



DIOCESE OF SANTA ROSA

*Marriage
Preparation
Policy*

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List of Document Abbreviations

- CCC** Catechism of the Catholic Church (1997)
- CIC** Code of Canon Law (January 25, 1983)
- DC** Deus Caritas Est (December 25, 2005), Benedict XVI
- EA** Ecclesia in America (January 22, 1999), St. John Paul II
- GS** Gaudium et Spes (December 7, 1965), Second Vatican Council
- GrS** Gratissimam Sane (February 2, 1994), St. John Paul II
- FC** Familiaris Consortio (November 22, 1981), St. John Paul II
- L** Lineamenta, 2014 Synod on the Family
- LG** Lumen Gentium (November 21, 1964), Second Vatican Council
- PS** Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities (November 16, 1978),
USCCB
- PSM** Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage (May 13, 1996), Pontifical
Council for the Family

I. Spiritual Vision of Holy Matrimony

“The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized” (CIC 1055, CCC 1601).

The self-giving love of a husband and wife represents the mutual love of Christ for his bride, the Church, and the love of the Church for her bridegroom, Christ.

The plan of God for Christian marriage begins with a vision of the wholeness of the human person. As Genesis states, “God created man in his own image... male and female, he created them” (1:27). With all the dignity and sacredness of life and sexuality, man and woman witness to the wonder and graciousness of God. Entering marriage is a response to God’s call for the man and woman to become “one flesh” in mutual self-giving (Genesis 2:24). The couple then becomes the symbol of the covenant that binds God and humankind together in a permanent and faithful covenant. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, stated that one meaning of love “stands out” among all others, namely, the “love between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an apparently irresistible promise of happiness” (DC 2).

Marriage is not a peripheral issue in the Christian life. It finds itself at the heart of the Christian mystery and serves to illuminate it. Indeed, we cannot understand the Church herself, says St. John Paul II, “unless we keep in mind the ‘great mystery’ involved in the creation of man as male and female and the vocation of both to conjugal love...” (GrS 19).

“God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being” (FC 11).

Through Christian revelation, we recognize two ways of realizing that personal and fundamental vocation to love: marriage and virginity/celebrity. Either way actuates the most profound truth in us, that of being created in the image of God (Ibid).

Vatican Council II states that “husbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children. The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come” (LG 35).

By virtue of Baptism, the marriage of Christians is a sacrament, a living sign that the couple truly communicates and participates in the love of Christ and the Church. Baptism is described as a “nuptial bath” (CCC 1617), and the Eucharist is understood as the sacramental consummation of the marriage between Christ and the Church. When we receive the Body of Christ, just like a bride we conceive new life in us – life in the Holy Spirit. It is the same Holy Spirit that forms the

bond that unites spouses in the Sacrament of Matrimony. This is the “profound mystery” in which marriage participates.

The Eucharist, then, is the very source of Christian Marriage. “In the Eucharistic gift of charity, the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its ‘communion’ and its ‘mission’” (FC 57), that is, to love as God loves.

II. Stages and Importance of Marriage Preparation

The Pontifical Council for the Family, in its document “*Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*,” identifies the following stages in preparation for the Sacrament of Matrimony:

- † **Remote Preparation** – a lifelong process
- † **Proximate Preparation** – practically, the nine to twelve months prior to the wedding
- † **Immediate Preparation** – the final two months leading up to the wedding liturgy

Remote Preparation begins in infancy and includes all family and environmental factors. This time has a profound influence on an individual’s human formation and views of marriage. A child who matures in a familial atmosphere of authentic love has the opportunity to form a bond with the living Christ through family life, catechesis, and the sacraments, resulting in an understanding of the conditions for real love, an understanding not made impossible but rendered difficult to those not raised in such an atmosphere.

The family, the domestic church, is the foundation for the remote marriage preparation process for every Catholic young person. Christian parents are the first educators of their children in faith, hope, and charity. They are “by word and example...the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child...” (LG 11). Parents are to model fidelity in marriage and unity in the family. Family life is the basis for the development of human values, formation of character, interpersonal social relationships, and authentic love.

The Church’s support of family life during the formative years is critical. Parents, parishes, religious education programs, and Catholic schools have the responsibility to transmit the teachings of the Church and to support the ideals of Catholic marriage and responsible parenthood in a manner that will allow young people to have a beautiful and inspiring understanding of marriage and the love of Jesus Christ when it clearly and unambiguously presents Catholic teaching on the “sacrament at theological, anthropological and spiritual levels” (EA 46).

While in a broad sense the **Proximate Preparation** process for the Sacrament of Matrimony begins as the young person matures into adolescence. For practical purposes the period of proximate preparation coincides with the period of engagement (preferably 9-12 months in advance of the wedding liturgy). This time of preparation is completed in hopes that it will give

new meaning, context, and form to this period of marriage preparation required by Canon Law (CIC 1063). It should be a special experience for those who have chosen to be married in the Catholic Church and is a time when couples can be guided to:

- Experience a sense of welcome and involvement in the Church
- Evaluate their readiness to live married life
- Gain insights of themselves individually and as a couple
- Obtain a deeper understanding of the Sacrament of Matrimony
- Understand the mission of a married couple both in the Church and in society
- Develop a greater appreciation of their faith

Immediate Preparation for the celebration of the sacrament occurs in the last couple of months immediately prior to the wedding liturgy. Immediate preparation consists of the final meetings between the pastor (or his delegate) and the engaged couple. The goal is to prepare the wedding liturgy and make final preparations for the couple's worthy celebration of their sacrament.

Immediate preparation provides a review of the marriage preparation experiences, especially the doctrinal, moral, and spiritual content according to the couple's needs. It is recommended that the priest or deacon witnessing the marriage meet with the couple at least once in the immediate stage of preparation to review the various preparation components. This meeting affords an opportunity to answer any remaining questions the couple may have about the Church's vision of marriage and their final preparations for the sacrament. Finally, this is the time to make certain that all documentation has been received by the parish (one month before the wedding).

