

“WHAT GOD HAS
JOINED...”

* SUPPLEMENT *

TO THE PARTICULAR NORMS FOR
CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE IN THE



ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The *What God Has Joined-Supplement* is designed to aid pastors and those who assist them in the implementation of the revised Norms for Christian Marriage. While the norms themselves offer a succinct statement of policies, this Supplement offers a "context" in which to better understand the norms as well as additional information important for their successful implementation.

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DOCUMENT ABBREVIATIONS

- CA John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *The Church in America* (January 22, 1999), Daughters of St. Paul.
- CC Pius XI. Encyclical Letter, *Casti Connubii* (December 31, 1930), Daughters of St. Paul.
- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), United States Catholic Conference.
- CIC *Codex Iuris Canonici* (January 25, 1983), Canon Law Society of America.
- CT John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (October 16, 1979), Daughters of St. Paul.
- DRP John Paul II, *Discourse to Participants in a Course on Responsible Procreation* (March 1, 1984), Daughters of St. Paul.
- FC John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), Daughters of St. Paul.
- GDC Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (August 11, 1997), United States Catholic Conference.
- GS Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), Daughters of St. Paul.
- HL Archbishop Charles Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., Pastoral Letter, *Of Human Life* (July 22, 1998), One More Soul.
- LF John Paul II, *Letter to Families* (February 2, 1994), Daughters of St. Paul.
- LMP Archbishop Charles Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., *Letter to All Those Involved in the Important Work of Marriage Preparation...* (May 5, 1998).
- MM Paul VI, Apostolic Letter, *On Mixed Marriages* (October 1, 1970), Daughters of St. Paul.
- MPC National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Marriage & Family, *Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples: An Information Report on New Realities and Pastoral Practices* (August, 1999).
- PSM Pontifical Council for the Family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* (May 13, 1996), Daughters of St. Paul.
- SMM National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Statement on the Implementation of the Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages* (November 16, 1970), Daughters of St. Paul.
- TB John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body* (General Audiences delivered between September 1979 and November 1984), Daughters of St. Paul.

(1) ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION

The greater the difficulties caused by one's surroundings for knowing the truth of the Christian sacrament and of the institution of marriage, all the greater must be our efforts to prepare spouses adequately for their responsibilities.

Pope John Paul II¹

The American cultural landscape provides both bright spots and shadows for today's couples preparing for marriage. On the one hand, couples coming to the Church today for marriage have been raised in a culture that instills in them greater attention to the quality of their interpersonal relationship, and a keen awareness of their equal dignity as men and women. On the other hand, many couples have grown up without the stable witness of their own parents' married love.

Furthermore, American culture incessantly promotes a vision of human life that is not only unsupportive of marriage and family life, but quite often antithetical to them. The Church must therefore promote better and more intensive programs of marriage preparation in order to counter the pervasive influence of secular culture and even more in order to favor positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages.²

While some might be led to despair in the face of current trends, "...as followers of Christ, we are people of hope. We are convinced that we have *good news of great joy* to proclaim to the couples who come to us for help in preparing for marriage."³ By proclaiming the full truth of conjugal love to engaged couples in the context of an encounter with Christ, and by directing them to full participation in the sacramental life of the Church, we lay the building blocks of a "culture of life."

(1a) Profile of Couples Seeking Marriage in the Church

While it is important to avoid unfounded prejudices with regard to specific couples, it is just as important to have a realistic understanding of the general circumstances in which many couples today are approaching the Church to receive the Sacrament of Marriage.

Some of the common issues / circumstances with which couples are dealing and which call for specific pastoral concern include the following:

- lack of initial conversion to Christ and his Church
- weak or non-existent faith
- uncatechized Catholics
- inactive Catholics

¹ Cited in PSM, n.4

² Cf. FC, n. 66

³ LMP

- mixed faith
- new-age spirituality
- individualism and materialism
- cohabitation / current sexual activity
- previous sexual relationships.
- couples generally older than in the past
- dual careers
- children of divorced parents
- divorce mentality
- contraceptive mentality / anti-child mentality
- second union
- seeking validation of civil union
- abusive backgrounds (child abuse, molestation, abusive dating relationships, rape)
- abusive relationship (verbal, emotional, and physical abuse)
- personal or parental alcohol or drug abuse or addiction
- previous abortion
- sexual addiction (extended involvement with pornography and masturbation, repeated sexual encounters, anonymous sexual encounters, repeated infidelity in mind and / or action, etc.)

The following information was gathered from an anonymous survey conducted by the Office of Marriage & Family Life of nearly 700 couples preparing for marriage in the Archdiocese of Denver in 2007:

- 43% attend Church regularly. 41% attend sometimes.
- 40% were entering mixed marriages.
- 62% were cohabiting at the time of their marriage preparation.
- 36% would like to practice NFP. 50% are not sure.

(1b) The Primary Task of Marriage Preparation

Those who marry in the Catholic Church have not been immune from the dramatic rise in divorce in our society. This is connected to the fact that Catholics are entering marriage with many of the same detrimental patterns of thinking and behaving as the general population, such as those characteristic of the issues and circumstances listed above.

This is the bad news. The good news is that the Catholic Church has a “blueprint” for successful marriages. She teaches that if marriages are to succeed two things are necessary: first, couples must meditate on God’s plan for marriage; and second, they must seek to shape all their ways of thinking and acting according to it.⁴

⁴ Cf. CC, n.2

Helping the engaged to do these two essential things in the context of an encounter with Christ is the primary task of Catholic marriage preparation.

