

**Protocol for Processing Petitions
for a Dispensation from the Impediment of Consanguinity in the Fourth Degree**

While the law of the State of California permits the marriage of persons related by consanguinity in the fourth degree (first cousins), a number of states do not. Moreover, it is an impediment for persons related by consanguinity in the fourth degree to marry in the Catholic Church (c. 1091, §2), although this impediment can be dispensed for a just cause in a particular case.

Before the Bishop of Stockton or his delegate will grant a dispensation from the impediment of consanguinity in the fourth degree, the following process will be followed.

1. A petition, written by the Catholic party, will be presented to the Bishop of Stockton requesting a dispensation from the impediment of consanguinity in the fourth degree. The petition shall include the following information:
 - The full names, addresses, and telephone numbers of each party in the proposed marriage;
 - The baptismal status (Catholic, non-Catholic Christian, or non-baptized) of each party;
 - The name of the priest, deacon, or pastoral minister preparing the parties for marriage;
 - The name of the priest or deacon who will witness the marriage;
 - The proposed date and place of the marriage;
 - How the parties are related;
 - The progression of the parties' relationship from first meeting through the courtship and engagement;
 - The reason why the dispensation should be granted;
 - The feelings of the family (parents, siblings, extended family) of each party toward the proposed marriage.

2. Prior to the grant of a dispensation from the impediment of consanguinity, the parties will be required to undergo genetic testing and counseling. Because of the increased risk of birth defects in children of consanguineous couples, it is important that both parties are aware of the potential for this increased risk prior to marriage.

The couple should make an appointment with a genetic testing center, explaining that the parties are related by consanguinity. The parties should receive the results of the testing. One copy should be made for the diocesan file.

3. If the testing center also offers counseling, the couple should take advantage of this to discuss the results with a trained professional. If the testing center does not offer counseling, the couple should make an appointment with a certified therapist to discuss the results and more importantly what they will mean for the parties and any children born of the marriage. The therapist selected should have a Christian anthropology, i.e., he or she approaches counseling with the understanding that all life is sacred as it reflects God's own life and salvation gifted through Jesus Christ.

At the conclusion of the counseling, it will be helpful if the counselor or therapist writes a report on the extent of the counseling received, the issues discussed, and his or her opinion of the parties' understanding and agreement of the potential genetic risks for any children born of the marriage as well as any impact this would have on their own relationship in marriage.

4. The parents of each party are to write a letter to the Bishop of Stockton sharing their views on the proposed marriage, whether in favor of or against it. While not determinative of the decision to grant the dispensation or not, these letters help to provide a familial context for the decision.

5. The priest, deacon, or pastoral minister preparing the parties for marriage shall write his or her opinion on whether or not there is a just cause for the dispensation to be granted.

6. The documents required in numbers 2–5 may be submitted with the petition of the Catholic party or may be sent to the Chancery when completed.

While letters should be addressed to the Bishop of Stockton, all documents can be sent to the attention of the Judicial Vicar, who handles consanguinity petitions for the Bishop, at 212 North San Joaquin St., Stockton, CA 95202.