

## SECTION 13: POLICIES FOR MARRIAGE PREPARATION IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW ORLEANS

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### 13.1. INTRODUCTION -

The sacrament of Matrimony, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is ordered for the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children (c. 1055§1). In the sacrament of Matrimony, spouses reflect the love of Christ for his Church, (Eph 5:32), promote the good of the spouses, and build up family by welcoming children, the crown of married life (*Rite of Marriage*, 4). Through the sacrament of Matrimony God raises up the “domestic church” and the home becomes a place where the faith is planted in the hearts of the young, and the faith is radiated into the surrounding world (CCC 1659).

Preparation for marriage occurs by exploring God’s design for interpersonal relationships, the requirements for freedom of consent, the indissolubility and unity of marriage, and the good news of God’s plan for human sexuality and parenthood (Pontifical Council for the Family, Preparation for Marriage, 1996, 35). In offering such preparation and adopting the policies below, the Archdiocese of New Orleans is committed to sharing our joy about the vocation of the sacrament of Matrimony.

## **13.2. RIGHT TO MARRIAGE AND PREPARATION**

**13.2.1.** While fulfilling the policies below, it must be kept in mind that each person, not bound by impeding obligations, is free to assume the state of marriage (Canon 1058). Therefore, all those engaged in marriage preparation ministry will strive sincerely to fulfill the rights of the faithful while providing them with marriage preparation. Doing so will aid them in a lifetime of fidelity to their vocation.

**13.2.2.** Through family life, primary and secondary school, as well as by means of homilies and programs, men and women should be offered the rich insights about married life that are given to us by Christ. This is known as remote preparation. Proximate and immediate preparation occur before engagement, and during formal marriage preparation. Even after entering the sacrament, men and women should always feel accompanied on their journey (Canon 1063, Pope Benedict XVI, World Meeting of Families in Milan, 2012). In light of this, marriage preparation, as described below, is one step of many. These many steps will aid the couple to encounter the Church as a family of faith which supports one another in living out the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## **13.3. THE COUPLE AND MINISTERS OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION**

**13.3.1. Responsibilities of the couple:** Each phase of the marriage preparation process is designed to be a blessing for the couple. Therefore, the couple’s active and sincere participation is necessary.

**13.3.1.1. Meet with a Roman Catholic priest or deacon in the Archdiocese of New Orleans.** The first meeting must occur at least 6 to 8 months prior to the desired date of the marriage. These 6 to 8 months will give sufficient time for the couple to discern their readiness for marriage with the assistance of the Church. At this first meeting, the priest or deacon needs to sign the form “The First Step to the Altar.”

**13.3.1.2. Agree on a date, venue, and time with the officiant.** Once agreement is reached regarding a date, venue, and time, the parish church may be reserved for the wedding. It is recommended that the wedding occur in the parish church of one party, or in the church where the couple intends to practice the faith as a married couple (Canon 1115). See the form “The First Step to the Altar.”

**13.3.1.3. Review the “Steps to the Altar.”** A priest, deacon, or marriage preparation minister will outline each step of the marriage preparation process and explain the phases to the couple. See section 1.4 below.

**13.3.1.4. Strive to fully practice the faith.** Preparing for marriage entails more than intellectual learning. The couple also needs to strive earnestly to live according to God’s design. Please be aware of these expectations during the marriage preparation process:

- a. Sacrament of Confirmation – The sacrament of Confirmation completes initiation into the Church. Therefore, it is ideal for a Catholic to be confirmed before entering the sacrament of Matrimony. If a Catholic party has not received Confirmation, he or she should consult with a priest or deacon so as to discuss the process by which Confirmation can be received. Marriage is not to be denied to Catholics who are yet to receive the sacrament of Confirmation (Canon 1065 §1).
- b. Actively practicing the faith – The sacrament of Matrimony is one which grants grace to the couple so that they may fulfill their duties as a couple. It needs to be lived in conjunction with the other sacraments. Couples must seriously consider their weekly participation in Sunday Mass and on Holy Days of Obligation. Making use of the sacrament of Confession regularly is also an integral part of practicing our faith (Canon 1065 §2).
- c. Chastity and co-habitation – Divine revelation has convinced us of the sanctity of marriage and human sexuality. Couples will be instructed in these ideals while in marriage preparation and strive to fulfill them during each stage. Co-habitation and pre-marital sexual relations are serious threats to fully embracing God’s plan for marriage. Couples should discuss this topic with the marriage preparation minister. Also see section 1.6.6.