Pastors, liturgists, and/or other pertinent marriage preparation ministers should devote appropriate time with the engaged couple to ensure their active and informed participation in the liturgy. Care and sensitivity must be exercised in explaining what is and what is not appropriate in the context of the wedding liturgy.

III. The Proximate Preparation Process

"The very preparation for Christian marriage is itself a journey of faith. It is a special opportunity for the engaged to rediscover and deepen the faith received in baptism and nourished by their Christian upbringing. In this way they come to recognize and freely accept their vocation to follow Christ and to serve the kingdom of God in the married state" (FC 51).

While St. John Paul II exhorted the Church to see marriage catechesis as a lifelong process (FC 66), the primary focus of marriage formation programs is on the formal engagement period, the nine to twelve months preceding marriage. This process includes a pastoral assessment of the couple's readiness for marriage, the completion of the Prenuptial Inventory (*FOCCUS*), participation in the "*Witness to Love*" mentoring program, completion of a marriage formation program, attendance at a *God Is! Day of Renewal* retreat, and an understanding of God's plan for human sexuality through instruction in Natural Family Planning, all leading up to the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

A. Pastoral Assessment of the Readiness for Marriage

Initial Assessment Conversation with Pastor (or Delegate)

The initial “in-person” conversation between the engaged couple and the pastor (or delegate) is required and intended to develop a constructive and faith-filled relationship between the pastor (or delegate) and the couple and is the first component of the proximate preparation process within the Santa Rosa Diocese. It is a time for the pastor (or delegate) to welcome the couple, taking the time to get to know them individually and as a couple. Ideally this initial assessment conversation should occur within the first month after the initial inquiry from the engaged couple.

An important part of this conversation is to ascertain whether there have been any previous marriages on behalf of either of the engaged individuals. That fact must be addressed before proceeding. A decision to proceed with or delay the wedding is made by the pastor (or delegate) after this aspect of the assessment conversation is completed.

Canon law states that “*Sacred ministers cannot deny the sacraments to those who seek them at appropriate times, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them.*” (CIC 843 §1). At the same time, pastoral care recognizes the duty to see to it that those who seek the Sacraments are prepared to receive them (CIC 843, §2) including pastoral care preceding the celebration of marriage (CIC 1063). The canons on marriage further state that all persons can contract marriage unless they are prohibited by law (CIC 1058). Before a marriage is celebrated, it must be evident that nothing prevents its valid or licit celebration (CIC 1066).

To assess the readiness for marriage:

- Discern if any impediment or obstacle exists that would prevent a valid or licit celebration;
 - If impediments or special circumstances exist, the couple is advised on how to proceed in dealing with the impediments and a follow-up interview is scheduled (no wedding date may be set until all identified impediments are resolved).
- If no impediments exist, a *tentative* wedding date is set. This date can be confirmed *after* the couple completes all the components of the marriage preparation process.

It is also the responsibility of the pastor (or delegate) to review the list of documents, permissions, and dispensations that are or may be necessary. See *Checklist of Necessary Documents* on Page 22 for a listing and explanation of each form:

- Prenuptial Testimony for Bride/Groom Form (Form A)
- Prenuptial Witness Questionnaire Form (Form B)
- Baptismal Certificates (issued within 6 months to 1 year of wedding)
- Confirmation Certificates
- Request for Matrimonial Dispensation or Permission (Form C, if necessary)
- Status of Documents (Form SD, if necessary)

Another important aspect of this assessment for the readiness of marriage is to take the time to ascertain the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of the couple about marriage in the Catholic Church. This conversation may (and likely should) take more than one meeting. The goal is for the pastor (or delegate) to develop an authentic relationship in getting to know the couple. As his knowledge of the couple increases, the pastor (or delegate) can be assured of now moving on to discussing and explaining the next steps in the marriage preparation process in guiding the couple for the reception of the Sacrament of Marriage in the Catholic Church.

B. Components of the Marriage Preparation Process

Here are the components of the proximate preparation process within the Diocese of Santa Rosa:

- 1. Initial Assessment Conversation with Pastor (or delegate)**
- 2. *FOCCUS* (Prenuptial Inventory)**
- 3. “*Witness to Love*” Mentoring Program**
- 4. Marriage Formation Program Options**
- 5. *God Is! Day of Renewal* (one-day retreat)**
- 6. Natural Family Planning Instruction**
- 7. Final meeting with the Pastor (or delegate)**

1. Initial Assessment Conversation with Pastor (or Delegate)

The initial “in-person” conversation between the engaged couple and the pastor (or delegate) is covered under **A. Pastoral Assessment of the Readiness for Marriage** (on Page 4).

2. *FOCCUS* (Prenuptial Inventory)

The approved Prenuptial Inventory for use within the Santa Rosa Diocese is ***FOCCUS*** (***Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study***). A Prenuptial Inventory is required because it facilitates the crucial dialogue through which the couple explores the significant issues that will impact their marriage. Further, it allows the pastor (or delegate) to adjust the emphasis of the marriage preparation to the couple’s specific strengths and weaknesses. The use of this inventory is beneficial in laying a foundation for the overall marriage preparation process. Because the Prenuptial Inventory supports the overall purpose of marriage preparation, it should be administered as an initial step in the Marriage Preparation Process. For specific information about *FOCCUS* go to: www.foccusinc.com

Of special note, it is recommended that four or five meetings be scheduled by the *FOCCUS* facilitator to allow for tapping into the full potential of *FOCCUS* as an evangelizing and discussion tool. The *FOCCUS* facilitator could invite couples who have knowledge of Church teaching in specific categories (e.g., finances, communication, NFP) to witness to the engaged

couples. If the results of the *FOCCUS* inventory point to issues or topics that may lead to serious conflicts for the couple, those issues should be addressed or explored more fully if deemed necessary. The Facilitator should recommend the couple to their pastor or to an appropriate licensed counselor for further discussion. *FOCCUS* is available in both English and Spanish.

