offspring, the good of the spouses, unity, indissolubility and sacramentality — not as an ideal meant only for the few, notwithstanding modern models fixated on the ephemeral and the passing, but rather as a reality that in Christ’s grace can be lived out by all baptized faithful. Therefore, *a fortiori*, **pastoral urgency involving all Church structures is leading us toward a shared intention to provide adequate preparation for marriage in a kind of new catechumenate — I emphasize this: a kind of new catechumenate — strongly hoped for by various Synod Fathers.**” *Inauguration of the Judicial Year of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota*, January 22, 2016 (emphasis added).

STEP 1 – MEETINGS WITH PRIEST OR DEACON

Policy

Six to twelve months³⁷ prior to the anticipated wedding date, the engaged couple will meet with the priest or deacon who will be preparing them for marriage.

Purpose

The goal of these meetings is to:

- Initiate a relationship of pastoral accompaniment between the engaged couple and the minister preparing them for marriage.
- Assist the engaged couple to understand that marriage is a life-long vocation.
- Begin the process of assessing the engaged couple's readiness for marriage by:
 - Ensuring that the engaged couple is free to marry³⁸ (initiating the annulment process if necessary for a previous marriage).
 - Determining if there are any issues that need special attention (cohabitation, pregnancy, immaturity, etc.).³⁹
- Begin to ascertain the engaged couple's attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about themselves and their desire for marriage in the Church.

Process

During these meetings, the priest or deacon will:

- Explain the marriage preparation process and present the diocesan checklist.
- Begin the process of completing the diocesan marriage assessment form.⁴⁰
 - Pre-nuptial files should be submitted to the Chancery two months prior to the scheduled celebration of the marriage in order to provide sufficient time for the file to be reviewed and ensure that all necessary documentation and diocesan requirements have been fulfilled.⁴¹
- Discuss a proposed wedding date and dates for marriage formation steps.
- Distribute parish-specific guidelines for weddings.
- Initiate a pre-marriage inventory/instrument.⁴²
- Review inventory with the engaged couple and assess their readiness for marriage.
- Answer questions the engaged couple may have at this point.

³⁷ "Often the engagement period is not long enough, the decision is precipitated for various reasons and, what is even more problematic, the couple themselves are insufficiently mature. As a result, the newly married couple need to complete a process that should have taken place during their engagement." *Amoris Laetitia*, 217.

³⁸ See Appendix A.

³⁹ See *Diocese of Steubenville Resource Guide for Marriage Formation* for more information.

⁴⁰ See Appendix C.

⁴¹ See Appendix A for Instruction from the Bishops of the Province of Ohio.

⁴² Pope Francis observed: "Couples need to be able to detect danger signals in their relationship and to find, before the wedding, effective ways of responding to them. Sadly, many couples marry without really knowing one another. They have enjoyed each other's company and done things together, but without facing the challenge of revealing themselves and coming to know who the other person truly is." *Amoris Laetitia*, 210. See *Diocese of Steubenville Resource Guide for Marriage Formation* for choices of pre-marriage inventories.

STEP 2 – INTRODUCTION TO THE THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

Policy

The engaged couple must complete an introduction to the Theology of the Body.

Purpose

We live in a culture that often upholds and promotes messages in conflict with the Gospel. Those approaching sacramental marriage frequently demonstrate a lack of understanding of the Church's teachings on conjugal love and marital chastity. It is evident that a deeper catechesis of marriage and sexuality is greatly needed. The *Theology of the Body*, created by St. John Paul II, is an excellent catechetical tool for marriage preparation. The *Theology of the Body* presents the nature and purpose of human sexuality, as well as the dignity of man and woman and the sacred calling of marriage, in a fresh and compelling way.

Many dioceses have found that exposing couples to the *Theology of the Body* has helped them to embrace the Church's teachings and be more willing to participate in Church's sacramental life to a fuller extent. In direct response to these presentations, some couples have reported a greater openness to learning natural family planning, and some cohabitating and/or sexually active engaged couples have even decided to separate and/or practice chastity in the months leading up to their wedding.