**13.3.1.5. Fulfill civil and ecclesiastical law.** It is the responsibility of the couple to obtain the civil marriage license in accord with the law of the State where the marriage is occurring.

### **13.3.2. Responsibilities of the cleric:**

**13.3.2.1. Personally meet with each couple, agree upon a date.** At least twice, each couple will meet with a Roman Catholic priest or deacon. One meeting will occur at the beginning of their process (phase 1 below) and once near the end of their marriage preparation process (phase 4 below). During this first meeting, the cleric will ask if they are free to marry, i.e. if they have ever attempted marriage before in any way. If, upon the conclusion of this meeting it seems they are free to marry, the

cleric will agree on the date, venue, and time and complete “The First Step to the Altar” form so that the couple may reserve their church.

**13.3.2.2. Formation of laity as marriage preparation ministers.** The assistance and wisdom of lay people is also invaluable to the engaged couple. The laity should be offered formation in the Church’s teaching on marriage so that they may assist engaged couples to prepare for marriage. For example, the laity may assist with the analysis of the pre-nuptial inventory (phase 2) and the Marriage Preparation Program (phase 3). While certain phases can be delegated to laity, please see sections 1.4.1. and 1.4.4. for details regarding which duties must be carried out by a cleric.

**13.3.2.3. Obtain or grant required permissions, dispensations, and delegations.** The following are among the needed permissions, delegations, and dispensations:

- a. Permissions: 1) For a Catholic to marry outside of his or her parish (Canon 1118 §1). 2) For a Catholic to marry a baptized non-Catholic (Canon 1125). 3) For the celebration of a Nuptial Mass between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic (*Rite of Marriage*, 8).
- b. Faculty and delegation: An officiant needs proper delegation before he can validly witness a marriage (Canon 1108).
- c. Dispensation is required for: 1) a Catholic to marry a non-baptized (Canons 1086, 1124). 2) a Catholic to marry a non-Catholic in a non-Catholic marriage ceremony (Canon 1118 §2).

**13.3.2.4. Completion of paperwork.** Ensure that all the paperwork is completed in a timely manner according to section 1.5.1. below. Documents necessary for the marriage of couples whose wedding occurs in the Archdiocese of New Orleans, but whose preparation occurs in another diocese, must be reviewed by the Chancellor of the Archdiocese of New Orleans. In this case, the policies for marriage preparation of the diocese where the preparation takes place should be followed. Upon completion, the Chancellor of the diocese where the preparation takes place will send the documents to the Chancellor of the Archdiocese of New Orleans. If one or both parties are baptized, baptismal certificates for each party, issued within 6 months of the wedding date, must be obtained and submitted to the parish where the marriage is occurring.

**13.3.2.5. Each couple will be introduced to Natural Family Planning.** Clerics will ensure that the names of those attending mentor couple programs and on-line preparation are provided to the Family Life Apostolate so the couple can be contacted by a certified Natural Family Planning trainer. Couples who attend the Days for the

Engaged or Weekend Engaged Encounter will receive the necessary information at their program.

**13.3.2.6. Last minute cancellation by officiant.** A cleric agrees to officiate at a wedding by signing the officiant line of “The First Step to the Altar” form. Because this is a significant commitment, he is required to assist the couple to find another cleric to take his place should the officiant be unable to fulfill his commitment.