3. “*Witness to Love*” Mentoring Program

Witness to Love is a virtues-based, Catechumenate-model of marriage renewal and preparation that integrates modern principles of psychology and the virtues to help couples facilitate an authentic dialogue about their relationship. The mission of *Witness to Love* is to provide the parish with the tools to transform marriage preparation into a wellspring of dynamic marriage discipleship that fosters both parish connection and nurtures authentic accompaniment before and after the wedding day.

The *Witness to Love* mentoring program is designed to allow the engaged couple to choose their own mentor couple from the parish whom they both admire and see as a source of faith formation. The mentor couple should give them a concrete connection and integration into the parish. Through the sharing of the mentor couple’s own marriage journey, the engaged couple inherits a “lifeline” of support in their commitment to Jesus and His Church. Using the *Witness to Love* workbook along with videos and guided activities, the mentor couple serves as a powerful witness for the engaged couple as they prepare for their life-time commitment to marriage. *Witness to Love* has proven to be very successful where it had been used in the many parishes across the country and it is required that each parish use this program as part of the Marriage Preparation Process in the Diocese of Santa Rosa. Upon completion of the program the pastor will receive a notice of completion from the mentor couple. *Witness to Love* is available in both English and Spanish.

For specific information about *Witness to Love*, go to: www.witnesstolove.org

4. Marriage Formation Program Options

Every engaged couple desiring to be married in the Catholic Church within the Diocese of Santa Rosa must participate in a diocesan-approved marriage formation program. This is to be completed ideally in the early stage of the engagement period. Since the last two months leading up to the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage are filled with practical details, it is important that the couple have the opportunity to spend quality time on their marriage formation early in their engagement.

There are four different types of marriage formation programs available within the Diocese of Santa Rosa. The pastor (or delegate) will discuss with each couple the program best suited to the specific needs of the parish and the couple. At the completion of the marriage formation program, the engaged couple is to obtain a “*certificate of completion*” that they will need to present to the pastor (or delegate).

Diocesan Approved Marriage Formation Program options:

- **“Catholic Marriage Prep”** on-line course:
The *Catholic Marriage Prep (CMP)* on-line course is intended for engaged couples unable to participate in an in-person marriage formation program. This on-line interactive course is rooted in St. John Paul II’s *“Theology of the Body”* and focuses on the building of strong, Christ-centered marriages. The course takes about 20 hours to complete and can take from one week to three months depending on the couple’s pace. Each couple is assigned personal, on-line instructors who follow them throughout the course. There are a variety of sessions that cover all aspects of marriage preparation, from God’s plan for marriage and family to practical tools that help develop a successful marriage relationship. This on-line course is available in both English and Spanish.

For specific information about the on-line *CMP*, a division of Agapé Catholic Ministries, go to: www.catholicmarriageprep.com

- **“Catholic Marriage Prep”** in-person course:
The *Catholic Marriage Prep (CMP)* in-person program invites couples to a deeper relationship with each other and with Christ and is rooted in St. John Paul II’s *“Theology of the Body.”* This in-person marriage formation instruction is very similar to the on-line course and is led by trained, mentor couples over the course of a few weeks, individually or in a small group setting. This *CMP* instructional program builds a foundation for a strong, healthy, Christ-centered marriage between a man and a woman as they become husband and wife. This program is available in both English and Spanish.

For specific information about the in-person *CMP*, a division of Agapé Catholic Ministries, go to: www.catholicmarriageprep.com

- **“Catholic Engaged Encounter”** weekend:
Catholic Engaged Encounter is a weekend retreat experience presented by married Catholic couples and a priest. It is designed to help engaged couples reflect, communicate, and understand their own lives, their future lives together, how they view their sexuality, and other aspects of married life. The main thrust of the weekend is personal reflection and dialogue between the engaged couple.

Catholic Engaged Encounter weekends are available in the San Francisco Archdiocese and the Sacramento Diocese in English (www.engagedencounter.org) and in the San Jose Diocese in Spanish (www.encuentrodenoviosj.org). The Santa Rosa Diocese does not have a *Catholic Engaged Encounter* program.

- **Parish Marriage Formation Program** (as endorsed by the Family Life Office):
Some Pastors may desire to provide a Marriage Formation Program within their own parish. These classes may consist of a number of sessions held in small group settings at the host parish over the course of several weeks or perhaps during one weekend. The sessions are generally led by the pastor and a knowledgeable parish team. The pastor desiring to provide a parish Marriage Formation Program is to consult with the Marriage and Family Life Office to assure that the proposed program is approved for use in the Diocese of Santa Rosa. Approved programs will be available in English and Spanish.

5. *God Is! Day of Renewal* (one-day retreat)

The *God Is! Day of Renewal* one-day retreat is an opportunity for the engaged couple to experience the fullness of faith found in the Catholic Church. It provides an opportunity to “meet” and fall in love with Jesus Christ and promotes a personal encounter with our triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This retreat meets people along their faith journey, reaching out through proclamation, personal witness, Sacramental renewal, prayer, Eucharistic adoration, music, and skits to help the participant’s faith come alive. It is the Good News of Salvation shared personally, lovingly, and joyfully! Additionally, the *God Is! Day of Renewal* provides a wonderful opportunity for the Catholic engaged couple (or individual if both are not Catholic) to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, an important part of the preparation for receiving the Sacrament of Matrimony.

The *God Is! Day of Renewal* one-day retreat is given at various locations throughout the Diocese of Santa Rosa. Generally it is presented in a parish on a Saturday and concludes with Mass with the parish community. Planning ahead to find where a *God Is! Day of Renewal* retreat is scheduled is important. Look on-line on the Diocese of Santa Rosa website or call the Family Life Office (707-566-3305) for more information.

6. Natural Family Planning Instruction

Another component of the marriage formation process is the required completion of training in *Natural Family Planning* (NFP). Instruction in NFP is one of the most practical ways the Church can help and encourage couples to conform their married love to the will of God. Married couples who experience the benefits of NFP share an enthusiasm and understanding of conjugal life, procreation, and education of their children in the area of human sexuality. NFP provides couples a deeper understanding of their sexuality by using the God-given phases of fertility and infertility for the purpose of achieving and/or postponing pregnancy. In this way, the unitive and procreative aspects of marital intimacy are maintained together in a responsible way.

