

Part Two

*Pastoral Policy for
Marriage Preparation*

Part Two: Pastoral Policy for Marriage Preparation

I. STEPS OF THE MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROCESS

A. Introduction

Influenced by a great pastoral concern for marriage, the Bishop of the Diocese of Worcester has approved a special common policy of marriage preparation. Priests, deacons and lay marriage preparation ministers who are preparing couples for marriage "should first of all strengthen and nourish the faith of those about to be married for the sacrament of Matrimony which presupposes and demands faith."¹¹

This marriage preparation policy establishes pastoral guidelines to determine readiness for marriage and provides a description of the steps of the marriage preparation process in order to assist in leading engaged couples to a more complete appreciation of what marriage means as a vocation, a sacred covenant, and a Christian way of life.

This policy states that all engaged couples receive a sacramental preparation that is both formational and informational. In order that this preparation process be adequately fulfilled, the process should begin **at least one year prior to the anticipated marriage date**. The Diocese of Worcester expects engaged couples to recognize the importance of a one year preparation period for a life-long commitment. The engagement period is a time to prepare for the eventual sharing of life together. It is a time of formation apart from the preparation for the wedding day itself.

B. Marriage Preparation Ministers

The term "marriage preparation ministers" is used generally in this section to refer to the priest, deacon, deacon couple, or lay couple (couple-to-couple ministers) involved in preparing the engaged couple for marriage. Programs of training, enrichment, and continuing education for marriage preparation ministers will be offered periodically by the Diocesan Office of Marriage and Family. Marriage preparation ministers are expected to have a sincere and living faith and a working knowledge of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, conveying them with truth and pastoral sensitivity, and providing an atmosphere of welcome and encouragement for couples approaching the Church for marriage.

The officiating priest or deacon is responsible for making sure that all the necessary canonical requirements, formational requirements, and liturgical preparations are carried out in accord with the Diocese of Worcester's Pastoral Policy for Marriage Preparation. Proper documentation (including canonical forms, certificates of completion for diocesan-sponsored requirements, etc.) is to be kept in the marriage file. (*See Appendix I for a list of forms and where to obtain them.*)

All involved in marriage preparation ministry should be familiar with and adhere to the guidelines of the Pontifical Council for the Family's *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* which emphasize the importance of the sacramental nature of the vocation of marriage and which states that pastoral care workers "must have a solid doctrinal preparation and unquestionable fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church so that they will be able to transmit the truths of the

¹¹ Sacred Congregation of Rites: *Rites of Marriage*, n. 7. March 19, 1969.

faith and the responsibilities connected with marriage with sufficient in-depth knowledge and life witness.”¹²

C. Goals of the Engaged Couples' Formation

The formational sessions are a means of assisting the marriage preparation ministers to form a caring relationship with the engaged couple. The sessions provide an opportunity for teaching, witness, and evangelization. This preparation should not focus primarily on the wedding day, but rather on how the engaged couple can faithfully live out their Christian commitment and vocation to a life-long and life-giving marriage. The marriage preparation ministers should take sufficient time for and give careful consideration to each individual engaged couple. In preparing the engaged couple, they play a most important role. Some of the goals of this preparation process include:

- Establishing a caring and concerned relationship with the engaged couple which will demonstrate a genuine love for this couple now and in the future.
- Letting them know that the Church welcomes them and cares about them, their relationship, and their desire to enter into sacramental marriage.
- Explaining why the Church asks them to participate in an in-depth marriage preparation process.

D. Proximate Preparation (Steps 1 through 4)

Step 1. Initial Meeting

The marriage preparation process begins with the initial meeting of the engaged couple with the priest or deacon who will preside at their wedding. No marriage date should be discussed until the initial meeting. This meeting provides an opportunity for the priest or deacon to welcome the couple and to become better acquainted, and includes an overview of the marriage preparation process and its requirements. The parties' "freedom to marry" should be established at this time. If either party was previously married no date for future marriage should be given them until their free status is determined.