The high rates of divorce among those who marry in the Church indicate that this task has not always been carried out successfully. Loss of faith in the Church's role as the authentic interpreter of God's plan for marriage is partly to blame for this. Furthermore, many couples come to the Church for marriage without any explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ.⁵

“Therefore, ‘the Church in America must speak increasingly of Jesus Christ, the human face of God and the divine face of man. It is this proclamation that truly makes an impact on people, awakens and transforms hearts, and in a word, converts. Christ must be proclaimed with joy and conviction, but above all by the witness of each one's life.’”⁶

What is required, according to John Paul II, “is a serious preparation of young people for marriage, one which clearly presents Catholic teaching on this sacrament at the theological, anthropological, and spiritual levels.”⁷ Such preparation is an integral part of the “new evangelization.” This new evangelization is a “more decisive personal conversion” and “an ever more generous fidelity to the Gospel.”⁸ “At a time when in the sphere of morality there is a disturbing spread of relativism and subjectivism, the Church in America is called to proclaim with renewed vigor that conversion consists in commitment to the person of Jesus Christ, with all the theological and moral implications taught by the Magisterium of the Church.”⁹

Pastoral experience attests that those who are properly evangelized and catechized, that is, those who have encountered Christ personally and who understand, embrace, and strive to live the Church's teaching on marriage, very rarely, divorce.¹⁰ Experience also attests that we cannot instill in others' hearts what is not instilled in our own: faith in the *Good News* of all that the Catholic Church teaches about marriage.

Thus, if we, as the witnesses to and proclaimers of the Gospel, are to do our part to turn the tide of marital breakdown, it will first require a more thorough understanding of, a deeper faith in, and a more profound conversion to all that the Church teaches about marriage: its sacramentality, its permanence, its God-given orientation towards children, the proper regulation of births, etc.

⁵ Cf. CT, nj. 19

⁶ CA, n. 67

⁷ Ibid, n.46

⁸ Ibid, n.26

⁹ Ibid, n. 53

¹⁰ Cf. Janet Smith, *Humanae Vitae: A generation Later*, p. 127; and “NFP Update....,” Diocese of Charleston’s Office of Natural Family Planning, Vol 4, June 1991

(2) WHAT IS MARRIAGE IN THE EYES OF THE CHURCH?

(2a) A Basic Definition of Marriage

*Marriage is the intimate, exclusive, indissoluble communion of life and love entered by man and woman at the design of the Creator for the purpose of their own good and the procreation and education of children; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.*¹¹

Intimate communion of life and love: Marriage is the closest and most intimate of human friendships. It involves the sharing of the whole of a person's life with his/her spouse. Marriage calls for a mutual self-surrender so intimate and complete that the two become “one,” not only in body, but in soul. Far from clouding their uniqueness as persons, true marital love leads to each spouse's deeper discovery of his/her personhood.

Exclusive communion of life and love: As a total gift of two persons to each other (physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually) this intimate union and the good of the children excludes such union with anyone else. It demands *total fidelity*.

Indissoluble communion of life and love: Husband and wife are not joined by passing emotion or mere erotic inclination, which, selfishly pursued, fades quickly away.¹² They are called by God to a vocation of holiness, and joined by him in conjugal love by the firm and irrevocable act of their own consent. For the baptized, this bond is sealed by the Holy Spirit and, once consummated, is absolutely indissoluble.¹³ Thus, the Church does not so much teach that divorce is wrong, but that divorce (in the sense of dissolving a valid marriage) *is impossible*, regardless of its civil implications.

Entered by man and woman: The complementarity of the sexes is essential to marriage. There is such widespread confusion today about the nature of marriage that some would wish to extend a legal “right” to marry to two persons of the same sex. The very nature of marriage makes such a proposition impossible.

At the design of the Creator: God is the author of marriage. He inscribed the call to marriage in our very being by creating us as male and female (Gen 1:27). Marriage is governed by His laws, faithfully transmitted by His Bride, the Church. For marriage to be what it is, it must conform to these laws. Man, therefore, is not free to change the meaning and purposes of marriage.

¹¹ Cf. GS, n. 48 and CIC, canon 1055

¹² Cf. GS, n.49

¹³ Even if a marriage is not consummated, no human power can claim to dissolve it. However, the Church, in very rare cases, does have the more than human power, given by God, to dissolve non-consummated marriages.

For the purpose of their own good: "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen 2: 18). Conversely, it is for their own good, for their benefit, enrichment, and ultimately, their salvation, that a man and woman join their lives in the Covenant of Marriage. Marriage is the most basic (but not the only) expression of the vocation to love that all men and women have as persons made in God's image and likeness.

And the procreation and education of children: "By their very nature, the institution of marriage itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children and find in them their ultimate crown."¹⁴ Children are not added on to marriage and conjugal love, but naturally spring from the very heart of the spouses' mutual self-giving as its fruit and fulfillment. Marriage retains its goodness even when couples are physically unable to have children. But intentional exclusion of children contradicts the very nature and purpose of marriage.

Covenant: Marriage is not only a contract between a man and a woman, but a sacred covenant. God created marriage to image and participate in his own covenant with His people. Thus, the marital covenant calls couples to share in the very love of God. Contrary to some trends in thought, the Church's recent emphasis on marriage as a covenant does not exclude the idea that marriage is also a contract. It is true that a covenant provides a more sacred framework for marriage, but canon law still purposely uses both terms to describe marriage.¹⁵

The dignity of a sacrament: Marriage between baptized persons is an efficacious sign of the union between Christ and the Church, and, as such, is a means of grace (see below for a more thorough discussion). The marriage of two non-baptized persons, or of one baptized person and one non-baptized person, while not a sacrament, is considered by the Church a "good and natural" marriage.