The required NFP component for marriage formation is an introductory 2-hour instruction and discussion session provided by a certified individual or couple located within the Diocese of Santa Rosa with specific training and expertise in NFP. A “*Certificate of Completion*” must be submitted to the pastor upon completion of this introductory instruction. It is strongly

recommended that the pastor encourage the couple to pursue further instruction in a full-course in a particular method of NFP. Consult the Family Life Office or the Diocese of Santa Rosa website (Marriage and Family Life → Natural Family Planning) for current listings of instructors and classes.

7. Final meeting with the Pastor (or delegate)

When all the components of the proximate preparation process are completed, it is now time for the pastor (or delegate) to have another conversation with the engaged couple to review their experience in preparing for their marriage. It is a time to critically analyze their intent and to verify their readiness for the Sacrament of Marriage. If any existing obstacles or impediments have been removed and the decision is made to move forward with the celebration of marriage, the next conversation should focus on Sacramental and Liturgical considerations.

C. Convalidations

When Catholic parties have already exchanged vows in a civil ceremony and seek to marry in the Catholic Church, since the couple has not been married according to Church laws, the couple must complete some form of a marriage preparation program leading to receiving the Sacrament of Marriage. The pastor must be sensitive not to discount the level of commitment that may exist in the relationship, while making clear that the convalidation is not a renewal or “blessing” of an invalid union, but the exchange of consent and the creation of a new, valid, sacramental marriage. The couple must understand the invalidity of their present union in order to marry for the first time in the Church.

Steps toward Convalidation:

- The pastor is to meet with the couple for the *Initial Assessment Conversation with Pastor* to discuss the situation and determine the steps required for conducting a convalidation.
 - If there is a prior marriage for either party the couple must initiate a process to investigate a possible *Declaration of Nullity*. No other work on preparing for a convalidation can proceed until this step is completed.
 - A recently issued copy of the baptismal certificate for the Catholic party (or parties) will be needed.
- As part of the preparation process, the couple is to complete the *Prenuptial Inventory (FOCCUS)* to identify strengths and areas for growth in the relationship.
- Direct the couple to an appropriate marriage convalidation program. After determining the maturity and strength of the relationship, the pastor (or delegate) should decide which marriage preparation process would best suit the couple.
 - If the couple has been married civilly for a short period of time (less than 2 years), the couple, with guidance from the pastor (or delegate), is to participate

in one of the approved Marriage Formation Program options (as listed under item III.B.4 “Marriage Formation Program Options” on page 6). The couple is also required to attend the Natural Family Planning Instruction component (as listed under item III.B.6 on page 8). Additionally, pastoral care should encourage the couple to participate in *Witness to Love* and a *God Is!* retreat as well.

- If the couple has been civilly married for an extended period of time (more than 2 years), the couple should attend a marriage enrichment weekend or retreat (e.g., Marriage Encounter – available in English and Spanish) or complete a program such as the *Beloved* DVD series (available in English and Spanish).
- Request that the Catholic party (or parties) celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to their marriage convalidation ceremony.
- When the components of the *Steps toward Convalidation* process are completed, it is now time for the pastor (or delegate) to have another conversation with the couple to review their experience in preparing for their marriage. If any existing obstacles or impediments have been removed and the decision is made to move forward with the celebration of marriage, the next conversation should focus on Sacramental and Liturgical considerations.

IV. Celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony

A. Sacramental and Liturgical Considerations

The Liturgy, the public prayer of the Church, is, by its very nature, communal. Therefore, Catholic weddings are celebrations of the whole Church, as well as of the couple, and are thus governed by the liturgical principles and directives of the Church. The Wedding Liturgy is an opportunity for all present to encounter God in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. At the liturgical celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage, the celebrant explains the structure of the ceremony to the guests and encourages participation of all present. Suitable materials should be provided to support an understanding and participation of the Wedding Liturgy to the fullest extent permitted.

The celebration of marriage is fundamentally a liturgical act. It is grounded in the Sacrament of Baptism. In Baptism, the baptized becomes a member of the Body of Christ and, therefore, a part of the assembly of the people of God. Through Baptism they are no longer merely isolated selves but ‘selves’ in reference to others. What happens with one’s life affects others. Whether they live a life of happiness and fulfillment or a life of dysfunction affects the Body of Christ.

The first liturgical consideration of a couple should be their relationship to the parish assembly. Are they truly part of it? Are they committed to attending Mass together weekly? Are they known as members of this parish who regularly join the assembly at Mass? If they are not, then it is important for the parish to reach out to them to provide an opportunity for fuller engagement within the parish.

Catholic engaged persons are encouraged to celebrate the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist as part of their preparation process, especially in the final days leading to the marriage ceremony. This sacramental preparation will deepen their relationship with Jesus,

prepare them for a more meaningful experience of their wedding liturgy, and become the foundation on which they build their married lives (CIC 1065, §2).

The engaged couple need to realize that, among the many aspects of their celebration, the actual liturgical celebration is primary. They will, by reason of their own full, conscious, and active participation each Sunday, begin to consider:

- The importance of the full assembly's participation in the liturgy in which they are joined in Matrimony
- What the readings from Holy Scripture signify
- Selection of appropriate music for the wedding liturgy
- Who are the proper ministers for the sacrament
- The importance of praying with the actual *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*
- That care should be taken that the details of the marriage celebration are characterized by a restrained, authentic, and reverent style.

B. The Place of the Wedding

Since the parish church is the spiritual home of the family of God and the heart of sacramental life and ministry, Catholics are ordinarily expected to marry in the parish church of either the bride or the groom.

