

Marriage

INTRODUCTION

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

The intention of the marriage preparation process is to enable couples 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 friends, and come at last to the kingdom of heaven" (Rite of Marriage, Nuptial Blessing 3). Preparation is not meant to make it difficult to marry in the Catholic Church. Rather, it is designed to help couples more deeply realize the serious and sacred, yet joyful and life-giving nature of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

PASTORAL APPROACHES

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 one chooses to get married in the Catholic Church, one is asking for more than a ceremony, a church building and a musician. The person is asking to celebrate a sacrament. They will make a vow before God, family, friends and their future spouse to stay married for the rest of their life. This is a momentous promise and commitment.

In an effort to help prepare for that commitment and for the sacrament, the catholic church requires participation in a marriage preparation process. The process will provide an opportunity to talk about personal values, such as faith, money, work, sex, children, marriage and a spouse. By talking about these things in advance a greater understanding of areas that will require special sensitivity and openness in marriage are identified.

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.

The wedding ceremony and celebration last for one day; marriage will last for a lifetime.

Guidelines: The wedding liturgy and preparation for marriage are to take place in a

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parish in which at least one person of the couple is resident. If marriage will not take place at the parish where the couple resides, their pastor(s) must give permission for a wedding to take place in another church.

EARLY CONTACT WITH THE PARISH ;

The guidelines advising early contact with the parish (4-6 months in advance) are intended to insure that adequate time to prepare for marriage and the wedding celebration is afforded. They also provide the pastor and the couple with an opportunity to develop a relationship with one another.

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

When possible, an excellent way to prepare for marriage is to participate in an Engaged Encounter. These are held in Anchorage and Fairbanks several times a year. This is another reason to contact the pastor as early as possible.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES IN MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Sometimes special circumstances warrant special attention in marriage preparation. This section of the guidelines addresses a number of circumstances that may arise.

Guidelines

- **Dysfunctional Relationships.** In relationships where physical, chemical, sexual or emotional abuse is evident, marriage should be delayed until appropriate remedial action has been taken.
- **Cohabitation.** Pastors discuss with the couple the teachings of the Church regarding human sexuality and marriage, and the reasons for the Church's disapproval of cohabitation before proceeding with the marriage.
- **Marriage of Persons Under Age Nineteen.** If either of the couple is not yet nineteen years of age, additional meetings with the couple and their v parents are advised to determine if it is appropriate to proceed with the wedding at this time.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Remarriage.** Preparation for remarriage includes a process to determine canonical freedom to marry and to implement the marriage preparation guidelines while sensitively addressing the unique challenges the couple may face.

VALIDATION OF A MARRIAGE

If the couple has married outside the Church and now wish to have the marriage validated, their understanding and appreciation of the sacrament they are entering will be deepened through marriage preparation. Couples approaching the Church for validation of their marriage must participate in an appropriate marriage preparation process before the marriage is validated.

PASTORAL CARE AFTER MARRIAGE

The Church is concerned that the couple's love will continue to grow and their marriage relationship will be strengthened and deepened throughout the years of marriage. The couple is encouraged to participate in the parish and to ask for help when there are difficulties.