The process of filling out the necessary canonical forms is begun at this meeting. Any follow-up documentation should be obtained as needed.

A *Marriage Preparation Packet* should be given to the couple at the first meeting. The packet will be provided to parishes by the Diocesan Office of Marriage and Family. This resource provides a welcome and is a sign of the Church's care for the engaged couple. The packet contains a variety of resource material about the vocation of marriage appropriate for the engaged couple. Among these materials will be a flyer containing a pre-marital checklist which will include a brief explanation of the purpose and importance of preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, and an outline of the marriage preparation process in the Diocese of Worcester with a brief explanation of each step. The marriage preparation minister should go over the checklist with the couple indicating any particular documentation they need to obtain and explaining how they are to do so. Information and registration forms for the *God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage* Seminar and the *Catholic Engaged Encounter* weekend will be included. Couples are to be encouraged to register for the *God's Plan* Seminar as soon as possible, selecting a date to attend preferably within the first two months of their engagement.

¹² Pontifical Council for the Family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, 1996, n. 43.

A date for a second meeting with the marriage preparation minister, in which the premarital inventory will be administered, should be set at this time.

Step 2. Premarital Inventory (or Remarital Inventory)

The couple completes a marriage preparation inventory (FOCCUS) at their parish. This takes place at a meeting subsequent to, and separate from, the initial meeting. This tool is designed to assess the strengths of the couple's relationship and identify areas that may need growth. The couple's completed FOCCUS forms are sent to the diocesan office for processing and the results are returned promptly to the parish. The results of this premarital inventory will be discussed during the formational sessions. *(See note following Step 4, below)*

Step 3. Formation Program – Part I

The first part of the formation program is the theology/human sexuality component of marriage preparation. It consists in **attendance at the *God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage* seminar, a diocesan sponsored program.** This seminar is designed to help couples understand and embrace an authentic Catholic vision of married love. The *God's Plan* seminars are run by facilitators who have completed the required training program. These one-day sessions for engaged couples are held a number of times throughout the year in various geographical locations. Schedules and registration forms will be provided by the Diocesan Office of Marriage and Family. Couples will register directly with the diocesan office, and should do so early as classes fill up quickly. The registration fee paid by the couple at this time covers materials and expenses for the *God's Plan* seminar and Marriage Preparation Resource Packet. (In cases of genuine financial hardship the marriage preparation minister should contact the Office of Marriage and Family.)

The couple will be given a certificate of completion at the end of the seminar to bring back to the parish which will then be kept in the marriage file. **This requirement should be completed as soon as possible in the early months of the marriage preparation process, as it will provide important formation on the theology of marriage and the gift of human sexuality that will serve as the basis of understanding for subsequent aspects of the formation program.**

Step 4. Formation Program – Part II

The sessions of the second part of the formation program discuss in-depth the vocation and sacrament of marriage and its related issues and life-skills. These sessions aim to provide an opportunity for couples to deepen and enrich their relationship with each other, God, and the Church. Please refer to the Pontifical Council for the Family's *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* which offers guidelines regarding the purposes, goals, and content of proximate preparation.

The scheduling of these meetings will be determined by the marriage preparation minister(s) who will coordinate meeting dates with the couple. The number of sessions (generally four to six) may be determined at the discretion of the marriage preparation minister, depending on their sound and pastoral discernment of the needs of the engaged. This determination would be based on the results of the premarital inventory and any other relevant issues or circumstances.

The following will be included in Part II of the formational sessions:

- 1) A review and discussion of the results of the FOCCUS premarital inventory.
- 2) Attendance at a *Catholic Engaged Encounter* weekend.

The engaged couple should register directly with the local *Engaged Encounter* facilitators. Brochures and registration information are available from the diocesan office or at the *Catholic Engaged Encounter* websites: www.worcestercee.org and www.engagedencounter.org. A follow-up discussion with the marriage preparation minister should take place following the couples attendance at the *Engaged Encounter* weekend, in order to discuss and reflect on the *Engaged Encounter* experience, and to assure the marriage preparation minister that the couple has assimilated the content and goals of the program.