It is important that the parish and the couple recognize the relationship that they share. The couple preparing for marriage should be given catechesis on the rite, prayers, and scripture readings on matrimony, in order that they might receive the greatest possible benefit from the celebration of the sacrament. The following policies should assist in guiding the decision for the place of the wedding:

- Marriage between two Catholics is to be celebrated in the church of either the bride or the groom (CIC 1118, §1).
- Marriage between a Catholic and a baptized Christian who is not Catholic is to be celebrated in the parish church of the Catholic party (CIC 1118, §1).
- The minister of the non-Catholic party may be invited to participate in the ceremony. However, the Catholic priest must be the one who asks for and receives the exchange of consent for both parties.
- When serious ecumenical or family reasons exist, the Bishop may be petitioned to grant a *Dispensation from Canonical Form* (CIC 1127, §2-3). Such a dispensation may be granted for a serious reason and when the Catholic party has a genuine commitment to continue active practice of the Catholic faith.
- Marriage between a Catholic and a person who is not baptized takes place in the parish church of the Catholic party. Mass is not permitted when one party is not baptized.
- If the religious convictions of the non-baptized party or members of his/her family create difficulties for celebrating the wedding in a parish church, the Bishop may give permission for another "suitable place" (CIC 1118, §3).

- The rabbi or minister of the non-Catholic party may be invited to participate in the ceremony. However, the Catholic priest must be the one who asks for and receives the exchange of consent from both parties unless a *Dispensation from Canonical Form* is also granted.
- Outdoor weddings are not permitted in the Diocese of Santa Rosa.

C. The Celebration of Marriage

"Make [your wedding] a real celebration – because marriage is a celebration – a Christian celebration, not a worldly feast! ... What happened in Cana 2,000 years ago, happens today at every wedding celebration: that which makes your wedding full and profoundly true will be the presence of the Lord who reveals himself and gives his grace. It is his presence that offers the 'good wine', he is the secret to full joy, that which truly warms the heart...It is good that your wedding be simple and make what is truly important stand out. Some are more concerned with the exterior details, with the banquet, the photographs, the clothes, the flowers... These are important for a celebration, but only if they point to the real reason for your joy: the Lord's blessing on your love" (Pope Francis, Address to Engaged Couples, 2014).

The Catholic Church provides different forms of celebrating the Order of the Sacrament of Matrimony for different circumstances:

- When both parties are Catholic, the celebration will ordinarily take place within the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
- When one party is not Catholic but is a baptized Christian, the celebration may take place within the context of the Mass
- The celebration between a Catholic and a non-baptized person is to take place without the Mass

There are certain days in the year in which the Nuptial Mass is not permitted (i.e., the Easter Triduum). On some of these days, the marriage may be celebrated within the Mass of the Day or without the Mass. The pastor (or delegate) should help the couple to be aware of such considerations. An initiative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *"For Your Marriage,"* is an invaluable resource for planning a Catholic wedding. (www.foryourmarriage.org)

Parish policies for wedding liturgies are encouraged. Written policies or guidelines should cover the responsibilities of the various persons involved in such things as the planning, music, decorations, and photography. Detailing what is allowed or not allowed in the celebration will guide the couple as they make plans and can help to avoid misunderstandings and disappointment. While guidelines may be particular for each parish, they must support the general law of the Church and Diocesan policies.

V. Pastoral Considerations

- Marriage of Non-practicing Catholics

“The faith of the person seeking marriage in the Church can exist in varying degrees. It is the primary duty of pastors to facilitate a rediscovery of this faith, nourishing it and bringing it to maturity. But pastors must also understand the reasons that lead the Church also to admit to the celebration of marriage those who are imperfectly disposed” (FC 68). The engaged couple must articulate, to the pastor, the reasons for their desire to be married in the Catholic Church. The engaged couple should be:

- instructed in the principles of the Catholic faith
- expected to participate in the marriage preparation process
- encouraged to attend Mass regularly
- in the state of grace at the time of their marriage.

A pastor has an obligation to officiate when the faith has been personally appropriated by the couple, even if the couple is “imperfectly disposed.” Social convention, parental or family pressure, or preference for setting are not justifications for marriage in the Catholic Church.

- Marriage of Minors

Respect and sensitivity are important in supporting minors who are seeking marriage. Parental consent or special permission of the local ordinary is required for the marriage of a minor (CIC 1071 §6). While age does not assure maturity, persons under eighteen (18) years of age may not have had the time to achieve the social, emotional, and intellectual development and balance needed to make a permanent commitment to the requirements of marriage in the Church.

- Pregnancy

Premarital pregnancy does not constitute adequate justification for marriage or the abbreviation of the marriage preparation process. Pregnancy is to be treated with caution since it may interfere with a person’s free consent. In many cases a counseling program should be recommended and the couple is strongly advised to delay the wedding until after the birth of the child. The danger of a possible civil marriage is not a valid reason to omit or abbreviate the Marriage Preparation Process (see III. B. on page 8).

- Mixed Marriage (between a Catholic and a non-Catholic)

The relevant sections of the Code of Canon Law (Canons 1118, 1059, 1071, 1124-1129, 1366) regarding mixed marriages should be consulted and followed. Marriage preparation for couples in this situation should involve a preparation program including faith formation to deepen their understanding of the Catholic faith and its teachings on marriage. Additionally, pastoral care may be needed to ensure that the Catholic spouse continues the practice of his/her faith and, “as far as possible,” that children will be baptized and brought up in the Church.

- Marriage After a Previous Union

The process for marriage after divorce can be complex. An important step during the *Initial Assessment Conversation with Pastor* is to determine that both parties are canonically free to marry before the preparation process may start and all impediments and restrictions resolved before the wedding date can be set. No wedding date may be set if one or both parties are still going through the annulment process. The priest should check if there is a *vetitum* (prohibition) or *monitum* (warning) attached to an annulment that might require counseling prior to entering into another marriage in the Church. Special care should be taken during marriage preparation to assure that both parties know and understand the reasons for the failure of the past relationship, how the dynamics of a previous union may affect this marriage, and/or to discuss specific challenges that may be faced by the specific couple.