**13.3.2.7. Fulfill all civil and ecclesiastical law.** Clergy from outside the Archdiocese of New Orleans will present a testimonial of suitability for ministry to the Archdiocese in a timely manner. Additionally, the State of Louisiana requires that all clergy who perform weddings within the State must be registered. A priest or deacon who is not registered is to do so as soon as possible. The Chancellor is willing to assist clerics in complying with this requirement.

**13.3.3. Responsibilities of the pastor of the church where the marriage is to take place:**

**13.3.3.1. Oversee the scheduling of the church building.** Each pastor will ensure that a couple who approaches his parish for a wedding ceremony is welcomed. The pastor will ensure that the couple has completed “The First Step to the Altar” form with a priest or deacon. If they have trouble finding a priest or deacon, the parish whose church they desire to use should assist them. If additional assistance is needed, clerics and couples may contact the Family Life Apostolate.

**13.3.3.2. Establish parish policies.** While a priest or deacon cannot demand a monetary offering for himself, the couple may wish to make a free will offering to the cleric. Additionally, a pastor may establish a fee for the use of the church building. However, he will take great effort to avoid imposing an undue burden on the couple. Regarding fees, it is recommended that special consideration be given to parishioners. The pastor will also ensure that parish policies or procedures comply with liturgical rubrics and particular law. Where legitimate variation is allowed, the parish should set policies. Examples of these include church use fee, wedding coordinators/sacristans and their fees, musicians, photography, videography, dress code, behavior code, floral arrangements, non-liturgical traditions, etc.

**13.3.3.3. Approve paperwork, grant delegations and permissions as necessary.** The couple’s paperwork will be submitted by the officiant at least between 14-30 days prior to the wedding ceremony. Alternatively, the pastor may receive the documents from the Archdiocesan Chancellor if the couple had been prepared for marriage in another diocese. An officiant who does not have habitual faculties in the

Archdiocese of New Orleans must present a testimonial of suitability for ministry to the Chancellor of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

**13.3.3.4. Retain hard copies for the pre-nuptial file.** The following documents are to be retained in the record of the parish where the wedding occurred: 1) The Pre-Nuptial Inquiry, 2) Dispensations, 3) Permissions, and 4) Delegations. Recent baptismal certificates are to be obtained by the cleric who is preparing the couple for marriage. These certificates indicate both the fact of baptism and give evidence for their freedom to marry. These certificates are to be given to the parish where the wedding will be celebrated. The parish is to verify that the information on the baptismal certificate is consistent with the information provided in the Pre-Nuptial Inquiry. Baptismal certificates, however, do not need to be retained with the other documents in the permanent record.

**13.3.3.5. Notify the places of baptism; record the marriage.** Regardless of the officiant who celebrates the marriage, the wedding is to be notated in the record of the parish where the ceremony occurs. Notification of marriage must be sent to the parish(es) where the parties were baptized (Canons 1121-1123).

**13.4. MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROCESS OVERVIEW** - The process below will begin at least 6-8 months prior to the wedding date. Phases 1-4 will be completed 2 months before the wedding date. These stages will begin as soon as practical after the couple contacts the parish priest or deacon. If the couple approaches the parish for marriage preparation more than 8 months before their wedding date, it is recommended that the parish will respond promptly to meet their pastoral need rather than delay their preparation until the wedding date is closer.

**13.4.1. Phase 1: Orientation:** (Numbers 1.\* - 4.\* are the responsibilities of a cleric and may not to be delegated to a lay person.) Phase 1 comprises at least one meeting between the couple and a Roman Catholic priest or deacon in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. “The First Step to the Altar” form guides the content of the meeting(s):

1. \* A welcoming pastoral environment should be established as the couple begins to form a relationship with the priest or deacon.
2. \* The couple is assisted to select a date, place and officiant for the ceremony. Freedom to marry is established in general terms (questions such as “Have you been married before?” need to be asked in this first meeting even if the priest/deacon decides not to do the Pre-Nuptial Inquiry until a later meeting).