Process

The engaged couple may complete an introduction to the *Theology of the Body* through any of the following means. This requirement may be fulfilled independently of Marriage Life-Skills Workshops or Retreats.

- An online video or DVD series recommended by the diocese.⁴³
- Participation in certain marriage preparation programs.⁴⁴
- Seminar on the *Theology of the Body* offered by the diocese.
- This requirement may also be fulfilled through a college course on the *Theology of the Body* if both parties have attended a Catholic college or university in recent years.

⁴³ See *Diocese of Steubenville Resource Guide for Marriage Formation* for more information.

⁴⁴ Some marriage preparation programs include a comprehensive introduction to the *Theology of the Body*, such as *God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage*, *Agape Catholic Marriage Prep*, and *Theology of the Body Marriage Preparation Program*.

STEP 3 – MARRIAGE LIFE-SKILLS WORKSHOP OR RETREAT

Policy

The engaged couple must attend an approved marriage life-skills workshop or retreat. A certificate of completion is to be placed in the couple's file.

Purpose

Life-skills for a healthy marriage require instruction in the following areas:

Self-knowledge	Knowledge of Spouse	Conflict Management
Decision Making	Communication	Career Expectations
Financial Management	Intimacy	Extended Family Issues
Marriage Sacramentality	Couple Adjustment	Inter-faith Issues

Process

The marriage life-skills requirement can be completed in a number of ways:

- Regional Pre-Cana Workshops.
- Catholic Engaged Encounter.
- Online marriage preparation programs.*
- Pre-Cana programs offered in adjoining dioceses.*
- Pre-Cana Sessions with mentor couples using a pre-approved marriage preparation program.*

* Couples would need the express permission of their pastors for these other options.

Regional Pre-Cana Workshops

Currently these workshops are offered in Steubenville, St. Clairsville and Marietta. These workshops vary in length from one day to two days.

Catholic Engaged Encounter

CEE is a unique weekend retreat away with other engaged couples, with time alone together to dialogue honestly and intensively about their prospective lives together – their strengths and weaknesses, desires, ambitions, goals, their attitudes about money, sex, planning children, Catholic ideals, family and their role in the church and society – face to face. Concerns about cohabitation are addressed in the program.

These topics are covered through five themes that are woven into 16 talks during an overnight weekend:

- Imprint of the Family of Origin (making a plan for blending a new family).
- Sacramental Marriage (a marriage is a covenant between the couple and God).
- Communication (provides skills for good communication).
- Intimacy (includes a personal relationship – not just sex – enhanced by NFP).
- Values (what values couples will incorporate into their marriage including a commitment to their faith, each other, children and community).

Parish Mentoring Couples

Parishes could consider identifying and training couples that can meet with engaged couples with a minimum of four, two hour sessions covering the topics above. It is preferred that the selected couple has demonstrated a wholesome and spiritual home. Having mentoring couples may be the preferred solution in rural areas.

Distant or Online Education Programs

(See *Diocese of Steubenville Resource Guide for Marriage Formation* for more information.)

STEP 4 – COURSE IN NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

Policy

Each couple must attend a diocesan-approved course in natural family planning. A certificate of completion is to be placed in the couple's file.

Purpose

The teaching of the Church on the inherent evil of contraception is quite clear.⁴⁵ The use of contraceptives for the purposes of avoiding pregnancy, even due to serious medical difficulties and complications, is not permissible.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the Pastors of the Church have warned married couples and society of the grave consequences posed by the use of contraceptives, both to the integrity of the marital union⁴⁷ and to society as a whole.⁴⁸ Tragically, the clear teaching of the Church has been ignored by the majority of Catholics with devastating results.

It is also important to note that there is widespread confusion about this issue. Natural family planning instructors often find that couples are completely unaware of the scientific basis and effectiveness of modern methods of natural family planning. It is vital for couples to be educated in the effectiveness of these methods so that they can find confidence in them and be able to embrace the Church's moral guidelines in matters of fertility.

Finally, in his recent Apostolic Exhortation on the Family, Pope Francis has affirmed the Church's teachings on contraception and encouraged a renewed emphasis on natural family planning.⁴⁹

Process

Various methods of training are available in the Diocese, although not all are available in each region. Most courses require at least 3 classes over the course of three months. The cost of instruction is determined by each provider and vary considerably.