- Citizenship Status

Situations that may affect a couple's ability to contract marriage include: (1) marriage in order to remain in the United States or to gain citizenship which impacts consent and (2) couples who freely want to marry but one or both are in the United States illegally. The priest should consult the Chancery for legal clarification. Sadly, it may happen that a Church marriage is not possible.

- Sexual Identity

For a sacramental marriage the presumption is that a man and woman asking to marry understand themselves to be a heterosexual man and a heterosexual woman. When either person expresses doubt or conflict about their sexual identity or orientation, the marriage should not proceed. Competent professional help is to be sought.

- Marriage of Persons with Disabilities

"Realizing the unique gifts handicapped individuals have to offer the Church, we wish to address their need for integration into the Christian community and their fuller participation in its life" (PS 1). For matrimonial consent to be valid however, it is necessary that the contracting parties possess a sufficient use of reason; that they be free of any grave lack of discretion affecting their judgment about the rights and duties to which they are committing themselves; and that they be capable of assuming the essential obligations of the married state (CIC 1095). It is also necessary that the parties understand that marriage is a permanent union, for the good of the spouses and for the procreation and education of children (CIC 1096). The priest should utilize professionals to complete an assessment (with input from the family) about the nature of the disability and the person's level of independence and ability to make a permanent commitment, and, if appropriate, his or her capacity for communication, intimacy, and parenthood.

- Chemical Dependency/Alcoholism

Great pastoral sensitivity must be shown by the priest if there is a question of alcohol or chemical dependency on behalf of one or both of the engaged. The couple must confront the issue before marriage. A pastoral evaluation should be made to determine if the parties have

the true desire and ability, based on possible chemical or alcohol dependency, to fulfill the required demands of a sacramental marriage. The marriage formation process should assist the engaged couple to confront the issues of chemical dependency and alcoholism before marriage and encourage them to seek professional treatment.

- Marriage of Seniors

Engaged couples over fifty-five (55) years of age should be advised to establish a will or revisit their existing wills to settle any concerns regarding inheritance and family matters in light of their pending marriage. Consideration should be made of the creation of specialized prenuptial agreements to assure the proper inheritance of family assets to the children of previous marriages who are the rightful heirs. Care must be exercised to assure that such prenuptial agreements do not imply the possibility of future divorce.

- Prenuptial Agreements

A prenuptial agreement is not an automatic determination of any invalid marital consent, but the agreement should be evaluated to determine if there are conditions limiting consent. A sacramental marriage is based on a permanent and committed lifelong partnership which implies sharing of spiritual and temporal goods. A prenuptial agreement which establishes a plan for ownership of assets in the event of divorce is antithetical to Catholic marriage. Such an agreement would be an impediment to approval of the marriage. However, there may be cases in which an agreement would be appropriate, such as for couples who may have children from previous marriages who are the rightful heirs to assets from those marriages.

- Sexually Active/Cohabiting Engaged Couples

Sexual activity and cohabitation among unmarried couples is unfortunately commonplace in our society today. When sexually active/cohabiting engaged couples desire to marry in the Church, the marriage preparation minister should neither immediately challenge nor ignore the situation. *“Pastors and the ecclesial community should take care to become acquainted with such situations and their actual causes case by case. They should make tactful and respectful contact with the couples concerned and enlighten them patiently, correct them charitably, and show them the witness of Christian family life in such a way as to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation”* (FC 81). *“All these situations require a constructive response, seeking to transform them into opportunities that can lead to the fullness of marriage and family in conformity of the Gospel”* (L 42).

Sexual activity and cohabitation should be addressed during the *Initial Assessment Conversation with Pastor* in the Proximate Stage of Preparation. There are four main pastoral goals in addressing this issue:

1. To clarify the Church’s teaching about the beauty of sexuality in marriage. Emphasis should be placed on the true meaning of sexual love in terms of God’s plan for human love in understanding *Theology of the Body*.

2. To encourage the couple gently, but directly, to refrain from having sexual relations until they are sacramentally married as an expression of their marriage commitment.
3. To lead couples to reflect on why they decided to become sexually active/cohabitate so that the factors that may put them at risk for future marital difficulties may be evaluated.
4. To help couples heal from spiritual and emotional wounds that the individuals may have experienced from past sexual behavior so those wounds will not have a harmful effect on their marriage. Healing begins with repentance and a return to the sacramental life of the church, especially with Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

If the couple is unable to acknowledge the beauty of God's plan for marriage and sexuality and the need for the sacramental reconciliation, the pastor *may* postpone the marriage if he feels more preparation may be helpful. However, since Canon Law does not cite cohabitation as a formal impediment to marriage, after the couple completes the marriage preparation process, even if the couple refuses to live a chaste life, the marriage may take place. In this case a marriage ceremony without Mass may be strongly proposed.

Causes for Denial or Delay of Marriage

The following is a list of situations which may call for delaying or refusing a marriage request. This list is not exhaustive.

- Non-Practice of the Faith

While an indication of the practice of faith is required, the level of faith is not the question. However, the non-practice of the faith by the Catholic party or parties with no reasonable hope of resuming such practice would be a reason for denial of the marriage request. *"As for wishing to lay down further criteria for admission to the ecclesial celebration of marriage, criteria that would concern the level of faith of those to be married, this would above all involve great risks"* (FC 68).

- Declaration of an Intention Contrary to Marriage

A Declaration of an Intention Contrary to Marriage which denies the other party's right to a permanent union, children, or exclusiveness is a situation which may call for refusing a marriage request. Parties must understand and agree to the permanence and exclusivity of marriage. After all attempts to encourage the person to accept this teaching have been rejected, the priest must refuse the marriage since such intentions constitute a grave lack of proper matrimonial intent.

- Lack of Openness to Life

By its very nature, marriage is *"ordained towards the begetting and education of children"* (GS 50). If either or both parties indicate on the Prenuptial Inventory (*FOCCUS*) or express an

unwillingness to have children, the marriage should be delayed until the couple agrees to be open to the possibility of children.