- 3) Sacramental catechesis, with an emphasis on the healing nature of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and its significance for the engaged couple both as part of their preparation and in their marriage, should be stressed in the individual sessions between the priest and the engaged couple. This will provide engaged couples an opportunity to focus on the spiritual aspects of their upcoming marriage and the importance of a Christ-centered life, nurtured in the Eucharist and as expressed in living a sacramental life. The couple is to be strongly encouraged, and offered the opportunity, to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation; they may choose to do so either with the priest officiating at their wedding or through referral to another priest if anonymity is preferred. (*see also, Step 6 - Wedding Rehearsal*)

Since the marriage preparation ministers will be expected to have a solid understanding and working knowledge of the theology and Catholic vision for married love as presented in the *God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage seminar* (which is based on Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*), this content will naturally then be incorporated into the life-skills formational sessions, providing a more integrated foundation for the couple as they participate in subsequent aspects of their preparation program.

The engaged couple's formation sessions are to be carried out in conformity with diocesan policy. In addition to the officiating priest or deacon who is responsible for overseeing that the couple fulfills all requirements, others who may share the ministry of marriage preparation may include a married deacon couple or trained lay couple (usually referred to as couple-to-couple ministers) who also may facilitate one-on-one discussions with the engaged couple and give personal witness to the living faith in Catholic marriage.

Note: While the engaged couple is asked to attend the *God's Plan* seminar early in their marriage preparation process, this does not preclude their beginning some of the early parish-based formation sessions simultaneously. In fact, it may be quite beneficial for the marriage preparation minister(s) to have met with the engaged couple at least three times prior to their attendance at the *God's Plan* seminar, e.g., the initial meeting, a meeting to administer the premarital inventory, and a meeting to go over, or begin discussion of, the results of the inventory. Subsequent meetings would then take all these things into consideration in light of the theology/human sexuality component.

The final result of this period of proximate preparation should be a clear awareness of the essential characteristics of Christian marriage: unity, fidelity, indissolubility, and fruitfulness; an understanding of the priority of sacramental grace uniting the spouses to the love of Christ; and the willingness to carry out the mission proper to families.¹³

¹³ Pontifical Council for the Family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, n. 45.

E. Immediate Preparation (Steps 5 and 6)

Step 5. Liturgical Preparation

After confirming that all documentation is complete (e.g., baptismal certificates, any required dispensations and permissions), the priest/deacon will assist the couple in planning the wedding liturgy. Catholic weddings follow the general norms for liturgical celebrations as provided in the Rite of Marriage. The priest or deacon will review with the couple the various options available to them regarding readings, music, and ritual, and will help the couple to prayerfully enter into this significant expression of their faith and commitment with the gathered community. *(See Appendix II - Liturgical Norms)*

Step 6. Wedding Rehearsal

The wedding rehearsal is a very valuable teachable moment not only for the couple about to be married, but also for their respective families and the entire wedding party. Time and effort should be taken so that all present are made aware of the meaningfulness of this celebration for the engaged couple and how they desire that all who take part in this event share in its love and joy. As part of the marriage preparation process, the wedding rehearsal also offers the opportunity for the wedding party and immediate families to join together in prayer. A presentation of guidelines for non-Catholics or those in irregular situations who are part of the immediate family or wedding party may need to be addressed at this time. It is recommended that an opportunity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation be made available to those at the rehearsal in order to assist them to enter more fully into the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage.



II. THE NATURAL RIGHT TO MARRIAGE: EXCEPTIONAL CASES

General Policies

During the initial meeting or the first or second formational sessions, the marriage preparation minister may discover that some real difficulty exists for an engaged couple, or the engaged couple may discover this for themselves. This may be a situation that requires deeper examination as well as theological, medical, or psychological consultation. In cases of this nature, the marriage preparation minister is to refer each case to the pastor who may then refer it to the Office of Marriage and Family. The diocesan office will then examine the case in collaboration with the pastor, the marriage preparation minister, and the engaged couple involved.

