



Marriage in the Catholic Church

## *MARRIAGE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*

Marriage is a commitment between a man and a woman to share their entire lives in an intimate way. It is a commitment by each to join their lives together forever to encourage the other to grow in holiness, to remain completely faithful to one another, to receive God's gift of children and raise them lovingly in faith.

Therefore, our Lord raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament, a sign of Christ's love. In marriage, Catholics encounter not only our Creator but also Christ, the Redeemer of all, and his Spirit, the Sanctifier.

A Christian marriage, then, is:

a **Sacrament**, because a couple consents to mutually give and accept each other in a covenant relationship. This conjugal covenant is a sacrament for it is rooted in baptism, developed in faith, nourished by the sacramental activity of the Church, and transformed by the redemptive love of Christ and the Church.

a **Permanent and Life-long Union**, because marital love is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Married spouses are called each day to realize this covenant through mutual fidelity and conjugal love. Thus couples signify and participate in the covenant of lasting unity and fruitful love that exists between Christ and the Church, so as to build up the Church and share in the salvific love of God.

**Open to growth in love and understanding**, and to life in harmony and fidelity within the community of the People of God, as well as total life long fidelity to one another.

**Committed to generous and responsible parenthood**, working together in partnership with God to raise loving, responsible children.

Your relationship in marriage is not static; it takes your gifts and talents as individuals and develops them in a new partnership blessed by God. This partnership offers you the strength to face the day-to-day realities of married life, and provides a vision of what love can be.

To live this type of life requires special help and strength. Your marriage should be celebrated, after careful preparation, with the greatest joy, and with much prayer. The following is an attempt to assist you in your preparation for your Marriage in the Lord.

### ***PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE***

Although the idea of a wedding may seem quite simple, the reality can be complex. Concerns for the sanctity of marriage and the profound effect that marriage will have on your life are the compelling reasons for the Church's stress on careful, even meticulous, preparation.

Marriage preparation has two sides: a personal one in which you share more fully with each other your beliefs, values, goals, and feelings, and prepare for the commitment you are about to make; and a formal preparation that involves not only you but also your

families, the Church, and society. Both of these began shortly after you started to explore a possible commitment to each other in matrimony. This time of preparation is a time of growth and should be filled with joy.

### *PERSONAL PREPARATION*

Your personal preparation begins a sharing with each other that should continue and develop throughout your married life. It is important for you to learn to communicate your ideas and your emotions, your plans and your dreams, your hopes and whatever fears you may have.

You may want to focus on:

1. Considering your rights and responsibilities as a married couple to each other, to society, and before God and the Church.
2. Knowing each other's relationship with God and reflecting on the role that God will play in your life together.
3. Adequate formation in and an appreciation of human sexuality, and of the enriching role that it will play in your marriage.
4. Sharing ideas and attitudes about responsible parenthood.
5. Comparing the values that each of you hold on material and financial matters, and adapting them to your new status.
6. Setting some goals for yourselves, including not only immediate plans, but also long range goals

that will give direction to your life as husband and wife.

7. Developing a style of joint decision-making and problem solving which will aid you in facing the future with love, common sense, and good humor.
8. Establishing new relationships with your own and each other's families and friends.

### *FORMAL PREPARATION*

Your personal preparation is crucial for the success of your marriage. Your family and friends, the priest, and the Church as a whole have a responsibility to support you in these preparations. Realizing that you will have already begun to think about things mentioned above, the Church has developed a formal preparation required of every couple seeking to be married, that will assist you in exploring those issues in even greater depth.

The priest or deacon you have selected to witness your wedding will be your principle advisor in the formal marriage preparation process. Therefore, you should contact this priest or deacon at least six months before your proposed wedding date. If you plan to be married in a Church other your own parish, or if the priest or deacon whom you have asked to officiate is not a member of your parish staff, you should also contact one of your own parish priests.

