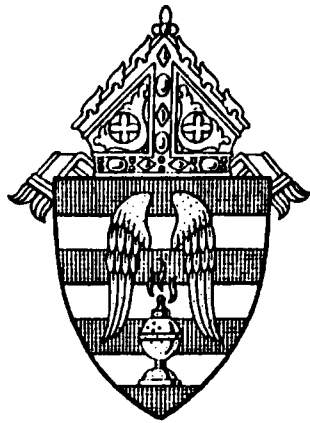


# **MARRIAGE AS A SACRAMENT**



## **POLICY AND PLANNING GUIDELINES**

**DIOCESE OF GARY**

**GUIDELINES**

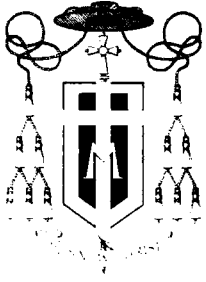
**For**

**MARRIAGE AS A SACRAMENT**

***Diocese of Gary***

***Indiana***

***Promulgated February 2, 1996***



**DIOCESE OF GARY**

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Coadjutor Bishop of Gary

February 2, 1996

**Dear Monsignor, Father, Deacon, and All Who Minister to Couples Who Will Receive the Sacrament of Marriage:**

**We, who minister in the name of Jesus, are challenged by Him to extend ourselves so that men and women preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage will grow in their relationship with the Lord, His Church, and each other. It is important for us to make the precious time of marriage preparation truly grace-filled moments of evangelization for the couples.**

**Marriage is an ecclesial matter involving a man, a woman, and the faith community. Our role is to help the couple respond to God's call to witness to His unconditional, enduring love for His people and Christ's love for His Church by forming a family which is, in the words of Pope John Paul II, the domestic church.**

**Throughout the long process of preparing these guidelines which form the marriage policy and preparation expectations for the Diocese of Gary, I have been impressed with the seriousness with which so many approached this work. Priests, deacons, lay men and women spent many hours in research and in meetings developing this policy.**

**As you minister to the couples who approach you for assistance in preparing for marriage, may you share their joy at these special moments in their lives. May you always have the heart and mind of Jesus. My prayers are with you in this important work.**

**This document is promulgated on the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus, February 2, 1996.**

Sincerely yours in the Lord Jesus,

**Most Reverend Dale J. Melczek  
Coadjutor Bishop of Gary**

**MARRIAGE AS A SACRAMENT**  
**Guidelines - Diocese of Gary**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Importance and Dignity of the Sacrament of Marriage**

When a couple decides to marry, they are beginning a time of joyful anticipation. They have agreed to establish between themselves a partnership for the whole of life. When it occurs between two baptized persons, this partnership has been elevated to the order of a sacrament by Jesus Christ.

Pope John Paul II writes, "By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligations, they are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ, who fills their whole lives with faith, hope and charity" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 56).

Men and women have a basic right to enter into valid marriages. When they do so under the aegis of the Church, marriage becomes a sacred bond. It is the desire and the responsibility of the Church to assist couples in understanding how serious, special and significant the bond of marriage really is. To help the couples understand the life-long fidelity on which a marriage is based requires careful thought, preparation and prayer.

The following Policies for Marriage Preparation are offered with the hope that we, the Church of the Diocese of Gary, can assist and serve engaged couples in their response to God's call to the married life.

During policy development, we have attempted to be sensitive to the small parish community, which might joyfully celebrate only a few marriages each year, and to larger, urban parishes, where fifty such celebrations occur annually. Our goal for engaged couples is that they, and the entire parish community, find in marriage a "specific source and original means of sanctification" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 56). May they do so with an assurance of peace, happiness and permanence.

**Policy and Guidelines Committee:** Msgr. Joseph Semancik, chairman, Rev. Martin Dobrzynski, Rev. Richard Emerson, Rev. Joseph Gazarkiewicz, Rev. Francis Lazar, Msgr. Carl Mengeling, and Msgr. John Siekierski

**Staffing by Family Life Ministry, Catholic Charities:** Rita Mayer, Francis Moynihan, and Barbara Pawlak

**I. ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARISH PRIEST & ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY**

1. The parish priest has the responsibility of assessing the readiness of those desiring marriage, and, with his own ecclesial community, assisting in the immediate preparation of the engaged couple for the Sacrament of Marriage.