- Indifference or Disdain for the Catholic Education of Children

Marriage must be delayed until the Catholic couple or the Catholic member of the couple accepts the Church's teaching concerning Catholic instruction for children. The Catholic couple or Catholic member of the couple must promise to do all in his/her power to share the Catholic faith and have children baptized and raised as Catholics.

- Lack of Understanding of the Sacrament

If the couple exhibits substantial lack of appreciation or awareness of the sacramental and spiritual aspects of marriage, the marriage should be delayed until some understanding is present. If after serious and appropriate marriage formation there is no hope of improvement, the marriage should be refused.

- Existence of Canonical Impediment

If no dispensation from an existing Canonical impediment is possible, the marriage must be refused.

- Lack of Proper Motive

If the desire to be married in the Church is to only to satisfy parents, from family pressure, or for appearance's sake, the marriage must be postponed until there is more substantive motivation.

- Serious Lack of Maturity

Serious lack of spiritual, emotional, or psychological maturity for marriage may be a reason for denial or delay of marriage. If, after serious attempts to address maturity in these areas, the issue persists with no hope of improvement, the marriage should be refused.

- Severe Emotional or Personality Disorder

The pressure of a diagnosed Emotional or Personality Disorder is a reason for concern. If the disorder is deemed by professionals to be serious enough to invalidate consent, the request for marriage should be denied.

- Refusal to Cooperate

Refusal to cooperate and participate in the Marriage Preparation Process is cause for the marriage to be delayed until all stages of the process are completed in good faith. The Diocese and parish have the responsibility to provide adequate and reasonable accommodations.

- Strong Objection by Parent or Guardian

If a parent or guardian of a person under 18 years of age presents a written strong and reasonable objection to the marriage, the marriage may be delayed or denied.

Pastoral Care After Marriage

“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” (L 40). It is critical to provide continuing support for couples after marriage to aid in living the Christian vocation of marriage including balancing time to maintain the marriage relationship, family life skills, spiritual and practical parenthood, and conjugal love. Canon Law requires pastors and faith communities to provide assistance to married couples so that *“the matrimonial state is preserved in a Christian spirit and advances in perfection”* (CIC 1063). Marriage enrichment programs and continued support for newly married couples is as important as the marriage preparation program through *“meaningful liturgies, devotional practices, and the Eucharist celebrated for families”* (L 40).

VI. Documents, Permissions, Dispensations

- *Preuptial Testimony for Bride/Groom* (Form A)

The completion of the *Preuptial Testimony for Bride/Groom* form is required to establish freedom to marry and to identify any impediments to the proposed marriage (CIC 1066-67). The answers assure the Church that the bride and groom freely wish to marry one another. It also explores the engaged couple’s understanding of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

At a time soon after the *Initial Assessment Conversation with Pastor*, the bride and groom must be interviewed separately by the priest or deacon in completing the *Preuptial Testimony for Bride/Groom*. This is a confidential church document and should be kept in a secured file with the other necessary documents such as the marriage assessment, the Preuptial Inventory, the certificate of completion of an approved marriage formation program, and their NFP training certificate.

- *Preuptial Witness Questionnaire* (Form B)

Each party must provide at least one witness to complete the *Preuptial Witness Questionnaire*. The witness must be able to give testimony regarding any impediments or issues that would hamper the bride’s or groom’s ability to enter into marriage unreservedly. The witness, preferably a parent, must be someone who has known the party since adolescence.

- Baptismal Certificates

A Catholic Baptismal Certificate is needed to verify the fact of baptism and to facilitate the post-marital registration and notifications required by Canon Law (CIC 1121-22). This certificate must be obtained from the parish of baptism within six months to one year of the wedding date and be complete with marginal notations.

- Confirmation Certificates

“Catholics who have not yet received the Sacrament of Confirmation are to receive it before they are admitted to marriage if it can be done without grave inconvenience” (CIC 1065). The certificate may be obtained from the parish of Confirmation if it is not noted on the Baptismal Certificate.

- Petition for Disparity of Worship

Marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person is invalid without a dispensation (CIC 1086). A petition for Dispensation from Disparity of Worship (on *Request for Matrimonial Dispensation or Permission* - Form C) is used to request authorization for a Catholic to marry a non-baptized person. It is also used when a Catholic marries a “doubtfully” baptized person, either because the fact of the baptism is doubtful or the validity of the baptism is in doubt. This form contains a statement by the Catholic party that he/she understands the expectations of the Church regarding continued practice of the faith and having children of the marriage baptized and raised in the Catholic faith. The form also contains a statement to the non-Catholic party that he/she has been informed of this declaration and promise by the Catholic party. Failure to obtain a Dispensation from Disparity of Worship (also known as Disparity of Cult) renders the marriage invalid.

- Petition for Marriage of Mixed Religion

Marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic requires approval through a petition for Mixed Religion Permission (on *Request for Matrimonial Dispensation or Permission* - Form C). This form contains a statement by the Catholic party that he/she understands the expectations of the Church regarding continued practice of the faith and having children of the marriage baptized and raised in the Catholic faith. The form also contains a statement to the non-Catholic party that he/she has been informed of this declaration and promise by the Catholic party. Failure to obtain this Mixed Religion Permission renders the marriage invalid.

- Petition for Dispensation from Canonical Form

When a Catholic desires to marry someone of another religious tradition in their place of worship and before the authorized minister of that religion, a petition for Dispensation from Canonical Form is needed (on *Request for Matrimonial Dispensation or Permission* - Form C). A petition for Dispensation from Disparity of Worship or Mixed Religion Permission would also be required.