⁴⁵ See *Humanae Vitae*, 14, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2370.

⁴⁶ Contraceptives are prescribed, at times, for medical conditions unrelated to pregnancy. Such uses of contraceptives have been recognized as morally licit by the Magisterium. See *Humanae Vitae*, 15.

⁴⁷ The US Catholic Bishops explained that in using contraception some married couple "may think that they are doing nothing harmful to their marriages. In reality, the deliberate separation of the procreative and unitive meanings of marriage has the potential to damage or destroy the marriage. Also, it results in many other negative consequences, both personal and social." *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ See *Humanae Vitae*, 17.

⁴⁹ Pope Francis writes: "The pastoral care of newly married couples must also involve encouraging them to be generous in bestowing life. 'In accord with the personal and fully human character of conjugal love, family planning fittingly takes place as the result a consensual dialogue between the spouses, respect for times and consideration of the dignity of the partner. In this sense, the teaching of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (cf. 1014) and the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (cf. 14;2835) ought to be taken up anew, in order to counter a mentality that is often hostile to life...'" *Amoris Laetitia*, 222.

Couples may choose any of the following methods (listed by provider):

- Billings Ovulation Method Association.
- Couple to Couple League.
- Creighton FertilityCare.
- Natural Family Planning International.
- Northwest Family Services.

Some of the above methods can be learned online. Refer to the website of the Office of Marriage, Family and Respect Life for contact information and class schedules, online at www.diosteub.org/family.

STEP 5 – FINALIZE PREPARATIONS

Policy

One to two months prior to the wedding date, the engaged couple will meet with the priest or deacon who will be officiating at the wedding to finalize all preparations.

Purpose

The concluding step in the process of marriage preparation consists of a final meeting between the engaged couple and the priest or deacon who will be officiating at the wedding. The couple will have the opportunity to review their marriage preparation with the priest or deacon, and to make the final decisions concerning the Wedding Liturgy.⁵⁰

Process

Finalizing preparations include:

- Review diocesan marriage preparation checklist.
- Confirm that all forms and documentation are in order.
- Finalize planning for wedding liturgy.
- Encourage the engaged couple to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before their celebration of Matrimony.⁵¹
- Ensure the engaged couple of the community's support for them and invite them to become more involved in the life of the parish.⁵²

⁵⁰ See Appendix B for liturgical resources.

⁵¹ Pope Francis observes: "It is also important to remind [couples preparing for marriage] of the availability of the sacrament of Reconciliation, which allows them to bring their sins and past mistakes, and their relationship itself, before God, and to receive in turn his merciful forgiveness and healing strength." *Amoris Laetitia*, 211.

⁵² Pope Francis notes that "Marriage preparation should also provide couples with the names of places, people and services to which they can turn for help when problems arise." The final meetings with the couple might be a good occasion to offer this information in the context of reminders of the parish community's support for them. *Amoris Laetitia*, 211.

EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

The above procedures are the norm for marriage preparation within the Diocese of Steubenville. However, pastoral discernment will be necessary for couples seeking convalidations and for certain couples seeking to marry again (for example, those of advanced age). Although some couples in these situations may greatly benefit from participating in some or all of these steps (especially if their original preparation was insufficient or approached from a non-Catholic or non-Christian perspective), pastors may discern that these steps are not necessary for these couples.

Also, recognizing that there are certain expenses associated with fulfilling the requirements of this policy, no couple with financial hardship is to be excluded from participation. Parishes are encouraged to establish small “scholarships” to assist couples when necessary.

APPENDIX A -- *Canonical Requirements*

Dispensations/Permissions

In some cases, the couple will require special permissions or dispensations. It is the responsibility of the priest, deacon, or lay minister preparing the couple for marriage to examine whether or not dispensations or permissions are needed. Pastors in the Diocese of Steubenville are delegated to dispense the following:

1. Dispensation from Impediment of Disparity of Cult (Catholic marrying an unbaptized person- c.1086)
2. Dispensation from Impediment of Disparity of Cult *ad Cautelam* (Non-Catholic is not certain he/she was baptized or cannot provide documentation of baptism).
3. Permission for Mixed Religion. (Catholic marrying a baptized non-Catholic and documentation of baptism has been provided- cc.1124-1125)

The form for these three are an integral part of the Marriage Assessment Form. All other dispensations and permissions should be referred to the Chancery.