*(CF/c. 1063)*

2. The parish priest of the church where the wedding takes place has the right to assist at the marriage, the responsibility for the couple's preparation for marriage, and for the assessment of their readiness to enter marriage. This canonical right belongs to the local parish priest even when a visiting clergyman is asked to officiate. *(CF/c. 1070)*

3. Those involved in the immediate preparation of couples for marriage are assured that nothing stands in the way of the valid and licit celebration of any given couple's marriage. *(CF/c. 1066)*

4. The parish priest may delegate to visiting priests and to deacons the faculty to assist at marriages within his territory. *(CF/c. 1111)*

**Pastoral Notes:**

a) A grave obligation rests upon the parish priest to provide any and all necessary assistance to a couple who is intending to enter into marriage. Such assistance will include a premarriage program. It may also include having the names of the couple(s) in the general intercessions, having the couple(s) meet with married couples in the parish prior to their wedding, and opportunities for psychological counseling and/or professional assistance.

b) All persons have the right to marry. *(CF/c. 1058)* Canon 1066 is a reminder that the right to marry is contingent on fulfilling certain legal prerequisites. The pastor becomes morally certain that nothing stands in the way of a valid and licit celebration before he proceeds with being a witness to the particular marriage.

c) Even if a couple is from another diocese, the parish priest who is performing the marriage and has the right to validly officiate is responsible for seeing that the couple is adequately prepared for marriage. "...within the confines of their territory, the local ordinary and the pastor in virtue of their office, validly assist at the marriages of their subjects as well as of non-subjects provided one of the contractants is of the Latin rite." (C.1109)

**A. NOTIFICATION OF THE PASTOR**

1. A couple contacts their parish priest as soon as they propose to marry, or at least six months prior to the proposed date of the wedding.
2. A tentative wedding date may be selected during the first session with the parish priest, but the date is not finalized until it is established that the couple is free to marry.

**Pastoral Notes:**

- a) Couples are encouraged to begin formal marriage preparation with their parish priest as soon as possible after the engagement has been announced. Oftentimes, this can occur almost one year before the anticipated wedding date.
- b) A minimum of six months comprises a preparation time. It is the minimum time necessary for proper personal, spiritual, and liturgical preparation of the couple for marriage. Important elements in the preparation are:
  - Premarital Assessment/Evaluation
  - Formation Sessions
  - Liturgical Preparation
  - Completion of Civil Requirements, e.g. marriage license

**B. INITIAL INTERVIEW - WELCOME****1. WELCOME AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The initial interview with the couple requesting marriage is an important time for establishing rapport, and for reviewing and explaining the concerns of the ecclesial community as expressed in these guidelines. It also is a time to determine the eligibility of the engaged couple to marry, according to both the civil law and the canon law of the Catholic Church. Priests cannot witness marriages not recognized by the State.

*(See Appendix A for sample questions)*

**2. EXPLAIN MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROCEDURE/PROCESS**

At the first introductory session, a complete explanation of the Marriage Preparation Process is given.

**Pastoral Notes:**

a) The Marriage Preparation Process is begun by filling out the diocesan premarital documents; briefing about the Instructional/Formational Program in which they will participate; and informing about the Premarital Inventory which they may be asked to complete.

b) It is extremely important that, during the initial stages of this first session with the couple, the priest emphasizes the positive aspects of this policy as an expression of the concern of the Church, given the many problems encountered in marriage today. He stresses that the marriage preparation process is a positive aid to the couple in the exploration of their future marriage. It is also an aid to the priest, as the representative of the Church, in the development of a solid marriage preparation program for this unique couple. In no way is it meant to be "just more red tape" or a hurdle that has to be jumped before the couple is "permitted" to marry in the Church.

c) The parish priest creates an atmosphere in which the engaged couple is motivated to sense the value of preparation and thus can commit themselves to it.

**3. ASSESSMENT AND ARRANGEMENTS**

At the initial interview, the parish priest assists the couple in beginning to assess their strengths and weaknesses in terms of marriage, and to evaluate their readiness as a couple to marry in the Catholic Church.