- Status of Documents

Status of Documents (Form SD) is used when the priest or deacon of the engaged couple’s home parish (within the Diocese of Santa Rosa) prepares prenuptial documents for another parish (outside the Diocese of Santa Rosa) where the wedding will take place. The documents are to be reviewed and sent to the Bishop (the Tribunal) of the Diocese of Santa Rosa for the *nihil obstat*, then forwarded to the Chancery of the diocese where the marriage is to be celebrated. That Chancery will then deliver the documents to the parish where the marriage

will take place. This procedure, with all premarital documents and permission of the pastor, assures the authenticity of the documents from diocese to diocese. It is the responsibility of the engaged couple's home parish (within the Diocese of Santa Rosa) to complete all required marriage preparation components in keeping with the Marriage Preparation Policy of the Diocese of Santa Rosa for wedding liturgies to take place outside the Diocese of Santa Rosa.

- "Destination" Weddings

The Diocese of Santa Rosa features many parish churches that are desirable locations for engaged couples from outside the Diocese to celebrate their wedding liturgies. Commonly known as "destination" weddings, they are allowed but do take additional coordination on behalf of the engaged couple. The first step is to check with the "destination" church to make tentative scheduling arrangements. Lead time, up to a year in advance, is recommended.

The next step for the engaged couple is to begin planning the marriage preparation process with their own home pastor. All marriage preparation, including the prenuptial inventory, and all documents are to be completed by the pastor (or delegate) of the home parish of the couple, in compliance with their applicable Diocesan Marriage Preparation Policy. After the home pastor (or delegate) completes all the necessary documentation, the home diocese office (Chancery) must provide the *Status of Documents* and *nihil obstat* for the Diocese of Santa Rosa. The Tribunal Office of the Diocese of Santa Rosa, upon reception and approval, will then forward the documentation to the parish within the Diocese of Santa Rosa where the wedding is to take place.

Checklist for *Engaged Couples*

Note: "Start Time" is recommended *prior* to the tentative wedding date.

<u>Start Time</u>	<u>Date Completed</u>	<u>Stage</u>
9-12 months	_____	Initial Meeting with Pastor This initial meeting should occur immediately after your engagement. The Pastor will walk you through the process and explain these necessary documents: <input type="checkbox"/> Prenuptial Testimony for Bride/Groom (Form A) <input type="checkbox"/> Prenuptial Witness Questionnaire (Form B) <input type="checkbox"/> Recent Baptismal Certificate(s)/Proof of Baptism <input type="checkbox"/> Confirmation Certificate(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Petition for Marriage of Mixed Religion (Form C, if necessary) <input type="checkbox"/> Petition for Disparity of Worship (Form C, if necessary) <input type="checkbox"/> Petition from Canonical Form (Form C, if necessary) <input type="checkbox"/> Status of Documents (Form SD, if necessary)
9-12 months	_____	FOCCUS (Prenuptial Inventory)
6-9 months	_____	<i>Witness to Love</i> mentor program
6-9 months	_____	Marriage Formation Program: Which one completed? <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Catholic Marriage Prep</i> "on-line" program or <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Catholic Marriage Prep</i> "in-person" course or <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Catholic Engaged Encounter</i> weekend or <input type="checkbox"/> Parish Program (approved by Diocese of Santa Rosa)
3-9 months	_____	Attend a <i>God Is! Day of Renewal</i> retreat
3-6 months	_____	Natural Family Planning (2-hr. intro course)
1-2 months	_____	Sacrament of Reconciliation
1-2 months	_____	Final Meeting with Pastor
1-3 months	_____	Obtain Marriage License

Checklist of Necessary Documents

For Pastor (or delegate)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Document</u>
_____	Preuptial Testimony for Bride/Groom (Form A)
_____	Preuptial Witness Questionnaire (Form B)
_____	Groom's Baptismal Certificate
_____	Bride's Baptismal Certificate
_____	Groom's Confirmation Certificate
_____	Bride's Confirmation Certificate
_____	Request for Matrimonial Dispensation or Permission (Form C, if needed)
_____	Certificates of Completion:
_____	<i>Witness to Love</i> mentor program
_____	Marriage Formation Program (Catholic Marriage Prep on- line or in-person, Catholic Engaged Encounter, or Parish-led program)
_____	<i>God Is! Day of Renewal</i> retreat
_____	Natural Family Planning introductory session
_____	State of California Marriage License

Addendum

Additional resources that are available for engaged couples

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) recommends:

- www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/index.cfm
- The "For Your Marriage" website offers practical help and advice whether you are seriously dating, engaged, or at any stage of married life. If you are planning a Catholic wedding, you will find information on everything from choosing the music and readings to marrying someone who is not Catholic.
- The "Marriage: Unique for a Reason" website is part of the USCCB's ongoing efforts to promote and defend marriage as the union of one man and one woman. It offers many educational resources for Catholics and others who want to better understand and articulate the Church's teaching on marriage. The website currently features five video resources: *Made for Each Other*, *Made for Life*, *Made for Freedom*, *Made for the Common Good*, and *El Matrimonio: Hecho para el amor y vida* (in Spanish with English subtitles), as well as FAQs about marriage, a library of Church teaching, and a regularly updated blog.
- The Por tu Matrimonio website is a space to inspire, assist and encourage Spanish-speaking couples to live their marriage more fully. Por Tu Matrimonio es un espacio para inspirar, ayudar y exhortar a las parejas de habla hispana a vivir más plenamente su relación de pareja.

For specific information about the **FOCCUS** prenuptial inventory, go to:

- www.foccusinc.com

For specific information about **Witness to Love**, go to:

- www.witnesstolove.org

For information on Marriage Formation options:

- For specific information about the on-line or in-person **Catholic Marriage Preparation**, a division of Agapé Catholic Ministries, go to: www.catholicmarriageprep.com
- For specific information and to find a **Catholic Engaged Encounter** weekend go to: www.engagedencounter.org. En Español: www.encuentrodenoviosj.org

For resources on Natural Family Planning visit:

- California Association of Natural Family Planning www.canfp.org
- Couple-to-Couple League (Sympto-Thermal Method) www.ccli.org
- Billings Ovulation Method www.boma-usa.org
- Family of the Americas Foundation (Billings Ovulation Method in Spanish) www.familyplanning.net
- Pope Paul VI Institute (Creighton Model Training and Infertility Specialists) www.popepaulvi.com