At times, the basis for the suspected difficulty will be an easily verifiable fact such as age or pregnancy. In other cases, the basis may be somewhat more difficult to determine, e.g., immaturity, an undue haste to escape an unhappy home situation, lack of sufficient commitment to the Church's teachings on marriage, undue parental pressure or other social or emotional problems. In all these situations the norm is that the case be brought to the attention of the Office of Marriage and Family. Once a referral is made, no marriage preparation minister may proceed with the wedding until a favorable decision has been reached.

Procedure in Exceptional Cases

If the pastor, even with the guidelines provided, should need further assistance in determining whether a specific case should be referred, he should contact the Office of Marriage and Family. If it is decided that a referral is to be made, the pastor must indicate to the engaged couple the reason for the referral and that there is a possibility that their preparation process may be extended. The pastor should try, in an understanding manner, to help the engaged couple appreciate the value of this extension.

Once a referral is made, the Office of Marriage and Family, in collaboration with the pastor and the engaged couple, will decide as quickly as possible whether the marriage will proceed in the ordinary manner, or whether a referral to a diocesan approved agency is required for further evaluation or counseling.

If it is decided that further evaluation or counseling is required and the engaged couple refuses to take advantage of this opportunity, the pastor is to inform them that he is prohibited from witnessing the marriage at this time.

Reasons for Delay of Marriage

Should the pastor alone or, in conjunction with the Office of Marriage and Family, reach the decision that the marriage should be delayed, he is to inform the couple immediately regarding the recourse they have. In every case the decision and the reasons for this decision to delay a marriage must be made known to the couple as soon as possible.

Serious Cause for Delaying a Marriage:

1. Substantial lack of appreciation for the spiritual, sacramental, and vocational aspects of marriage.
2. Lack of preparedness for marriage as assessed by the marriage preparation minister through:
 - a. Personal interview
 - b. Recommendations of the Premarital or Remarital Inventory
 - c. Further evaluation from the Office of Marriage and Family
 - d. Parental consultation

Note: Particular attention should be given to the length of time in the relationship. A sufficient period of time is needed to establish the beginning of a healthy, solid relationship. Without a relationship there can be no sacrament.

3. Stated intent to deny the other's right to a family and/or belief that marriage does not require a lifelong, faithful commitment to the other party.
4. Refusal of the couple to take part in the marriage preparation process or to participate in pre-marriage assessment, evaluation or counseling as deemed necessary for proper preparation for the reception of the sacrament.

Appeal Procedure

When a marriage is delayed in the Church upon the decision of the pastor alone, the engaged couple has the right to appeal this decision to the Office of Marriage and Family which will review the case with the engaged couple, the marriage preparation minister, and the pastor who recommended the delay. If the diocesan office upholds the decision to delay after due consideration, the engaged couple may then appeal to the Diocesan Tribunal with whom the final determination rests.

If the engaged couple cannot be persuaded to postpone their wedding and indicate that they will marry outside the Church, the marriage preparation minister should not look upon such an attempted marriage as simply a lesser of two evils. If the engaged couple is judged not ready to assume the responsibilities of marriage, then any union, even a civil one, could be a mistake. Therefore, the marriage preparation minister should do all he possibly can to persuade the couple not to enter any kind of a union at this time.

Jurisdiction

It should be noted here that the priests of both Catholic parishes to which the parties may belong have jurisdiction in the matters of marriage. If a couple wishes marriage in a different parish, a letter of permission must be obtained from the pastor/parochial vicar of both parishes.

Summary of Policies Regarding Exceptional Cases

The policies regarding exceptional cases aim to:

- Uphold the right to marry in cases where both parties, though quite young, give evidence of the required minimal spiritual, psychological and emotional maturity.
- Provide consultation with experienced persons of good judgment to insure that any negative evaluation of the engaged couple is reasonably objective and not based on the determination of a single individual.
- Provide the opportunity for the engaged couple to avail themselves of prudent professional counselors who might be able to aid them in better understanding the seriousness of a lifelong commitment in marriage.
- Ensure the postponement of the marriage until such time as an adequate level of maturity is reached by both parties where the immaturity of one or both is evident.