3. \* While it may be delayed until a later time in the preparation process, a priest or deacon must complete the Pre-Nuptial Inquiry, explain what documentation is needed from the couple, and determine whether any dispensations or permissions will be necessary.
4. \* Other topics may be discussed such as motives for marrying and special circumstances such as cultural background, pregnancy, military service, physical and/or emotional problems, levels of faith and religious practice.
5. The couple will also be informed about the entire marriage preparation process and which Marriage Preparation Program they should select according to the hierarchy below in 1.4.3.
6. Administer a premarital instrument to assist in beginning the assessment of the couple's readiness to marry. These include: PREPARE/ENRICH, FOCCUS (4<sup>th</sup> edition or later)/REFOCCUS, Fully Engaged, and others approved by the Family Life Apostolate.

#### **13.4.2. Phase 2: Diagnostics:**

1. Complete the premarital instrument (Prepare/Enrich, FOCCUS (4<sup>th</sup> edition or later)/REFOCCUS, Fully Engaged, or other inventory). The results will be reviewed with a priest, deacon, or lay minister. The minister should be suitably trained to guide a discussion and analysis of the instrument given to the couple. Each instrument supplies its own course of training or certification. This will ensure that the pre-nuptial inventory is used for the maximum benefit of the couple.
2. These discussions will also explain the sacramental nature of their bond and assess the couple's readiness to marry.
3. The couple may begin the liturgical wedding plans and be presented with the parish guidelines for their wedding liturgy.
4. During phase 2, the priest or deacon, along with the couple, will make the decision to proceed or delay the marriage. If the wedding is to proceed, the wedding date is confirmed and the process continues. Otherwise, see section 1.4.6. below.

**13.4.3. Phase 3: Instruction:** (or "Marriage Preparation Program") This phase presents the essential human and Christian aspects of marriage so that the couple becomes aware of the total dimensions of the marriage covenant. Formal marriage preparation includes reflection on the nature and sacramentality of marriage, married love, family life, couple prayer, marital responsibilities, communication within marriage, personal expectations, and other practical considerations. During this phase, each couple will have contact with

a Natural Family Planning professional within the context of their chosen program. Priests, deacons or marriage preparation ministers will offer marriage preparation options in the order of preference shown below. Number 1 and 2 listed below will be presented as most preferable.

1. Mentor couple program (such as In-Home Prep, Witness to Love, and others approved by the Family Life Apostolate). These not only prepare a couple for marriage, but do so in a way that fosters relationships with fellow parishioners, aids in internalization of the faith, external practice of the faith through involvement in the parish, and continued mentoring into the first years of marriage.
2. “Engaged Encounter Weekend” retreat, which provides an opportunity for focused dialogue on key topics as well as support from well-trained couples and a priest in the context of prayer and the sacraments.
3. If they are truly unable to take advantage of the first two preferred programs, the priest or deacon will make available the two-day “Days for the Engaged” seminar. The content of this program will be set by the Family Life Apostolate and will occupy two day-long sessions, not to include an overnight stay.
4. If the two engaged are in different locations (military, offshore, etc.) or if for some other reason none of the above options are available, online marriage preparation via catholicmarriageprep.com can be made available.
5. Special programs are available for couples who are entering into a valid marriage after a civil law marriage, or couples who are remarrying after the death of their spouses, or couples who are remarrying after having obtained a declaration of nullity of their marriage from a Catholic Church Tribunal. The Family Life Apostolate can be contacted to obtain more information about these offerings.

**13.4.4. Phase 4: Sacramental Catechesis:** (Numbers 1\*-3\* are the responsibilities of a cleric and may not be delegated to a lay person.) This phase is to be completed at least two months before the wedding date. Less than two months prior to the wedding, the couple often finds it hard to concentrate on anything other than the details of the ceremony. Therefore, it is important to keep the long-term perspective on the sacramental nature of marriage, not the ceremony. Items 1.\* - 3.\* below comprise the second mandatory meeting between the couple and a priest or deacon. In this phase, the couple will discuss:

1. \* What they have learned and experienced at their formal Marriage Preparation Program. The Pre-Nuptial Inquiry needs to be completed at this phase or earlier; it contains discussion questions which may be used for further conversation.

