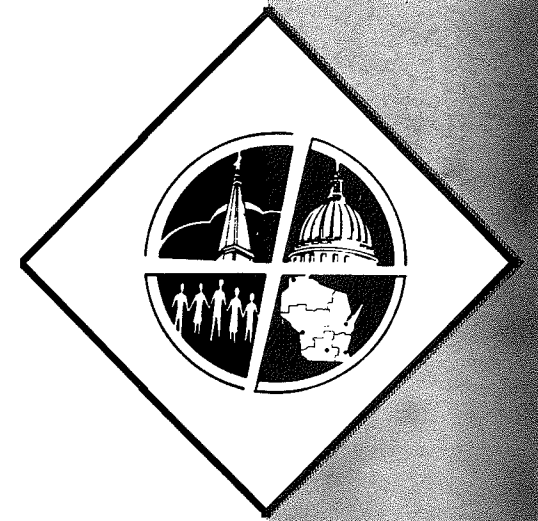


■ W I S C O N S I N ■



**PASTORAL
GUIDELINES
FOR
MARRIAGE PREPARATION**



COUPLES' GUIDE

Wisconsin Catholic Conference

Archdiocese of Milwaukee
Diocese of Green Bay
Diocese of La Crosse
Diocese of Madison
Diocese of Superior

Dear Engaged Couples,

Marriage is a sacrament. It can also be one of the greatest sources of strength, hope and encouragement in a person's life. But sustaining a grace-filled marriage requires patience, sacrifice, flexibility and a lifetime of honest communication.

Because the Catholic Church puts a high value on marriage and wants people to have successful marriages that bring them happiness and joy, it believes that marriage should not be entered into lightly.

When you choose to get married in the Catholic Church, you are asking for more than a ceremony, a church building and a musician. You are asking to celebrate a sacrament. You will make a vow before God, family, friends and your future spouse to stay married for the rest of your life. This is a momentous promise and commitment.

In an effort to help you prepare for that commitment and for the sacrament, the Catholic Church requires that you participate in a marriage preparation process. The process will provide you with an opportunity to talk about your personal values, such as how you view faith, money, work, sex, children, and your extended families in your life together. It seeks to help you identify what you expect from marriage and your spouse. By talking about these things in advance, you can come to a greater understanding of areas that will require special sensitivity and openness in your marriage.

For many couples, this process is a wonderful time of affirmation. It reminds them of all the good things they have working in their favor. For other couples, the process is an opportunity to discuss issues that should be addressed before they make a lifetime commitment.

Your wedding ceremony and celebration last for one day; your marriage will last for the rest of your life. We hope that this process will help you succeed in your commitment to each other, to God and to the Christian community.

*Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland, Archdiocese of Milwaukee
Bishop Robert J. Banks, Diocese of Green Bay
Bishop John J. Paul, Diocese of LaCrosse
Bishop William H. Bullock, Diocese of Madison
Bishop Raphael M. Fliss, Diocese of Superior*

PREFACE

Marriage is a sacred relationship. For you as individual persons, it is a moment of profound richness and dignity. For the community, it is an institution that serves as one of the basic bonds which holds our society together. For the Church, it is a sacramental event that gives a visible sign of God's presence and graceful intervention in our lives.

The Church has a rich tradition in its teaching on sacramental marriage and covenantal union. Throughout the Old Testament the authors speak of God making a covenant with the chosen people and promising that they will never be forsaken. The authors of the New Testament speak of Jesus as the new covenant and compare the relationship of Jesus with the Church to the relationship of a husband and wife.

The Church believes that the sacred union of husband and wife is itself a **sacrament** and acknowledges God's unconditional love and presence in their relationship. You, as a couple, are assured of God's graces as you face the struggles and joys of a lifelong journey of faith together. You, as the bride and groom, are the ministers in this unique sacrament of marriage. For this reason, it is your responsibility to judge your readiness for marriage in your relationship and in your personal faith. The Church is here to assist you in making a judgment concerning your readiness for marriage and to provide an environment of support and love in which you as a couple can succeed. Through marriage preparation, you will be given an opportunity to review your decision to marry and your decision may be reinforced through the preparation.

In order to provide strong support and care for you as you enter the sacred state of marriage, the Catholic Dioceses of Wisconsin have prepared these Pastoral Guidelines for Marriage Preparation. These guidelines have not been written to make it difficult for you to marry in the Catholic Church. Rather, they have been written to help you more deeply realize the serious and sacred, yet joyful and life-giving nature of the Sacrament of Matrimony. The intention of the marriage preparation process established in these pastoral guidelines is to enable you as a couple to pray together in the community of the Church, to be God's witnesses in the world, and to "reach old age in the company of [your] friends, and come at last to the kingdom of heaven" (*Rite of Marriage, Nuptial Blessing 3*).