III. PROCEDURES GOVERNING MARRIAGE PREPARATION POLICY

Establish Freedom to Marry

The *Canonical/Pre-Nuptial Questionnaire* (available from the Diocesan Tribunal) is to be administered to each engaged couple approaching the Church for marriage. Each party is to be interviewed separately by a priest or a deacon under oath. See item No.10 on the form which deals specifically with questions regarding establishing freedom to marry.

Date of Wedding

A definite date for a wedding should never be established until it is determined that neither party has been married before and the pre-nuptial evaluation, the parents' forms (if necessary), and the premarital inventory have been completed. If one party or both had been married before, documentary proof that a Declaration of Nullity has been granted, expressly stating that the person(s) is free to marry, must be submitted before a wedding date can be given. After the marriage preparation minister has assessed that the engaged couple is sufficiently prepared for marriage, a definite date for the wedding is to be established and the remainder of the marriage preparation process is to continue. Following the one year process established by this policy, an engaged couple should be informed no later than two months into the process if their marriage is to be delayed.

In order to allow sufficient time for this marriage preparation process, those desiring to be married within the Church should notify the priest/deacon of their parish as soon as they make the decision to marry and **at least one year prior to the desired wedding date.**

Marriage of Persons Under Age Twenty-One

In view of the many circumstances adversely affecting marriage today, especially the need of personal maturity, special care and concern must be given a couple requesting marriage when one or both of the parties has not celebrated his/her twenty-first birthday.

In such cases, no definitive date may be set for the wedding until the following is submitted to the Office of Marriage and Family:

- a. The pre-nuptial forms
- b. The parental consultation forms
- c. The completed FOCCUS report
- d. The marriage preparation minister's personal evaluation

Should the marriage preparation minister, the pastor, and the diocesan office believe a further evaluation is needed, the couple will be asked to present themselves for such an evaluation. The results of this further evaluation will then be returned to the pastor with the recommendation that he either proceed with the marriage preparation process or delay that process for further counseling. The pastor will make the decision in this process. If his decision is to delay, he is to inform the couple of their right to appeal and assist them in doing so. (*See "Appeal Procedure" in Part Two, Section II of this policy.*)

Marriage of those Over Age Twenty-One

The above process may be used for any engaged couple should this be the desire of the pastor. The pastor may, when he deems it necessary, request a second opinion in the form of a further evaluation from the Office of Marriage and Family.

Pregnancy

Marriage in cases of pregnancy creates special challenges for those preparing couples for marriage. The Church views such situations with compassion and concern. In light of our Church's consistent witness to the sanctity of human life, the couple's courageous choice to embrace the pregnancy should be affirmed.

The decision to marry must be freely made by the parties independent of external pressure from any third party. The marriage preparation minister should also convey to the couple that in justice, they are entitled to all of the usual pastoral care required in marriage preparation. Pregnancy in itself is not sufficient reason to diminish or ignore the need for adequate preparation for the sacrament. In fact, it is even more vital to the marriage that the marriage preparation process be taken seriously. Careful consideration must be given to determine marriage readiness and the impact the pregnancy has on the decision to marry.

If the couple was engaged to marry prior to the pregnancy and are at least twenty-one years of age, plans for the marriage may be made if the marriage preparation minister determines that the couple is sufficiently prepared for the process. The marriage preparation process should be fully realized even if in a compressed period of time. An interview with the parents is required in the evaluation process for those couples where one or both parties are under twenty-one years of age.

If the couple had not made the decision to marry prior to the pregnancy and if either party is not yet twenty-one years of age, the FOCCUS is to be administered, further evaluation is to be obtained from the Office of Marriage and Family, and an interview with the parents of the couple

by the marriage preparation minister is to be arranged before further consideration is given for setting a wedding date.