(2b) Theology of Marriage

The twentieth century witnessed significant developments in the Church's theology of marriage, beginning with Pope Pius XI's 1930 encyclical *Casti Connubii*, passing through the Second Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, and culminating in the manifold writings and original insights of Pope John Paul II. In fact, over two thirds of what the Catholic Church has ever said about marriage in her two thousand year history has come from John Paul II's pontificate.

The Second Vatican Council marked a shift from a merely "juridical" presentation of marriage, typical of many previous Church pronouncements, to a more "personalist" approach. Rather than focusing merely, on the "duties," "rights," and "ends" of marriage, the Council Fathers emphasized how these same duties, rights, and ends are informed by the intimate, interpersonal love of the spouses. "Such love, merging the human and the divine, leads

¹⁴ Cf. Ibid, n.48

¹⁵ Cf. canon 1055

the spouses to a free and mutual gift of themselves, a gift providing itself by gentle affection, and by deed; such love pervades the whole of their lives, growing better and growing greater by its generosity.”¹⁶

Explaining how conjugal love is a “merging of the human and the divine” is the task of a theology of marriage.

The Centrality of Marriage in God's Plan

“Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God and concludes with a vision of the ‘wedding feast of the lamb.’ Scripture speaks throughout of marriage and its *mystery*,’ its institution and the meaning God has given it, its origin and its end, ...the difficulties arising from sin, and its renewal ‘in the Lord’ ...”¹⁷ Throughout the Old Testament, God's love for his people is described as the love of a husband for his bride. In the New Testament, Christ *embodies* this love. He comes as the Heavenly Bridegroom to unite himself indissolubly to his Bride, the Church.

Marriage, then, is not a peripheral issue in the Christian life. It finds itself *right at the heart* of the Christian mystery and serves to illuminate it. Pope John Paul II goes so far as to say that we cannot understand the Christian mystery unless we keep in mind the “great mystery” involved in the creation of man as male and female and the vocation of both to conjugal love.¹⁸

Male & Female: Image of the Trinity

Having created man in his image and likeness specifically as *male and female*, God called them to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:27. 28). God is in himself a life-giving *Communion of Persons*. We are called to image God's faithful, everlasting, life-giving love by living in a similar *communion of persons*.

“Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. ...Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person, in its entirety, to love: marriage, and virginity or celibacy. Either one is in its own proper form an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being ‘created in the image of God.’”¹⁹

Thus, marriage and celibacy are not in conflict, but stem from the very same call to the sincere gift of self in “nuptial” love. Every man is called, in some sense, to be both a husband and a father. Every woman is called, in some sense, to be both a wife and a mother. This is why the terms husband, wife, father, mother, brother, and sister are applicable to both marriage *and* the celibate vocation. Both, in different but complementary ways, form us into the one family of God.

¹⁶ Ibid, n. 49

¹⁷ CCC, n. 1602

¹⁸ Cf. LF, n. 19

¹⁹ FC, n. 11

Marriage: Sacrament of Christ & the Church

By virtue of their baptisms, the marriage of Christians is a *sacrament*. It is a *living sign* that truly communicates and participates in the love of Christ and the Church. The spouses' vows lived out in their daily commitment, and most specifically in their "one flesh" union, constitute this living sign.²⁰ As St. Paul says, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother, cling to his bride, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a profound mystery, *and it refers to Christ and the Church*" (Eph 5: 31,32).

Since the "one flesh" union of man and wife foreshadowed Christ and the Church right from "the beginning," Pope John Paul II speaks of marriage as the *primordial sacrament*. "All the sacraments of the new covenant," he says, "find in a certain sense their prototype in marriage..."²¹ In as much as the visible sign of marriage is linked to the visible sign of Christ and the Church, it transfers the eternal plan of love into history making it "the foundation of the whole sacramental order."²²

Hence, Baptism is described as a "nuptial bath,"²³ and the Eucharist is understood as the sacramental consummation of the marriage between Christ and the Church. When we receive the body of Christ into our own, just like a bride *we conceive new life in us* - life in the Holy Spirit. It is this same Holy Spirit that forms the bond that unites spouses in the Sacrament of Marriage. This is the "profound mystery" in which marriage participates.

The Eucharist, then, is the very source of Christian Marriage. "In the Eucharistic gift of charity the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its 'communion' and its 'mission,'"²⁴ that is, to love as God loves.

The Marital Embrace

The free exchange of consent properly witnessed by the Church establishes the marriage bond. Sexual union consummates it - seals it, completes it, perfects it. *Sexual union is where the words of the wedding vows become flesh*. The very "language" that God has inscribed in sexual intercourse is the language of the marriage covenant: the free commitment to a union of love that is indissoluble, faithful, and open to children. If spouses willfully contradict any of these goods of marriage in their sexual expressions, marital intimacy becomes less than God intended it to be.

²⁰ Cf. TB, General Audience of January 5, 1983. John Paul II brings a development to the Church's understanding of the "sacramental sign" of marriage. Historically, most theologians have posited the "sign" of marriage in the wedding vows, rejecting another view that posited the sacramental sign in the act of consummation. John Paul II brings the two views together by recognizing that the words of the wedding vows "can be fulfilled only by conjugal intercourse." In conjugal intercourse, he says, "we pass to the reality which corresponds to these words. Both the one and the other element are important in regard to the structure of the sacramental sign."