Impediments to Marriage

Freedom from impediments to marry must be documented (e.g., Decree of Nullity, Death Certificate of previous spouse, Decree of Laicization, etc.). Certified copies must be obtained and placed in the permanent marriage file.

Ohio Law

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

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

APPENDIX B – *Liturgical/Canonical Considerations*

Location of Wedding Ceremony

Because entry into the married state is part of the sacramental reality of the Church, the proper place to enter into marriage is within the sacred setting of the church – either the parish of the bride or the parish of the groom, or another church. In the case of couples where one is Catholic and one is non-Catholic, and with the dispensation from canonical form, weddings may be held in the place of worship of the non-Catholic partner and the vows received by a non-Catholic minister (Canon 1118).

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

Setting A Wedding Date

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

Weddings During Advent and Lent

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

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony

The directives and rubrics contained in this Rite are to be followed as is normative for the celebration of any of the Church's sacraments.

Wedding Liturgy

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

The parish is to assist couples preparing for marriage to understand the wedding liturgy, and to use the options that are available for a prayerful, joyful, and more meaningful celebration of their marriage. Those preparing the couple are to offer a fundamental

understanding of liturgy in regard to both the sacramental-covenantal nature of marriage and how the celebration of the ritual begins their marriage.

Liturgical Ministries

Per normal liturgical practice, each ministry should be done by someone not fulfilling another ministry. Typically, the ministers are people who have some significance in the lives of the couple. There is no requirement that any the wedding party (maid/matron of honor, best man, bridesmaids, groomsmen) be Catholic. However, prior to the wedding, any non-Catholics in the wedding party should understand that they may not receive Communion if the wedding is within Mass. If no one is available to fulfill a particular ministry, the parish should provide someone.

The role of non-Catholic clergy or ministers at a Catholic wedding

Occasionally a couple will request that a non-Catholic minister participate in their wedding. The Catholic cleric should take steps to establish contact with the minister of the other church or community to make arrangements. The non-Catholic minister may offer a prayer, read from Scripture, or give a brief exhortation.

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

If a dispensation from Canonical Form of Marriage has not been granted, no Catholic clergy may assist in such a wedding ceremony in any way. When a Catholic cleric has been asked to represent the Catholic Church at a wedding ceremony for which a dispensation from Canonical Form has been granted, he is never to serve as the canonical witness of the marriage; the non-Catholic minister must receive the vows. The Catholic cleric may read from Sacred Scriptures, assist with the exchange of rings, or give a blessing. The marriage file is to be kept at the Catholic church of the parish at which the couple was prepared. Marriages of this type must be recorded in the marriage register of the parish of the Catholic party. Notification of the marriage is to be sent to the parish of baptism of the Catholic party. It is civilly and canonically unlawful for Catholic clergy to receive the vows in full or in part in a marriage celebrated outside of canonical form.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Reconciliation prior to the wedding is encouraged, preferably at a time normally scheduled in their own parishes. However, at his discretion, the celebrating priest or deacon may also make arrangements for any Catholic parties involved in the wedding to receive the sacrament at their mutual convenience, possibly before or after the rehearsal.



DIOCESE OF STEUBENVILLE

MARRIAGE ASSESSMENT FORM

GROOM

BRIDE

_____	NAME	_____
_____	ADDRESS	_____
_____	CITY	_____
_____	TELEPHONE	_____
_____	BIRTH DATE	_____
_____	RELIGION - (RITE)	_____
_____	BAPTISM DATE	_____
_____	CHURCH OF BAPTISM	_____
_____	ADDRESS OF CHURCH OF BAPTISM	_____
_____	CITY	_____
_____	FATHER	_____
_____	MOTHER (MAIDEN NAME)	_____
_____	PRESENT PARISH	_____
_____	WITNESSES	_____
_____	DATE AND PLACE OF THE MARRIAGE	_____
(Date)		(Place)

(NOTICE OF THIS MARRIAGE MUST BE SENT TO CATHOLIC PARTY'S PARISH OF BAPTISM)

NOTE: Priest/Deacon is to note his evaluation in the space provided. He may use any other approved instruments that will assist him in making the necessary evaluation in each assessment area.