2. \* Discuss the reception of Penance and Holy Eucharist as a fitting preparation for the celebration of marriage.
3. \* Their understanding of sacrament in light of their formal preparation.
4. By this time, the couple will have completed the premarital instrument (Prepare/Enrich, FOCCUS (4<sup>th</sup> edition or later)/REFOCCUS, Fully Engaged, or other inventory). See phase 2, #1.
5. A lay minister may discuss with the couple their responsibilities as members of God's people, as spouses and future parents.
6. A lay minister may ensure the completion of needed documents (e.g., the Pre-Nuptial Inquiry (completed by a cleric), certificates of baptism, rescripts, decrees of freedom to marry, decrees of nullity, civil marriage license, and/or appropriate permissions or dispensations, etc.)

**13.4.5. Phase 5: Liturgical Planning:** During this phase, the couple will work with their place of marriage and other marriage preparation ministers to finalize the wedding liturgy and discuss the wedding rehearsal.

**13.4.6. Delay of marriage:** Upon agreement with a couple regarding a date for the wedding, a cleric has made a significant commitment to the engaged parties. A cleric should not be unduly hasty to set a date since the couple may be committing themselves to reception venues and travel arrangements once that date is set. Should a significant reason to delay the marriage arise, a cleric will consult with a diocesan official before counseling the couple to delay their marriage date. The diocesan officials that a cleric may consult are: a dean, the Vicar for the Clergy, the Judicial Vicar, the Chancellor, the Vicar(s) General, or the Archbishop.

## **13.5. MARRIAGE CELEBRATION**

**13.5.1. Normal timeline:** The couple will contact an officiant at least 6 to 8 months prior to the date of the wedding. Phases 1-4 are to be completed 60 days prior to the wedding date. Paperwork should be completed and submitted to the parish in whose church or territory the marriage is occurring at least 14 - 30 days prior to the wedding date.

**13.5.2. Weddings allowed on Saturday evenings:** Pastors are to make their church available for Saturday evening weddings. This policy does not obligate a pastor himself to celebrate a Saturday evening wedding. However, the pastor will make his church available (unless there is another event) even if this incurs for the couple an additional sacristan fee.

**13.5.3. When weddings are not allowed:** In addition to the days listed in the *Rite of Marriage*, 11 and the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 372, weddings are not allowed on Sundays in the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

**13.5.4. Days of precept:** Wedding Masses which occur after 4pm on a Saturday (or day preceding a Holy Day of obligation) satisfy the obligation to attend Mass (Canon 1248 §1, New Orleans Archdiocesan Policy manual 8.8). The obligation is satisfied no matter which Mass prayers and readings are used. Officiants are to be careful to select prayers and readings in accord with the *Order of Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours and the Celebration of the Eucharist (Ordo)* and the *Rite of Marriage*, 11.

**13.5.5. Location of weddings:** In accord with Canon 1118, the proper place for weddings is a parish church. If there are to be exceptions to this policy, please consult 1.6.9. below. When a couple contacts a priest or deacon to begin their marriage preparation process, it is recommended that the cleric direct a couple to a church parish which will assist the couple to live out their faith for the foreseeable future. This recommendation hopes to assist a couple to establish a “home parish.” The engaged couple is free to approach any cleric and any church parish for their preparation and their celebration of marriage.

## **13.6. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THAT WARRANT ADDITIONAL PASTORAL CONCERN**

**13.6.1. Marriage of minors:** The Code of Canon Law establishes that a man below the age of 16 and a woman below the age of 14 cannot enter marriage (Canon 1083 §1). The state of Louisiana requires that individuals be 18 years old before marrying, or 16 with the permission of their guardian and court authorization. If a cleric determines that it is appropriate for a couple to marry before the age of 18, he will consult with the guardians of the couple, follow civil law, and obtain the permission of the local ordinary. Thereupon, the marriage preparation process should take place as usual.