The priest or deacon who is to assist you in preparing for marriage will give a general overview of the entire

preparation period and settle on a schedule of the steps to be taken that is convenient for all concerned.

Four elements in this preparation process can be enumerated:

**1. Personal Preparation** - To assist your personal preparation you need to select a marriage preparation program from among those certified by the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, such as Pre-Cana, parish-based Sponsor Couple Program, Engaged Encounter Weekends. The priest or deacon who will witness your marriage will discuss these alternatives with you and help you select the one best suited for your needs. Parishioners of the Cathedral of Saint Joseph are strongly encouraged to make an Engaged Encounter Weekend.

**2. Sacramental Preparation** - The universal law of the Church requires that parties respond to a premarriage questionnaire and furnish certain documents mentioned, including, for Catholic parties, a baptismal certificate of recent date (i.e., within six months of the proposed marriage). The priest or deacon assisting you will present the questionnaire and guide you in obtaining the documents that may be needed.

While Catholics do not need to be confirmed to be married, reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation before celebration of Marriage is strongly encouraged. As with any sacrament, Catholics are strongly encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance before marriage.

**3. The Legal Preparation** - Civil law requires that the parties present a license valid for the city or county where

the marriage is to take place to the clergyman who officiates. In Ohio County, WV, there is no waiting period between time of application for and receipt of the license; rather, the application process takes about 15 minutes. There is a fee attached, the couples need to show ID; those who are previously married and divorced, need final decree papers; those who are coming from out of state can apply in any county in WV; residents of WV must apply in the county in which they reside.

**4. The Liturgical Preparation** - The priest, deacon, or pastoral minister will explain the requirements, suggest many options for you to consider, and will work with you in planning a wedding that will reflect both the rich traditions of the Church as well as your own personal taste. For marriages between Catholics and persons of other religious denominations, please consult the priest or deacon officiating for information on the appropriate guidelines.

**5. The Practical Preparation** - You will need to reserve a time at the church and make arrangements regarding music for your wedding. You will be invited to participate in the selection of Scriptural Readings to be used during the celebration and the selection of music. National, local, and familial customs for the marriage ceremony may also need to be considered. In these matters your families and friends can be of great assistance.

As you can see from the above, you have a great deal of work to do in preparation for your wedding and your marriage. While special arrangements can be made

because of particular problems, this entire process usually requires about six months to complete and may require several meetings between you and the priest or deacon you have chosen to witness the marriage.

### *YOUR WEDDING*

Since the Eucharist is the perfect sign of the union of Christ and his Church, the Sacrament of Marriage between two Catholics normally is to be celebrated within Mass.

When either the bride or groom is not Catholic, the Marriage is outside of Mass in order to avoid the appearance of disunity or division on such an important day for the couple and their families.

The wedding may take place in the parish Church of either the bride or groom. With permission of the pastor of either the bride or the groom, the wedding may be held in another Church or chapel. Permission for a marriage in a place other than a parish Church or chapel is granted only in extraordinary circumstances and may be obtained only from the Chancery.

Your wedding may be held on any day of the week throughout the year except Sundays, the first Friday of the month, Holy Thursday through Easter Sunday, Ash Wednesday, and November 2, All Souls Day. Weddings are not celebrated at a scheduled Sunday or Holy Day parish Mass. They may, however, be held any time of day



or evening depending on the availability of the Church. At the Cathedral of Saint Joseph, weddings on Saturday are not scheduled any later than 2:00 p.m.

***GUIDELINES FOR YOUR PRIEST OR DEACON OF WHICH YOU SHOULD BE AWARE***

The jurisdiction for officiating at a wedding usually rests with the pastor or clergy staff of the Catholic party's parish. No priest or deacon may officiate at the wedding of parishioners of another parish without receiving written permission from the proper pastor.

In an interfaith marriage, the pastor of the non-Catholic party should be contacted to determine the parishioner's eligibility to marry. If yours is an interfaith marriage, you may wish to receive a dispensation to marry in the church of the non-Catholic party. However, two separate ceremonies are not permitted.