²¹ Ibid, General Audience, October 20, 1982

²² Ibid, General Audience, October 20, 1982

²³ CCC, n. 1617

²⁴ FC, n. 57

The often disputed sexual moral teachings of the Church become lucid when seen through this lens. Like all sacramental signs, if sexual intercourse (as the visible sign of marriage) is truly to communicate God's life and love, then it must accurately symbolize it. Sexual union that is total, faithful, and open to new life actually participates in the communion of Christ and the Church. Masturbation, fornication, adultery, intentionally sterilized sex, homosexual acts, etc.- none of these accurately symbolize, and thus never bring about the love of Christ for the Church. None of these behaviors are *marital*. Thus, for sexual union to consummate a marriage it must be performed in a "human manner" and be "*per se* suitable for the generation of children."²⁵

Marriage and the Rupture Caused by Sin

Marriage is indeed a "profound mystery," as St Paul described it (Eph 5:31). But this lofty vision of marriage that Christ sets forth for his Church often meets with much cynicism and resistance. When Jesus proclaimed the permanent nature of marriage, even his disciples said to him, "If this is the situation for a husband and a wife, it is better not to marry" (Mt 19: 10).

Universal experience reveals that marriage is wrought with difficulties. "According to faith, the discord we notice so painfully does not stem from the *nature* of man and woman, nor from the nature of their relations, but from *sin*. As a break with God, the first sin had for its first consequence the rupture of the original communion between man and woman."²⁶

History affirms the poignant story in the book of Genesis by attesting to the havoc wrought in the relationship of man and woman as a result of human disobedience to God. Because of sin, male and female differences, rather than complementing one another and bringing about communion, are often a cause of great tension and division. Sexual attraction itself, originally given by God to be the power to love as he loves, tends to be, because of sin, a desire for self-gratification at the expense of others. All of this inflicts deep personal wounds on husbands, wives, and their children who, in turn, often grow up to repeat the same fallen patterns of relating.

A Call to Conversion

While an "echo" of God's original intention for marriage remains in the human heart, this distorted way of relating has become man's lot. The capacity for genuine marital love has not been entirely lost, but men and women must consciously renounce all that is contrary to God's plan and continually surrender themselves to the grace of Christ's redemption if they are to experience marriage as God intended it "in the beginning."

Since it was man and woman's turning away from God that distorted their relationship, restoring marriage requires a radical return to God. Thus, the task of authentic marriage preparation is not only *informational* but, above all, *transformational*. It must call couples to a life of ongoing personal *conversion* to Jesus Christ.

²⁵ CIC, canon 1061

²⁶ CCC, n. 1606, 1607

Only as spouses renounce themselves and take up their crosses to follow Christ can they experience the true joys of marriage that God ardently wishes to shower upon them.

Marriage and family life find themselves, as Pope John Paul II explains, “at the center of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love.”²⁷ Living the truth about marriage, then, is a very difficult struggle, even for those with solid moral formation. This struggle brings spouses to the heart of the “spiritual battle” (Eph 6: 12) that they must fight if they are to resist evil (in the world and in themselves) and love each other as Christ loves his Bride, the Church.

But spouses must never become discouraged. For Christ has won the victory over sin. As they surrender their lives to the grace of redemption, it is truly possible for spouses to know the joy and freedom that come from living and loving according to their true dignity as men and women made in the image and likeness of God. It is truly possible for men and women, husbands and wives, to experience restoration of proper balance and mutual self-giving in their relationship.

This is the *Good News* of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit has been poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5). The Spirit of love makes the Cross of Christ fruitful in our lives enabling us to live the full truth about marriage. The Church never ceases to proclaim this *Good News* for the salvation of every man and woman.

A Question of Faith

History tells the tale of entire nations separating from the Church because of disputes over the nature and meaning of marriage. In the face of fierce persecution and resistance, right up to our own day, the Church stands firm in her teaching. Why is the Church so obstinate? Because marriage is the *primordial sacrament* of God's love. *To diminish in any way the nature and meaning of married love is to diminish the nature and meaning of Gods love.*

When Jesus restored God's original plan for marriage, he said that it was because of the hardness of their hearts that Moses allowed divorce, that is, because of sin. Then he added, “But in the beginning it was not so” (Mt 19:8). Christ is able to restore God's original plan because he is the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (Jn 1:29).

Confronting the Church's teaching on marriage, then, brings us face to face with the message of the Gospel. It brings us face to face with a Question of faith: *Do we believe that Christ came to save the world from sin and restore Gods original plan of love? Do we believe that it is possible for husbands and wives (and everyone else) to love one another as God loves?* The Church, the Bride of Christ, responds with a resounding “*Yes, we do!*”

This is the faith to which all engaged couples and all husbands and wives must be called. “It is certainly important to instruct the engaged in realities such as handling conflict, career expectations, finances, etc. However, *the heart and soul of Catholic marriage preparation must be the proclamation of the Gospel as it pertains to marriage and family life.*”²⁸ That is, the heart and soul of Catholic marriage preparation must be a call to faith.

²⁷ LF, n. 23

²⁸ LMP

(3) MARRIAGE PREPARATION MINISTERS²⁹

The policies set forth in the norms recognize that not all couples who volunteer to help prepare the engaged for marriage are trained catechists, nor are they expected to be. While properly trained and certified catechists are essential to the marriage preparation process (particularly for Session 4 of proximate preparation), the lived experience of couples who give authentic witness to the practical realities of sacramental married life is no less important. Their generous and invaluable service should be recognized with gratitude.

A particular problem arises, however, when those couples involved in forming the engaged are living in direct conflict with Catholic teaching on marriage and conjugal morality. Rather than presenting an authentic witness to the lived experience of the Church's teaching, their attitudes and behavior, at least in the conflicting area, present a *counter-witness*. This is not only a cause of scandal, but a source of great confusion for the engaged. "Catholic marriage preparation, therefore, cannot be done by the disaffected or lukewarm. It's for people who have a fire in their hearts for God: who love the Church and all her teachings."³⁰

Before couples are given an opportunity to help form the engaged, they must first be called to embrace the truth in their own marriages. Establishing a marriage prep team to assist the pastor is itself, then, an opportunity for evangelization and catechesis. This implies the need for an adequate formation program for the couples who give of their time to serve the engaged.³¹

Because of the many special circumstances with which engaged couples come to marriage preparation, extraordinary discretion, prudence and sensitivity are required of all those who serve the engaged in preparation for their sacrament. In cases where the engaged couple may be unchurched or uncertain regarding Church teaching and practice, the welcome and understanding which sensitive marriage preparation ministers (referred to hereafter as MPM's) offer on behalf of the entire parish community is particularly important.