**13.6.2. Pregnancy:** Although it understandably creates a sense of urgency in the minds of the couple or someone else, premarital pregnancy of itself does not constitute adequate justification for marriage or for abbreviation of the marriage preparation process. Pregnancy must be considered equally as grave a reason for not contracting marriage as for contracting marriage. A couple needs the time and opportunity to assess their reasons and readiness for marriage exclusive of the pregnancy. Therefore, pregnancy of itself shall constitute no exception to these diocesan regulations concerning the setting of the date of the wedding. The following norms are to be followed:

**13.6.2.1. Eighteen years of age and older.** If the couple made the decision to marry and were engaged prior to the pregnancy, the decision to proceed with the marriage preparation process may be determined by the priest or deacon if he assesses the couple to be sufficiently prepared for marriage. If the couple had not made the decision to marry before the pregnancy, the cleric responsible for the marriage preparation is to consult with the Family Life Apostolate to see if further assessment is necessary.

**13.6.2.2. Either party if under 18 years of age.** If the couple made the decision to marry and were engaged prior to the pregnancy, the cleric responsible for their marriage preparation is to consult with the Tribunal of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, as well as with the parents or guardians of the engaged couple. If the couple did not make the decision to marry prior to the pregnancy, the cleric will adhere to the above.

### **13.6.3. The faiths of the parties:**

**13.6.3.1. When both parties are Catholic.** When two Catholics marry, this normally occurs within a Mass. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 78; *Rite of Marriage*, 6) “The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage. The Eucharistic sacrifice in fact represents Christ's covenant of love with the church, sealed with his blood on the cross.” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 57)

**13.6.3.2. When a Catholic marries a baptized non-Catholic.** If suitable, and at the request of both the officiant of the wedding and the pastor of the place of the wedding, permission may be granted for the wedding to be celebrated within the context of Mass (*Rite of Marriage*, 8). The Archbishop, the Vicar(s) General, or the Chancellor can grant such permission. If Mass is celebrated, the appropriate form will be submitted and the given announcement regarding the reception of Communion only by Catholics who are in the state of grace is to be made.

**13.6.3.3. When a non-baptized party is involved.** When a Catholic marries someone who is not baptized, this presents a situation in which careful pastoral guidance is to be provided. So that the faith of the Catholic party may be safeguarded, the Church provides much pastoral guidance. See: CCC 1633-1637; Canons 1128, 1129; Paul VI, *Matrimonia Mixta*, 1970. The *Rite of Marriage* does not foresee the possibility of celebrating marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptized person within the context of the Mass, nor may the Eucharist be distributed to those present (*Rite of Marriage*, 8).

**13.6.3.4. Non-practicing Catholics.** When a Catholic who no longer practices their Catholic faith approaches a parish for marriage preparation, special pastoral care is to

be extended to them. Since marriage is a sacrament lived out only by God's grace, any form of marriage preparation will have the goal of aiding a couple to reengage their personal faith through the practice of their religion. Failure to practice the faith is not in itself a matrimonial impediment.

**13.6.4. Validation:** If a couple has attempted marriage outside the Church or is seeking validation of an otherwise invalid marriage, they are to follow the marriage preparation process described herein. It is preferable that couples in this situation attend a suitably adapted mentor couple program or the diocesan program: "Special Marriage Preparation Seminar" through the Family Life Apostolate. This program serves to meet the requirements of the formal marriage preparation program. In addition, the minister overseeing marriage preparation will advise the couple to attend the human sexuality segment of the "Days for the Engaged" program, if this is pastorally applicable. This preparation process may also utilize pre-marital inventories. Additionally, during the preparation process, the minister should explain to the couple that the consent they exchange at their validation is a new act of consent by which they enter a valid marriage. Regarding the 6 month preparation requirement, the priest or deacon preparing the couple may adjust this regulation appropriately if the couple has been married for a number of years.