If a couple was not engaged and is over twenty-one, a further evaluation may be obtained from the Office of Marriage and Family if the marriage preparation minister deems it appropriate.

If after the above, a decision is made to proceed with the wedding, the couple is to complete the marriage preparation process in a thorough manner in a time frame judged appropriate by the marriage preparation minister. Questions or concerns should be directed to the Diocesan Office of Marriage and Family.

Faith Commitment

Within the Church today there exists a clear and forceful movement toward a demand of "living faith" as an essential ingredient in our sacramental practice. This demand is by no means an unrealistic one. However, we as persons of faith and pastoral ministers need to be sensitive to the fact that the gift of faith exists in others as in ourselves in differing degrees. The development of faith occurs at different stages. Faith in any degree is a gift. Faith is not merely intellectual knowledge. As pastoral ministers our concern in discerning the faith commitment of an engaged couple should not be based upon the demand that they must prove their faith. As ministers we must focus upon the engaged couple's openness to develop further the level of faith they express. At the same time, the need for catechesis and evangelization in ministering to the engaged couple brings with it a special responsibility and an opportunity to foster a deepening relationship with the person of Jesus Christ.

The following are valid criteria to discern the "living faith" of an engaged couple as they prepare for sacramental marriage:

- Is there a willingness on the part of the engaged couple to cooperate in catechesis?
- Is there a willingness on the part of the engaged couple to raise their children in the faith?
- Is there a willingness on the part of the engaged couple to share moral values with each other and with the marriage preparation minister and to uphold the teachings of the Catholic Church both now and in their marriage?
- Is there a willingness on the part of the engaged couple to participate in the liturgical life of the community?

If there is a generally positive attitude and response to the above criteria, there exists an openness to further develop the level of "living faith" and preparation for sacramental marriage is to proceed.

If there is a generally negative attitude and response to the above criteria, there would not seem to exist an openness to develop the level of faith; therefore, the marriage preparation minister should attempt, through further dialogue, to gain such an openness. Should this fail, the marriage preparation minister is to inform the engaged couple that they are not properly disposed to receive sacramental marriage at this time.

Cohabitation

The Church has consistently taught that human love 'demands a total and definitive gift of persons to one another' that can only be made in marriage (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2391). Since cohabitation violates the Church's teaching about sexual love and marriage, the issue must be addressed truthfully and in a spirit of Christian charity. Cohabitation and premarital sex are situations which "offend against the dignity of marriage; they destroy the very

idea of the family; they weaken the sense of fidelity. They are contrary to the moral law. The sexual act must take place exclusively within marriage. Outside of marriage it always constitutes a grave sin and excludes one from sacramental communion.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2390)

While couples have a natural right to marriage, and cohabitation is not in itself a canonical impediment to marriage, cohabitation is nonetheless an issue with serious consequences that must be addressed with pastoral sensitivity. Human reason leads one to see that irregular situations cause damage to the family and to society, and cohabitation and sex outside of marriage are demeaning to human dignity. Sociological data support Church teaching and the moral law, giving evidence to an alarming increase in a host of social issues, including a significantly higher risk of divorce among couples who live together before marriage.

Marriage is a symbol of the union of Christ and the Church, which is not a temporary or “trial union” but one which is eternally faithful. Marriage preparation ministers should become acquainted with such irregular situations case by case, and should make tactful and respectful contact with the couples concerned, enlightening them patiently, correcting them charitably, and showing them the witness of Christian family life, in such a way as to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation. (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, nn. 80-81).

For additional information on the issue of cohabitation, see the references in Appendix III (*Living Together: Questions and Answers Regarding Cohabitation and the Church’s Moral Teaching; Familiaris Consortio; Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples*).

Validation of Marriage

Sacraments consist of matter and form. In the case of Holy Matrimony, the proper form of the sacrament exists in the words of consent. If a couple has attempted marriage contrary to the laws of the Church regarding the proper form of marriage, a validation should be permitted only after the couple has completed the necessary steps of this policy governing their age and circumstances. A copy of the civil marriage record is to be obtained.