The Norms for Christian Marriage presuppose that leadership development in marriage preparation ministry be a high priority at the parish level. If they have not already done so, pastors are strongly encouraged to establish a

²⁹ The priest or deacon must be understood as the first and primary marriage preparation minister. However, as used in this document, "marriage preparation ministers" also include the lay faithful who assist the priest or deacon in the preparation process.

³⁰ LMP

³¹ As noted in the Norms, Instructional Workshop 1, entitled "God's Plan for Joy Filled Marriage" also serves as a formational program for marriage preparation ministers. All are encouraged to attend and can do so free of charge. Pre-registration is required.

parish marriage preparation team consisting of couples who are able to give lively witness to the practical realities of living a sacramental marriage. Such a team will be of particular service in the successful implementation of Sessions 3 and 5 of proximate preparation and Sessions 1 and 2 of immediate preparation.

Pastors are responsible for ensuring that all those involved in this sensitive ministry have appropriate dispositions and sufficient understanding of Church teaching on marriage and conjugal love. *Above all, pastors must be certain that the couples they hold out as an example to the engaged are not living in direct conflict with the teachings of the Church particularly in matters of conjugal morality-* Such an assessment must be undertaken with care and sensitivity, not with the aim of excluding couples outright from ministry, but with the aim of inviting them to enrich their own marriage by embracing the full truth of God's plan for them. If in the end, however, and in spite of all efforts, a couple remains in conflict with the Church's teaching, it would be inappropriate to hold them out as an example to the engaged.

(4) SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Couples requesting marriage come to the Church today with a wide diversity of backgrounds and family experiences. Consequently, parish ministers often encounter circumstances which justify special concern and attention. In the following section, archdiocesan policies governing these special circumstances are discussed (see Appendix for a discussion of cohabiting and sexually active couples). Further pastoral guidance in these matters is available from the Office of the Judicial Vicar.

(4a) Marriage of Non-practicing Catholics

In the case of non-practicing Catholics who request to be married in the Church, the MPM should ask the couple to articulate clearly the reasons for their request. While the Church does admit to the sacrament those who are imperfectly disposed, mere social convention, parental pressure, or preference for setting provide no justification for marriage in the Catholic Church.

The celebration of a Catholic Marriage is indicative of faith in Christ and his Church and expresses very concretely the manner of living the couple is going to pursue. Thus, the priest or deacon has an obligation to officiate only at those weddings where faith has been personally appropriated by the couple, even if that faith is imperfect.

It is proper to expect that couples attend Mass regularly and are in the state of grace, particularly at the time of the celebration of marriage. If they are not attending Mass regularly they should be warmly invited to do so. They should also be offered further instruction in the life of faith beyond what is required by the policies set forth in the norms. Whether and how couples are approached in this regard can mean the difference between continued alienation from the Church or renewed involvement.

Commentary: The teaching of Pope John Paul II provides pastoral ministers with fundamental insights into the prudent pastoral judgment such cases require. It is recommended that the full text of the section from which the following excerpts have been taken be consulted by all who have responsibility for marriage preparation.

The faith of the person asking the Church for marriage can exist in different degrees, and it is the primary duty of pastors to bring about a rediscovery of this faith and to nourish it and bring it to maturity. But pastors must also understand the reasons that lead the Church also to admit to the celebration of marriage those who are imperfectly disposed.

The Sacrament of Matrimony has this specific element that distinguishes it from all the other sacraments: it is the sacrament of something that was part of the very economy of creation; it is the very conjugal covenant instituted by the Creator “in the beginning.” Therefore, the decision of a man and a woman to marry in accordance with this divine plan, that is to say, the decision to

commit by their irrevocable conjugal consent their whole lives in indissoluble love and an unconditional fidelity really involves, even if not in a fully conscious way, an attitude of profound obedience to the will of God, an attitude which cannot exist without God's grace. They have thus already begun what is in a true and proper sense a journey towards salvation, a journey which the celebration of the sacrament and the immediate preparation for it can complement and bring to completion, given the uprightness of their intention.

...It must not be forgotten that those engaged couples, by virtue of their Baptism, are already sharers in Christ's marriage Covenant with the Church, and that, by their right intention, they have accepted God's plan regarding marriage and therefore at least implicitly consent to what the Church intends to do when she celebrates marriage. Thus, the fact that motives of a social nature also enter into the request is not enough to justify refusal on the part of pastors.

...However, when in spite of all efforts, engaged couples show that they reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls cannot admit them to the celebration of marriage.³² (See causes for denial or delay of marriage below)

(4b) Marriage of Minors

The *Code of Canon Law* states that without special permission of the local ordinary, no one is to assist at a marriage of a minor (a person under the age of 18) when the parents are unaware of the marriage or are opposed to it for reasonable cause (canon 1071, §6).

