

## **Catholic Marriage Policy For the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama**

### **Introduction**

Marriage is a lifelong, faithful union of a man and a woman mutually committed to sharing life and love together. As a Christian sacrament modeled after and strengthened by God's love for His people, marriage is both an opportunity to experience God's love and a means to proclaim that love to others.

The Church is aware of problems in our society which threaten the traditional marriage values of permanence, commitment, loyalty, and faithfulness. To strengthen the vocation of Christian marriage and to encourage the entire Christian community to support Christian marriage, the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Birmingham adopts the following policy.

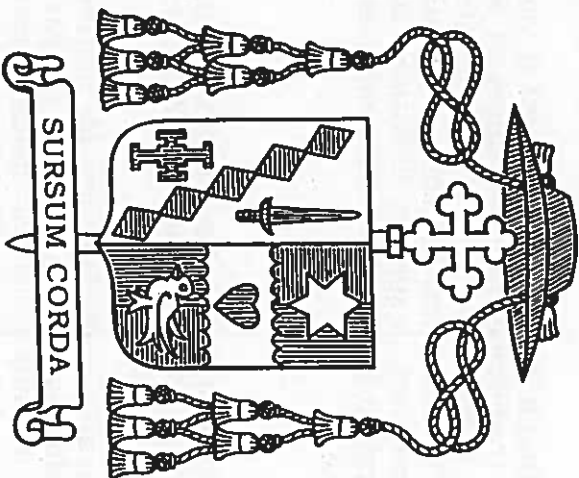
### **Policy**

1. The Catholic community has serious responsibility to help couples ascertain their maturity and faith readiness for the sacrament of marriage.
2. In order to allow sufficient time for marriage preparation, as outlined below, couples must notify the parish priest or pastoral administrator at least six months prior to the celebration of their wedding. The date of the wedding should be discussed at the initial interview. Couples are encouraged to begin preparation before that six month period when possible.
3. Marriage preparation is required for all couples using one of the following options:
  - a) the priest, pastoral administrator, or some designated person
  - b. a parish team couple or couples trained in marriage preparation
  - c. Evenings for the Engaged
  - d. an Engaged Encounter Weekend
  - e. a Marriage Preparation Retreat, under parish sponsorship
  - f. a Pre-Marriage Workshop  
e.g., The Huntsville Program

4. The priest/deacon who will witness the marriage is responsible for any follow-up required after the basic preparation program.
5. For the validation of marriage the same steps of preparation as above are required, with the additional option of a Marriage Encounter Weekend for #3.
6. A preparation period longer than six months will be indicated in cases of:
  - a. non-practice of the faith;
  - b. substantial lack of appreciation for the spiritual, sacramental aspects of marriage;
  - c. a lack of readiness for marriage when assessed by the priest or pastoral administrator;
  - d. a refusal on the part of either party to participate in the steps of preparation for marriage.
7. Whenever a couple is required to extend the preparation period beyond the required six months, they must be informed of the reason for the delay, and they must be advised that they may request a review by the Bishop's office.
8. Special factors will be treated in the following way:
  - a. Factors of Age
    1. An interview with the parents is required for all marriages of those under 19.
    2. Additional preparation and counseling will be required for all marriages of those under 19.
  - b. Pregnancy of itself shall not constitute an exception to the policy of preparation or the setting of the date. Special Counseling with a recognized counselor will be required.
9. Catholic weddings are to be celebrated in a Church, and they may not be celebrated on a Sunday.
10. Requests for an exemption to any part of the policy must be referred to the Bishop's Office in writing.
11. This policy will be evaluated, and revised as needed.

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