- I. Location of Preparation and the Wedding Liturgy.** The wedding liturgy is central to your marriage celebration. The following guidelines will assist you in determining in which parish you should marry and how to proceed if your marriage is to be celebrated in a parish other than one in which one of you has residence or is registered.

Guidelines:

Your wedding liturgy and your preparation for marriage are to take place in a parish in which at least one of you is resident.

If your marriage will not take place at the parish where one or both of you reside, your pastor(s) must give permission for your wedding to take place in another church.

- II. Early Contact with the Parish.** The guidelines advising early contact with your parish are intended to insure that you have adequate time to prepare for your marriage and your wedding celebration. They also provide the pastor, deacon or pastoral ministers and you an opportunity to develop a relationship with one another.

Guidelines:

Your preparation for marriage will begin when you announce your engagement, even if that is a year or more before your proposed wedding date. You must contact your parish a minimum of six months prior to the anticipated date of your wedding.

It is recommended that your formal preparation be completed at least six weeks prior to the anticipated date of your wedding.

- III. Engagement Blessing.** An engagement blessing emphasizes the importance of this time of discernment and preparation for marriage. It also provides a ritual through which your families and the parish community can bless you and become involved in your journey of faith in marriage.

Guideline:

Following the engagement announcement, the parish may provide an opportunity for your family and members of the parish community to affirm your decision through an engagement blessing.

IV. The Marriage Preparation Process

- A. The Initial Session.** The Church wants your relationship and marriage to be successful and to be a source of happiness and blessing throughout your lives. This initial meeting will help explain the marriage preparation process, determine your canonical and civil eligibility for marriage, and explore the possibility for the sacrament of confirmation if one of you is a Catholic who has not been confirmed.

Guideline:

Your initial session with the pastor/deacon or pastoral minister will occur as soon as you inform the parish that you have decided to marry.

- B. Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage.** This section of your marriage preparation presents the essential Christian and human aspects of marriage so that you may come to a deeper understanding of all the dimensions of the marriage covenant. It provides you with concrete means to reflect on your relationship in light of the factors and issues that are usually involved in marriage. It emphasizes the ongoing nature of marital development and love including a deeper understanding of God and your relationship with God in prayer.

Guidelines:

Your relationship as a couple and your readiness for marriage will be explored through a premarital inventory or an equivalent experience.

You, as an engaged couple, will participate in an instructional program provided by the diocese or a parish program that follows the criteria of the state guidelines.

At the completion of this process, the pastor, deacon or pastoral minister (with input from designated marriage preparation ministers) will proceed with your marriage unless a serious obstacle arises that might prevent you from entering a sacramental and permanent marriage. (These may include: incapability to assume the obligations of marriage due to psychological causes, an expressed intention to deny the other a permanent and exclusive union, a decision by either to permanently prevent children, and refusal of the Catholic to make every effort to provide for the Catholic formation of children.)

- C. Liturgical Preparation.** These guidelines indicate the ritual to be followed as you prepare and celebrate your wedding liturgy. In the event that your wedding liturgy will not be celebrated in

a Catholic Church, your pastor, deacon or pastoral minister will advise you of the importance of completing the marriage preparation program and of the required dispensation.

Guidelines:

You as an engaged couple, along with your pastor, deacon or pastoral minister are to follow the Catholic Rite of Marriage and diocesan guidelines in preparing your wedding liturgy.

In the event that your wedding liturgy will be celebrated in other than a Catholic church for a reasonable cause, the marriage preparation sessions are to be completed and a dispensation obtained by the Catholic pastor or deacon.

- V. Delay of Marriage.** Sometimes it is wise to delay a marriage. The guidelines in this section emphasize the importance that the Catholic community places on the permanence and sacredness of marriage. The guidelines indicate that there might be a just cause for delaying your marriage and present a process for you to follow if a delay is recommended.

Guidelines:

For a just cause a marriage can be delayed. (Common causes include: non-practice of the faith by the Catholic with no intention of practicing the faith, substantial lack of appreciation of the spiritual and sacramental aspects of marriage, refusal to cooperate in the marriage preparation process, and unmet obligations to a person or children arising from a prior union.)

If a delay is recommended, you will be offered resources to help you remove the cause(s) of delay, and you will be advised of the process of appeal.

- VI. Appeal Process.** In the unlikely event that you and the pastor/deacon or pastoral minister disagree as to whether the marriage should proceed, the appeal process protects the rights of all concerned and provides you with the opportunity to have diocesan personnel review your case.

Guidelines:

If your marriage is delayed, you may ask to have your situation reviewed by the designated diocesan office or agency.

The recommendations arising from the appeal process shall be referred to the bishop

or his representative for final determination in a timely and strictly confidential manner.