Commentary: Because sacramental marriage is a lifelong commitment, the Catholic Church has a responsibility to ensure that engaged couples understand its sacred nature. Although the strength of the conclusions drawn from statistical evidence differs, it cannot be disputed that a direct correlation exists between younger age and high incidence of divorce. Many teenagers are not sufficiently mature to bear successfully the obligations and responsibilities of marriage in contemporary American society. Age clearly does not guarantee maturity, but time is required for a person to achieve the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual development and balance necessary to make the commitment to married life. Clear evidence of immaturity, particularly when reinforced by parental opposition, demands that the parish minister counsel the couple to delay their marriage. In the difficult process of discussing the reasons for this decision with them, the pastoral minister is challenged to demonstrate utmost respect and sensitivity.

³² FC, n. 68

(4c) Pregnancy

In the case of pregnancy, a request for marriage in the Church will only be considered following completion of recommended counseling, and (if either person is under 18 years of age) consultation with the parents/guardians of both parties. In any case, the couple should be strongly advised to delay the wedding until *after* the birth of the child.

Commentary: Premarital pregnancy, although it understandably creates a sense of urging in the minds of the couple and their parents, constitutes of itself adequate justification neither for marriage nor for abbreviation of the marriage preparation process. Statistics indicate that the majority of marriages involving a premarital pregnancy end in divorce. Even when the marriage does not fail, the pressures on the couple created by an unexpected pregnancy tend to inhibit their mutual growth. Factors that must be considered include the couple's maturity and readiness for marriage, their freedom from parental and social pressure, capacity to manage the financial responsibilities of a family and the possibility of adoption. Regardless of the age of the couple, marriage is never an acceptable option for a couple without the degree of personal maturity to accept freely and live the responsibilities of marriage.

A premarital inventory is particularly valuable in assessing the maturity of young couples in these difficult circumstances. In many cases, the parish MPM may find it appropriate to recommend professional counseling. Parents should be invited to participate in the discernment process in order to help the couple evaluate their motivation and readiness for marriage. Regardless of the ultimate decision, the man must be strongly advised of his continued moral responsibility to the woman and their child.

(4d) Mixed Marriage

The relevant sections of the *Code of Canon Law* regarding mixed marriages should be carefully followed during marriage preparation, particularly canons 1118, 1059, 1071, 1124-1129, and 1366. In addition to completing the preparation requirements detailed in the norms, the couple may require additional instruction sessions with the MPM to deepen their understanding of the Catholic Church and its teaching on marriage, particularly in regard to morally responsible means of birth regulation.

While the Catholic party should become acquainted with the religious traditions of the future spouse, he or she "...has the duty of preserving his or her faith. Nor is it ever permitted to expose oneself to a proximate danger of losing it. Furthermore, the Catholic party in a mixed marriage is obliged ...as far as possible, to see that the children be baptized and brought up in the faith..."³³

³³ MM, n. 12

Commentary: Since "... 'the perfect union of mind and the full communion of life' to which married couples aspire can be more readily achieved when both partners share the same Catholic belief and life..., the Church greatly desires that Catholics marry Catholics and generally discourages mixed marriages."³⁴ The difficulties of the Catholic spouse in maintaining his or her faith should not be underestimated. Without the support of a Catholic spouse, simply getting to Mass on Sunday can become a chore, even a cross. Special care must be taken to help the Catholic spouse maintain his or her faith.

While "inter-denominational" marriages bear the same tensions that exist between Catholics and the separated Churches, they can also share in the hope that "all may be one" as Christ himself prayed (Jn 17:21). Such marriages, when they succeed in bringing spouses to an ever more unified faith, serve as an ecumenical bridge. As Pope John Paul II has noted, when both parties are faithful to their religious duties, "their common baptism and the dynamism of grace provide the spouses in these marriages with the basis and motivation for expressing their unity in the sphere of moral and spiritual values."³⁵

It must also be noted that the number of marriages between Catholics and unbaptized persons is growing. While these are not sacramental unions, they are to be respected as good and natural marriages. In some of these cases the unbaptized person confesses another religion. In other cases the unbaptized person confesses no religion at all. In both situations, particular pastoral safeguards must be in place to ensure the Catholic spouse's free and uninhibited practice of the faith, including the raising of children in the faith.

(4e) Marriage After a Previous Union

Particular pastoral concern is required to meet the special needs of couples requesting sacramental marriage in the Church following a previous union. The MPM must be particularly careful to ascertain that both parties are canonically free to marry *before* proceeding with the marriage preparation, and that all responsibilities towards children of the previous union have been satisfied (canon 1071, § I, 3 °). Marriage preparation may not begin nor may a date be set for a future marriage until *after* these obligations have been satisfactorily discharged. In the case of a proposed marriage following the death of a spouse, care should be taken that the person has recovered from the grief of separation.

Commentary: Everyone entering marriage begins a new and unique relationship. Although it is commonly believed that those involved in previous unions require little preparation because of their past experience, research concludes that marriages after previous unions fail at a higher rate than first marriages. Such persons are rarely required to examine their past experience and identify the factors which caused the failure

³⁴ SMMM, n.5

³⁵ FC, n. 78

of their first relationship. The parish MPM must therefore encourage such persons to analyze the reasons for the failure of their past relationship, and guide them in a realistic assessment of the challenges which they will face in their pending marriage.

The Church desires to strengthen the faith and devotion of divorced and remarried Catholics, particularly when they have endured painful personal experiences that increase their desire for unity with the Church community. “Towards Christians who live in this situation, and who often keep the faith and desire to bring up their children in a Christian manner, priests and the whole community must manifest an attentive solicitude, so that they do not consider themselves separated from the Church, in whose life they can and must participate as baptized persons.”³⁶ On the parochial level, pastors should welcome the opportunity to assist their brothers and sisters in the preparation of the documentation necessary for canonical review of a previous bond by the Metropolitan Tribunal.