Dispensations for Ecumenical and Interfaith Marriages

Great care and concern should be exercised when the marriage preparation minister has a request from a couple of mixed religious background. It has always been the tradition of the Catholic Church to use great caution in these matters and, in the years since the Second Vatican Council, to recognize the rights and obligations of each person in such a marital relationship. The marriage preparation minister should spend a good amount of time in dealing with the religious differences, including the resolution of the baptism and rearing of children. Not only should the faith commitment of both parties be taken into consideration, but also their understanding of the commitment to be made by the Catholic partner to baptize and educate children in the Catholic faith. Such a commitment does not exclude the right of the partner of another religious tradition to share his/her traditions with any children born of the marriage. For a couple to exclude totally the possibility of the Catholic religious education of the children would be grounds for denying the necessary permission for the marriage to take place.

The *Declaration on Religious Freedom* from the Second Vatican Council also states that the conscientious devotion of the Catholic to the Catholic Church is to be safeguarded and the properly formed conscience of the other partner is to be respected.

The marriage preparation minister should take care to aid couples to come to a deeper understanding of their married life together and enliven the couple's appreciation of the virtues of fidelity, mutual trust, forgiveness, honesty, openness, love and responsibility for their children. They should likewise stress deeply that both parties have a fundamental responsibility to see that their children are instilled with deep and abiding religious values. For this reason, the marriage preparation minister should encourage the couple to contact the minister of the other community so that he/she, too, might take part in the religious preparation of this couple for marriage and be invited to assist at the marriage ceremony.

In regard to permission for ecumenical or interfaith marriages, the above principles should be kept in mind regarding faith commitment and the premarital promises made by the Catholic partner.

Dispensation and/or Permission Forms must be obtained in the following circumstances:

- *Permission for Mixed Religion* - where the other party is a baptized non-Catholic.
- *Dispensation from Disparity of Cult* - when the other person has never been baptized or there is a doubt concerning baptism or a doubt regarding the validity of baptism already received.
- *Dispensation from Canonical Form* - so that the couple may be validly married before the minister of another Christian communion or the clergy of another religious tradition usually in a church. The place of the marriage and the reasons for the dispensation should be cited. The Church requires that there be some public form of celebration.

Marriages usually follow the rite of the church in which they are celebrated. Occasionally, a priest may be asked to officiate using Catholic form at a wedding in a non-Catholic Church, or in the case of a Catholic marrying a Jewish person, in a suitable place other than a church or chapel. Permission for extraordinary place must be requested so that the marriage can be celebrated outside of a church or chapel and in an appropriate setting.

The marriage preparation minister should take great concern in sharing with the couple the church's desire to celebrate a marriage in as sacred a manner as possible so that the setting will greatly contribute to the religious enrichment of the occasion.

In the Diocese of Worcester priests and deacons may not officiate at marriages that are celebrated in such places as gardens, meeting houses, etc. Any questions should be referred to the Tribunal.

Note: Additional information regarding Ecumenical weddings and Jewish-Catholic weddings can be found in Appendices III and IV.

Remarriage

It is recognized that couples who enter a remarriage, whether as a result of death or divorce/annulment, have special needs requiring special marriage preparation. In situations of remarriage, couples will follow the program of preparation as stated in this policy, with pastoral sensitivity and adaptation to the couple's particular situation.

The previous marriage could have been either a church or civil ceremony. The fact of having been married before does not preclude the importance and necessity of participating in the diocesan marriage preparation program. The FOCCUS program has a re-marital inventory to help address the particular concerns in a remarriage situation.

IV. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The revised Pastoral Policy for Marriage Preparation and the procedures contained therein are effective immediately. The policy and its procedures shall be given wide publicity and explanation in the Church community as well as in the community at large. Pastors and parochial vicars have the responsibility to ensure that these regulations are well known to the parishioners and that they are reemphasized on a regular basis.

August 6, 2009
Feast of the Transfiguration