- VII. Marriage between a Catholic and a Non-Catholic (Mixed Marriage).** Your religious convictions and values can be a rich source of strength and blessing in your marriage, but serious differences and problems may arise from these convictions. The following guidelines address these issues and recommend a sound approach to insure that these differences become a strength in your marriage and prevent possible difficulties that may otherwise arise. The required additional sessions are meant to be informational for both the Catholic and non-Catholic and are not meant to put any pressure on the non-Catholic to convert.

Guidelines:

When a Catholic plans to marry a person of another church, ecclesial community, denomination, religion or faith, the couple are to participate in additional sessions about the Catholic faith.

The involvement of the pastor, deacon or pastoral ministers from the community of faith of each partner is encouraged when the non-Catholic would like him or her to be involved.

- VIII. Marriage of Non-practicing Catholics.** The following guideline is intended to help you develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of your Catholic faith, if either of you is a non-practicing Catholic.

Guideline:

When one or both of the parties entering marriage is a non-practicing Catholic, the couple are to participate in additional sessions in the Catholic faith.

- IX. Special Circumstances in Marriage Preparation.** Sometimes special circumstances warrant special attention in your marriage preparation. This section of the guidelines addresses a number of circumstances that may arise.

Guidelines:

- A. Absent Partner/Long Distance Relationships.** When the application of these guidelines is not possible due to absence or distance, the pastor or pastoral minister

will offer you alternative ways to carry out the spirit of the guidelines. When suitable alternatives cannot be found, delay of your marriage may be appropriate.

B. Dysfunctional Relationships. In relationships where physical, chemical, sexual or emotional abuse is evident, your marriage should be delayed until appropriate remedial action has been taken.

C. Cohabitation. Pastors, deacons or pastoral ministers will explain and discuss with you the teachings of the Church regarding human sexuality and marriage, and the reasons for the Church's disapproval of cohabitation before proceeding with your marriage.

D. Ethnic, Cultural and Racial Differences. These guidelines will be pastorally and sensitively interpreted in light of the your ethnicity, culture and race.

E. HIV and Marriage. While the present Code of Canon Law does not list HIV/AIDS as an impediment to marriage, it is essential that you receive proper counsel prior to any decision to marry if either of you have tested positive to HIV/AIDS.

If you have tested positive to HIV/AIDS and are contemplating marriage, you must inform your prospective spouse of the virus infection.

In situations where one or both partners have HIV/AIDS, you will be requested to explore the unique issues you face with a qualified representative of the Church.

F. Marriage of Persons Under Age Nineteen. If either of you is not yet nineteen years of age, additional meetings with you and your parents are advised to determine if it is appropriate to proceed with your wedding at this time. Other professional counsel will be recommended if necessary.

G. Marriage of Older Couples. The marriage preparation process should be adapted to your age and maturity as a couple, but marriage preparation should not be eliminated.

H. Marriage of Persons with Disabilities. In general, persons with disabilities have a right to marry, but certain physical and mental disabilities may be an impediment to marriage. Pastors, deacons and pastoral ministers should extend appropriate pastoral care.

I. Pregnancy. Pregnancy of itself is not the determining factor in proceeding with or delaying a marriage, nor is it sufficient reason to omit the marriage preparation process.

J. Remarriage. Preparation for remarriage includes a process to determine your canonical freedom to marry and to implement the marriage preparation guidelines, while sensitively addressing the unique challenges you may face.

X. Validation of a Marriage. If you as a couple have married outside the Church and now wish to have your marriage validated, your understanding and appreciation of the sacrament you are entering will be deepened through marriage preparation.

Guideline:

Couples approaching the Church for validation of their marriage must participate in an appropriate marriage preparation process before the marriage is validated.

XI. Pastoral Care after Marriage. The Church is concerned that your love will continue to grow and your marriage relationship will be strengthened and deepened throughout your years of marriage. You are encouraged to participate in marriage and family enrichment programs that will be available to you through your parish and diocese.

Guideline:

Pastors, deacons and pastoral ministers are to take practical steps to insure that the parish continues to support you as you seek to live out the sacrament of marriage.

DIOCESAN OFFICES OF FAMILY MINISTRY

ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE

Adult and Family Ministry Office
3501 South Lake Drive
P.O. Box 07912
Milwaukee, WI 53207-0912

(414) 769-3440
(800)-769-9373*

DIOCESE OF GREEN BAY

Family Life Department
P.O. Box 23825
1825 Riverside Drive
Green Bay, WI 54305-3825

(414) 437-7531

DIOCESE OF LA CROSSE

Family Life Secretariat
P.O. Box 4004
La Crosse, WI 54602-4004

(608) 788-7700

DIOCESE OF MADISON

Office of Family Ministry
142 West Johnson Street
Madison, WI 53703-2298

(608) 251-7727

DIOCESE OF SUPERIOR

Family Life Apostolate
1201 Hughitt Avenue
P.O. Box 969
Superior, WI 54880-0017

(715) 392-2937

*This 800 number is valid only in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

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