(4f) Validation

If a couple has not been married according to the laws of the Church (e.g. lack of canonical form), a validation (i.e., marriage in the Church) is permitted only after the couple has satisfactorily completed the marriage preparation process (note: pre-marital inventories that could be used in the validation process include REFOCCUS, ENRICH, or MATE if the couple is over 50).

Commentary: Pastoral prudence and discretion is essential in cases involving Church validation of a union lacking canonical form. First, MPM's must be sensitive in communicating what a validation actually is. It is not, as commonly misunderstood, a “blessing from the Church” of an existing marriage. Without discounting the level of commitment that has existed between them, and endured in some cases for many years, the couple must acknowledge the fact that by offering their consent before the Church, they are marrying *for the first time*. Pastoral sensitivity is particularly important in this regard as couples must implicitly acknowledge the invalidity of their present union and be willing to make a *new* consent in order to ensure the “validity of the validation.”

The period of proximate and immediate preparation as discussed in the norms is required for any couple who has lived in an invalid union for less than two years. When the couple has lived in a civil union for many years, and their relationship demonstrates the stability, commitment, and fidelity characteristic of a matrimonial covenant, the parish MPM may adjust the duration of the preparation period accordingly.

Ethnic couples are sometimes less likely to understand the importance of following the canonical form of marriage and may more readily live in civil unions. Such couples are to be encouraged in every way, and with special attention, to seek marriage in the Church.

³⁶ CCC, n. 1651

(4g) Marriage of the Disabled

The parish MPM should demonstrate particular care and sensitivity when a disabled person requests marriage in the Church. Each situation must be assessed individually and a determination made only after consultation with both family and professionals who can assess the person's level of independence and his or her ability to make a permanent commitment.

Commentary: When necessary, the office of the Judicial Vicar should be contacted regarding the canonical aspects of these situations, particularly when professional experts and civil authorities consider the parties incapable of assuming responsibility for their own lives.

(4h) Chemical Dependency/Alcoholism

Special care and concern should be taken to assess the effects of personal alcohol and/or chemical abuse on the capacity of persons to enter sacramental marriage. Likewise, the impact of parental alcoholism and chemical abuse on the emotional and psychological stability of engaged men and women must be carefully evaluated. In some circumstances a professional evaluation may be required. In the case of a chronically chemically-dependent person, the marriage cannot be permitted until a professional evaluation confirms that sufficient use of reason and discretion is present.

Commentary: Alcoholism and drug abuse affects not only the afflicted person but all the family members. These conditions often exhibit an identifiable pathology which requires professional intervention and treatment. Whether persons requesting marriage in the Church are themselves alcoholic and/or chemically dependent, or from a family whose other members have been afflicted with these illnesses, it is crucially important that they understand the devastating effects which they can bring to a marriage. Marriage in the Church is not permitted when a person is incapable of fulfilling the responsibilities of marriage due to the effects of personal or parental alcohol and/or chemical dependency.

Great pastoral sensitivity is required in assisting the couple to confront the issue of chemical dependency before marriage. Because the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol typically follows a pattern of progressively greater dependence, challenging the couple to recognize the problem and obtain professional treatment benefits them, their family and the greater community even if the marriage cannot ultimately be celebrated in the Church. It is clearly important for the parish MPM to be aware of available community counseling and rehabilitation resources when a situation of chemical dependency is encountered (contact Catholic Charities for more information at 303-742-0828).

(4i) Marriage of Older Couples

Special consideration should be given during the process of marriage preparation to engaged couples over the age of 35 when both persons are requesting marriage for the first time. The pastoral minister should invite them to proceed with the normal marriage preparation process, but offer whatever modifications may be appropriate to address their specific needs.

Commentary: Older couples, by virtue of their longer and richer life experiences, have different needs than the majority of engaged couples who enter marriage at a younger age. During the preparation period, the parish MPM should evaluate their emotional stability and capacity to enter a permanent and exclusive relationship, and ability to relinquish their prior financial and social independence. Because each person brings to the marriage a life-style formed by habit over an extended period of time, the capacity to accept contrasting patterns of decision making and behavior is particularly important.

It must never be assumed that a couple is ready for marriage in the Church simply because they are older. Analysis of data from diocesan Tribunals indicates that many marriages of older couples fail, primarily because of the inability to compromise individual independence for the mutual interdependence of the marriage relationship.

(4j) Causes for Denial or Delay of Marriage

Although people have a natural right to marry, a priest or deacon is not to witness a marriage unless he is morally certain that nothing impedes its valid and licit celebration. As John Paul II wrote, "...when in spite of all efforts engaged couples show that they reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls cannot admit them to the celebration of marriage."³⁷

Commentary: This decision is not to be arrived at lightly but must come after prayer and thorough consideration of the problems involved. The decision to delay should be a joint pastoral decision, made by the priest or deacon and the couple with the good of the couple in mind. The priest or deacon will do his best to indicate this and refrain from speaking of the delay in punitive terms. As a minister of the Church, a priest or deacon cannot recommend a civil union when the sacrament has been delayed or refused.

The following is a list of situations which may call either for delaying or refusing a marriage. This list is not exhaustive:³⁸

³⁷ FC, n. 68

³⁸ Special recognition is extended to the Archdioceses of Washington D.C., from whose norms this list was adapted.