**a. PRE-MARITAL INQUIRY.**

After the priest has thoroughly discussed this diocesan policy, answering the various questions that the couple may have, he initiates the formal marriage preparation process by filling out the diocesan premarital documents:

- Form M-1 \* (Premarital Questionnaire);
- Form M-2 \* (Witness Form);
- Form M-3 \* (if a dispensation or permission is needed);
- Signature of the Catholic party to the Declaration and Promise in an interreligious marriage\* ,
- Supplementary Oaths in the case of a premarital pregnancy.

***(See Appendix B for Sample Forms\*)***

(CF/c. 1066) Marriage is celebrated when it is evident that nothing stands in the way of its valid and licit celebration.

***(See Appendix C for Impediments to Marriage)***

\*At the time of this printing, Diocesan Marriage Forms are being revised and combined. A sample form is not available for inclusion in this document.

**Pastoral Notes:**

a) The Pre-Marital Investigation Form is used not only to uncover impediments to marriage, but also may be used as a springboard for discussion of a couple's attitudes toward marriage, and especially the Sacrament of Marriage.

b) In some cases, the priest may wish to delay filling out some forms until further in the preparation process when the couple is better able to assess the importance and references of the forms. However, the tentative marriage date remains tentative until the forms are completed and it is determined that the couple is free to marry.

**b. DOCUMENTATION**

**Baptismal Certificates/Other Documents.** The parish priest obtains a **recent** (no older than six months from date of request) copy of the baptismal certificate(s) of the Catholic party(ies).

**Pastoral Notes:**

a) The parish priest also indicates what further premarital documents will/may be required: parental affidavits; death certificate of a previous spouse; written permission from pastor of either the bride or the groom, if appropriate; Declaration of Nullity of previous marriage.

b) The parish priest informs the couple about the **requirements of the State**. In order to obtain a marriage license (county clerk's office) in Indiana, the couple is required to have valid driver's licenses or state I/D cards, and a rubella blood test (females under 50 years) entered on a blue Indiana form.

c) These documents, and any necessary dispensations, along with a brief summary of any marriage assessment tool and/or report from a counselor, are kept in an envelope and saved in a permanent file at the parish.

**c. WITNESS/INTERVIEW**

Goals are to ascertain freedom to marry. *(See Appendix B for sample forms)*

**Pastoral Notes:**

a) The witness forms are filled out by persons who have known either of the engaged since the party was of marriageable age. Parents can be used.

b) Interviews with the parents, or others who know the couple well, are very effective in cases involving **minors, pregnancy, apparent immaturity, or other difficulties**. Whenever possible, these interviews are extended to such areas as family background, parents' assessment of the readiness of the couple, as well as the couple's motivation to marry.

c) Results of these interviews are retained with the permanent prenuptial file.

**d. DATE & PLACE OF MARRIAGE**

**Date of Marriage.** Discussion of a tentative wedding date may take place during the initial contact with the parish priest/deacon; however, the date is not to be finalized until the assessment process has been completed. At the conclusion of the Marriage Preparation Process, a decision to proceed with or delay the planned wedding is made by the priest and the couple.

**Pastoral Notes:**

The couple is advised that if serious reasons surface, the priest/deacon may delay the wedding until the matter is resolved. If the decision is to proceed, the wedding date is finalized and the Liturgical Preparation for the wedding begun. (CF/c. 1077)

**Place of Marriage.** The wedding of two Catholics takes place in the parish church of either the bride or groom. For two Catholics to marry in another parish church, it is proper that permission is received from either of the respective parishes. The wedding in which only one of the parties is Catholic takes place in his or her parish church. (See "The Place of the Wedding" in the Liturgy Document, p. 30.)

**Pastoral Notes:**

a) Since the parish church is the spiritual "home" of the family of God, where the life-giving sacraments are normally celebrated and since the parish is the heart of sacramental life and ministry, weddings in non-sacred places (private homes, gardens, parks, hotels, wedding chapels) are rarely, if ever, allowed.

b) In the case of an interreligious marriage, the bishop may permit the couple to celebrate their wedding in the place of worship of the non-Catholic party when a pastoral reason exists. A dispensation from canonical form is required as it is presumed that the officiant, witnessing consent, is not a Catholic priest or deacon.

c) In cases where a wedding in a Catholic Church would be offensive, the pastor can permit the marriage celebration in a suitable place.