CANONICAL ASSESSMENT

1. Has either party been married before? If so, how will this previous marriage be dissolved?
2. Are they entering marriage freely without force, coercion, social pressure?
3. Do they intend to make a permanent commitment? To be faithful to one another? To rear eventually a family?
4. Are there any impediments to their marriage, namely blood or spiritual relationships, vows, Sacred Orders, impotency, Crimen?

PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

1. How long have they known each other? Have they been able to communicate effectively with each other?
2. Do they show signs of a growing maturity? What is their attitude toward parents, authority, superiors?
3. Do they perceive the basic obligations and responsibilities of marriage? Parenthood? Job?
4. Have they been under doctor’s care for any mental or physical ailments? Are there problems with drugs, or alcohol?
5. Do they seem compatible in personality, character, temperament, feelings?

DOCUMENT FOR DISPENSATION

This section must be completed for each marriage between a baptized non-Catholic and a Catholic or a non-baptized person and Catholic. In the case of a baptized non-Catholic, proof of baptism must be documented by reason of a certificate or verification from the church of baptism.

PRE-NUPTIAL DECLARATION AND PROMISE	
(Note: This promise must be made in every marriage involving a non-Catholic)	
By the Catholic Party:	
I reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ, and with God's help, intend to continue living that faith in the Catholic Church.	
I promise to do all in my power to share the faith I have received with our children by having them baptized and reared as Catholics.	
_____ Signature of the Catholic Party	
Check if necessary:	<input type="checkbox"/> The Catholic party chose to make the above declaration and promise orally.
I certify that the other party has been informed of the promise obliging the Catholic spouse.	
_____ Church	_____ Priest or Deacon
_____ City	_____ Date

_____ a baptized Catholic requests a dispensation from:

- Mixed Religion
- Disparity of Worship
- Mixed Religion and for precaution Disparity of Worship

The above party is contracting marriage with _____ who is:

- Baptized non-Catholic
- Non-baptized
- Doubtfully baptized

Having fulfilled the canonical requirements and with sufficient reason I, as pastor, hereby grant a dispensation for the parties to marry. This permission is granted to me in virtue of the power delegated by the local ordinary (c. 1124).

Signature of Pastor

Date

N.B. Any dispensations other than mixed religion or disparity of worship must be sent to the Chancellor for proper dispensation.

DECLARATION OF MATRIMONIAL INTENT

Since consent makes a marriage, it is essential that a couple be completely familiar with all of the constitutive elements. This declaration is an expression of current theology and canon law and is to be signed at the conclusion of the pre-nuptial investigation and preparation. It is important, therefore, that its intent be explored and understood by the couple as they prepare for their wedding.

We, in the presence of one another, individually declare our freedom to marry and our freedom from any known impediments between us. We hold marriage to be a life-long and faithful union and process of choosing each other for the mutual sharing of our life and our love; it is a union which is open to children; it is a union which is modeled after and symbolizes God's ever faithful love for His people. It is this partnership of life and love that we seek in marriage and to which we publicly give our consent.

Signature of GROOM

Signature of BRIDE

After a thorough review, I can attest that this couple is free to marry and have the proper intentions in regard to Christian marriage.

Comments: _____

Parish

Priest or Deacon

City

Date

FOR MARRIAGE OUTSIDE PARISH

I, the pastor of the above-designated party, hereby grant permission to any duly delegated priest/deacon, *servatis de iure servandis*, to assist at her marriage outside of her proper parish.

Pastor

Date: _____

Place: _____

DELEGATION OF A PRIEST TO PERFORM MARRIAGE IN PARISH

I, the undersigned Pastor (Associate), hereby delegate

in accordance with Canon 1111 to assist within the limits of this parish, at the marriage of the parties designated in this questionnaire.

Pastor (Associate)

Parish, City: _____

Date: _____

Notes or Comments