Without proper delegation, no priest or deacon may officiate at a wedding in a parish to which he is not assigned. This delegation, which is usually granted, is a rule of Canon Law for validity, and the responsibility for obtaining delegation rests upon the priest or deacon who is to witness the marriage.

The priest or deacon has a serious moral responsibility to provide personal pastoral care by meeting with both of you as often as necessary to assist in your immediate preparation for marriage as well as the wedding. He

should be particularly concerned that you both understand and appreciate the sacramental, liturgical, and spiritual aspects of a Christian marriage, as well as the practical consequences involved. The priest or deacon will take special care to help a young couple determine their readiness for Christian marriage because marriage failure among young people has become a subject of increasing concern to the Church.

The pastor or the clergy staff of the parish, where the wedding takes place, has the responsibility to see that the policies stated herein are carried out. The officiating clergyman will see to the details of the formal process. When the officiating clergyman is from another parish within the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, he is responsible for guiding both of you through the process and will be asked to do so by your parish priest or deacon. Your parish priest or his pastoral associate or the celebrant witnessing your marriage is responsible for preparing you for the Sacrament of Marriage and guiding you through the process.

### ***SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES***

**INTERFAITH MARRIAGES:** The celebration of marriage between Catholics and non-Catholics should be celebrated outside Mass. The ceremony can be planned to emphasize especially the Word of God where all Christians find a source of unity and strength. Marriage between Catholics and non-Christians will require special planning to ensure sensitivity to the traditions represented. Even where permission has been granted for

you to be married in the church of the non-Catholic party, all of the steps in this policy must be observed.

**VALIDATIONS:** If you have married outside the Church, you should approach the decision to enter the Sacrament of Matrimony through a process similar to that outlined above, provided you are free to marry in the Church. The nature and extent of the consultation process should be dependent on the reasons for originally marrying outside the Church and the duration and stability of your present marriage, as well as the factors listed in "Delays."

**PREVIOUS MARRIAGES:** Since the ordinary premarital consultation processes are designed for couples entering marriage for the first time, they may be inappropriate for you if either of you has been widowed or has had a previous marriage annulled by the Church. In this case, your priest or deacon will provide consultation designed to meet your particular needs as a couple.

### *DELAYS*

**REASONS FOR DELAYS:** Circumstances may arise which would necessitate more extended consultation and evaluation to assist you in determining your readiness for marriage. In such cases, the priest or deacon is obliged to ask you to delay your marriage pending the outcome of such consultation and evaluation.

These circumstances exist where:

1. One or both of you have been previously married and have not yet received an Decree of Nullity from the Church.
2. The clergyman is convinced that one or both of you lack understanding of, or a commitment to, the Sacrament of Marriage (e.g., if you refuse to practice your faith or have no intention of returning to it), if you do not understand or refuse to accept the rights and responsibilities of Marriage, or if you have come to the Church merely to satisfy your parents or to seek the atmosphere of a Church wedding.
3. You refuse to take part in good faith in the formal marriage preparations outlined above.
4. One or both of you is below the age of 21, or shows the lack of maturity demanded by a Christian marriage.
5. You are under substantial and undue pressure to marry from external sources (e.g., social, religious, parental pressure, or premarital pregnancy).
6. A parent or guardian has made written a strong objection to your marriage.

**THE PROCESS IN CASE OF DELAY:** If one of these special cases exists, you will be asked to seek further consultation and can be required to be evaluated by a certified counselor as to your readiness for marriage. The counselor will not be deciding if you can marry. He or she will assist you to evaluate your readiness to understand and to meet the responsibilities of marriage in the Catholic Church in the light of your special circumstances. The final decision will rest with you and

the clergyman assisting you. If the clergyman is unable in good conscience to witness your marriage in the name of the Catholic Church, he is obliged to notify you of this fact and of the reasons for the delay.

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Based upon  
<http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/preparation/MarriageLord.cfm>