**e. CELEBRANT**

No priest may assist at the wedding of parishioners of another parish without the permission of the proper pastor. (CF/c. 1115) No priest can **validly** assist at a wedding in a parish of which he is not the pastor, associate pastor, assistant pastor or curate without proper "delegation" of the pastor or the Ordinary. (CF/c. 1118)

**Pastoral Notes:**

If another priest is invited to perform the ceremony, it is permissible for him to handle the preparation, but confirmation of this must be given to the local priest. If the priest is from out of state or is not able to handle the couple's preparation, it remains the responsibility of the local parish priest.

**C. REQUIREMENTS FOR MARRIAGE PREPARATION**

1. All couples wishing to be married in Catholic churches in the Diocese of Gary must participate in a formal diocesan approved marriage preparation course.
2. The engaged couple is asked to participate in a formal preparation course during the first three months of the six-month preparation time.
3. The Marriage Preparation Course is designed to:
  - Bring the couple to a deeper awareness of self, of intercommunication, of human sexuality and the theology of marriage.
  - Promote discussion between the couple on topics they may have not fully considered or shared with respect to marriage.
  - Help the couple come to a deeper appreciation of the impact of their own families of origin.
  - Foster personal and spiritual maturity through the use of parish resources.
  - Consider and review practical information a married couple will need.  
(c. 1063)  
*(See Appendix D for Course details)*

**Pastoral Notes:**

- a) In some particular cases, participation in the marriage preparation program by both parties **together** is impossible by reason of special circumstances (e.g. military service). Absent parties must obtain like preparation and assessment of readiness for marriage in their own locality in cooperation with the parish priest who will perform the ceremony.
- b) Since the last few months prior to the date of the wedding are filled with so many practical details, it is vitally important that quality time be spent early on by the couple and the priest/deacon in assessing the relationship and preparing for marriage. The crucial distinction between preparation for Matrimony and the planning for the wedding liturgy is maintained. "A wedding is a day.....a marriage is a lifetime."
- c) Some couples merit special considerations: the marriage of an elderly couple, for example, or the validation of a civil marriage which has existed for many years. Couples in these situations are treated with special sensitivity and probably always individually, rather than encouraged to meet with a group of couples. In some places special marriage preparation processes are available for couples who have been previously married.
- d) When making decisions about which program the couple will choose, it is wise to encourage the engaged couple to select those programs which will best suit their needs, rather than requiring a particular program.

e) **Pre-Marital Inventory.** Use of a pre-marital assessment or inventory is strongly recommended as part of the assessment for each engaged couple. For the following couples, however, the Pre-Marital Inventory is **required**:

- Age--if the age of either party is under twenty years on the proposed wedding date;
- Pregnancy--if there is a pregnancy and either party was under twenty-one years of age prior to the pregnancy or if there is a pregnancy and both parties have celebrated their twenty-first birthdays but were not engaged prior to the pregnancy;
- Previous marriage--if either party was in a previous marriage either ecclesiastically dissolved or declared invalid by a Church Tribunal;
- MPC non-participation--if one of the parties has not participated in the pre-approved Catholic Marriage Preparation Course;
- Problem areas--if, after participation by both parties in the Catholic Marriage Preparation Course, the parish priest is informed that problem areas surfaced from the course assessments.

**\*\*\* Referral for professional counseling may be advised depending upon the special circumstances, or for other reasons noted by the priest/deacon. The counselor can assist in determining the readiness of the couple for marriage through professional evaluation, or engage in therapy and ongoing counseling which may deal with personality disorders or psychological issues too important to be left unaddressed before marriage.**

f) There are various tools available for the pre-marital inventory. These can be helpful in obtaining insights into the emotional, psychological, and religious maturity of the couple and in helping them become aware of both strengths on which to build their relationship and dangers that might threaten it.

g) The Pre-marital Inventory is a written value clarification exercise. It is not a test. It is intended to be **an aid to the priest and the couple** in exploring the couple's relationship, attitudes and expectations about entering into the proposed marriage.