**13.6.5. Remarriage:** Couples who are entering a subsequent marriage are provided special consideration owing to their differing circumstances and past experiences with marriage. The priest or deacon will address the circumstances of each particular situation and assist the couple accordingly. Such couples who are free to marry in the Church need to obtain the necessary documentation stating their freedom to marry and follow the marriage preparation process described herein. It is preferable that couples in this situation attend a suitably adapted mentor couple program or the diocesan "Remarriage Preparation Seminar" through the Family Life Office of the Archdiocese of New Orleans. In addition, the minister overseeing marriage preparation will advise the couple to attend the human sexuality segment of the "Days for the Engaged" program, if this is applicable. Regarding the 6 month preparation requirement, the priest or deacon preparing a remarriage couple may adjust this regulation.

**13.6.6. Cohabitation:** If, either from public knowledge or by frank admission of the couple, a priest or deacon knows that the couple is living together before their upcoming marriage, he is to approach the marriage preparation process with cautious pastoral care. In teaching the couple about matrimony and Christian teachings on the meaning of sexual intimacy, the cleric should exhort them to live separately and refrain from sexual activity until after their marriage. While it may indicate a significant misunderstanding of God's design for human sexuality, cohabitation is not an impediment to marriage.

**13.6.7. Annulments and RCIA:** An individual engaged in the annulment process cannot know with certainty the timing or the results of their annulment proceedings. Because of this, they should be made aware that participating in the marriage preparation process or the RCIA process before a declaration of nullity has been granted does not guarantee that the sacraments will be extended to the individual. While they are permitted to participate in the marriage preparation process and RCIA process, ministers will clarify with them that their annulment case must be completed with a positive decision before a date can be set for their marriage or entrance into the Church.

**13.6.8. Pre-nuptial agreements:** Many couples consider forming a legal agreement concerning their temporal goods before they contract marriage. Some couples entering marriage after the death of a previous spouse consider such agreement to direct their assets to their proper heirs. If, however, such an agreement is formed in such a way that indicates the couple is not taking seriously the goods of marriage, namely fidelity and permanence, then the couple needs to be advised to reject their pre-nuptial agreement. It may be helpful to distinguish for the couple between a will (which manages assets after someone's death) and a pre-nuptial agreement (which manages assets upon a divorce). If questions remain about whether a pre-nuptial agreement poses a problem, marriage ministers are to contact the Judicial Vicar.

**13.6.9. Weddings outside of a parish church:**

**13.6.9.1.** Permission to celebrate a wedding outside of a parish church or oratory will be given only for serious reasons (Canon 1118 §2). The request for this permission needs to be sent to the Archbishop and must come from the priest or deacon who will officiate at the ceremony. It is to be in writing, stating the reasons of the couple for requesting the permission as well as the opinion of the officiant. The pastor of the proposed place of the wedding must also give his approval. The request is to be submitted at least four months prior to the wedding ceremony, preferably even sooner.

**13.6.9.2.** Weddings are not to be celebrated in oratories without the proper permission of the Archbishop of New Orleans. The record of the wedding, if the permission is granted, is to be made at the parish in whose territory the oratory is located. For further questions, the Archives Department is to be consulted.

**13.6.10. Competence to grant dispensation from norms:**

**13.6.10.1. Canonical form.** If the party seeking dispensation has domicile in the Archdiocese of New Orleans, the dispensation needs to be sought and obtained from the local ordinary of this Archdiocese. If the party seeking dispensation has domicile

in another location, dispensation needs to be sought and received from the local ordinary of that place.

**13.6.10.2. The competence of the dean.** For a just cause, the dean of the place of marriage or the dean of the officiating cleric may permit a couple to be married without the passage of 6 months. Such permission is to be written and retained in the marriage file.

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