- Non-practice of the faith by the Catholic party or parties, with no reasonable hope of resuming such practice. In such a case, the marriage is to be delayed until there is some indication of intent to practice the faith.
- Declaration of intention to deny the other party's right to a permanent union and to exclusiveness. Through proper and careful instruction about the nature of the marriage commitment, it may be possible to bring the person to an understanding and acceptance of the Church's teaching on the permanence and exclusiveness of marriage. Until such understanding and exclusiveness is attained, the marriage must be delayed. If, after all attempts to encourage the person to accept this teaching have failed, the priest or deacon must refuse the marriage, since such an intention constitutes a grave lack of proper matrimonial consent.
- Refusal to have children. By its very nature, marriage is "ordained towards the begetting and education of children."³⁹ If the Question on the Pre-Nuptial Investigation Form concerning the children is answered negatively by one or both of the parties, the marriage is to be delayed until the couple agrees to be open to the possibility of children.
- Existence of a canonical impediment (until dispensed). If no dispensation is possible, the marriage must be refused.
- Marriage in the Catholic faith only to satisfy parents or due to parental pressure or simply for appearance's sake. In such a case, the marriage is to be delayed until the couple demonstrates a more substantive motivation for marriage in the Church.
- Indifference or disdain for the Catholic instruction of their children. In such a case, marriage is to be delayed until this attitude has been corrected.
- Substantial lack of appreciation and awareness of the sacramental aspects of marriage and its spiritual dimensions. In such a case, the marriage should be delayed until the rudiments of such an understanding are present. If after serious marriage preparation, this lack persists with no hope of improvement, the marriage should be refused.
- A radical lack of physical, emotional, spiritual or psychological maturity required for marriage. In this case, marriage must be refused.
- Refusal to cooperate with the preparation process or to participate in good faith. In this case, marriage must be delayed.

³⁹ GS, n. 50

- Severe personality and/or emotional disorder. In this case, marriage must be delayed or even refused if the disorder is serious enough to invalidate consent.
- A parent or guardian of a person under 18 has presented in writing a strong and reasonable objection. In this case, it is pastorally advisable to delay the marriage until the priest or deacon can assess the seriousness and veracity of the objection or until the cause for it has been remedied.

(4k) Permission to Marry and the Right to Appeal

If on the basis of these policies a priest or deacon of the archdiocese reaches the pastoral judgment that he cannot witness the marriage of a particular couple in the Church, no other priest or deacon may witness the marriage without the permission of the local ordinary or his delegate, the Judicial Vicar.

A couple denied permission by a priest or deacon to marry in the Church on the basis of these policies may appeal the decision to the local ordinary through his delegate, the Judicial Vicar. Prior to consideration of the appeal, all possible efforts to resolve the issues involved on the parish level with the assistance of the office of Marriage & Family Life must have been exhausted.

(5) PASTORAL CARE AFTER MARRIAGE

Parish-centered support and enrichment for couples once married is as important as the preparation they receive prior to the celebration of their marriage in the Church. “Hence there is urgent need of a broad catechetical effort regarding the Christian ideal of conjugal communion and family life, including a spirituality of fatherhood and motherhood. Greater pastoral attention must be given to the role of men as husbands and fathers, as well as the responsibility which they share with their wives for their marriage, the family, and the raising of their children.”⁴⁰

The primary responsibility for marriage enrichment lies within the local parish: “The pastoral care of the regularly established family signifies, in practice, the commitment of all the members of the local ecclesial community to helping the couple to discover and live their new vocation and mission... Young married couples should learn to accept willingly and make good use of the discreet, tactful, and generous help offered by other couples that already have more experience of married and family life. Thus within the ecclesial community... there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families.”⁴¹

Enrichment programs for the newly married should combine elements of a practical nature to help couples adjust to married life with ongoing instruction in the Church's teaching on marriage and conjugal love. It should also include opportunities for socialization and emphasize the need for personal involvement in the parish community. Particular attention should be given in the instruction of newly married couples to the Church's teaching on responsible parenthood. Willingness to “receive children lovingly from God,” marks significant maturity in the move from “I” to “we” in a couple's relationship. “Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute substantially to the welfare of their parents.”⁴²

Contrary to popular “wisdom,” delaying childbearing in order for the couple to have “time to themselves” or until all adjustments have been made and a certain stage of development has been accomplished, is neither advisable nor in keeping with a faith perspective. While not making the other purposes of marriage of less account, the practice of true conjugal love has this aim: “that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the Love of the Creator and Savior, who through them will enlarge and enrich his own family day by day.”⁴³

⁴⁰ CA, n.46

⁴¹ FC, n.70

⁴² GS, n.50

⁴³ Ibid

(6) APPENDIX

PASTORAL CARE OF SEXUALLY ACTIVE/COHABITING ENGAGED COUPLES

(6a) Assessment of the Problem

Many MPM's identify premarital sexual activity / cohabitation as the most difficult issue they face in preparing engaged couples to embrace a sacramental vision of marriage. While premarital sexual activity and cohabitation can not simply be identified (many engaged couples engage in sexual intercourse without living together, and it is possible to share the same residence without a sexually active relationship⁴⁴), they remain closely related pastoral problems. Sharing a common life in the same residence before marriage raises additional issues. However, this should not overshadow the fact that those who are sexually active without cohabiting are in no less need of specific pastoral assistance.

As mentioned previously, 62% of engaged couples surveyed are cohabiting.⁴⁵ This presents the Church of Denver with a Herculean pastoral task and demonstrates a crucial need for a “new catechesis” in human sexuality. The Church of Denver must be ready and willing to employ new methods and new approaches that convincingly demonstrate how the Church's teaching on sexuality corresponds to the deepest desires of the human heart for love and intimate personal union. Special attention must be given to parents in this “new catechesis” as they play a critical role in preventing cohabitation and premarital sex in the lives of their children.

A growing body of research has firmly established that the prospect of divorce dramatically increases for those who cohabit before marriage. One study indicates a 50% higher risk of divorce for cohabiters.⁴⁶ Another study concludes that marriages that began with premarital sex are three times more likely to end in divorce than when sex was saved for marriage.⁴⁷ In short, the phenomenon of cohabitation is altering the face of marriage and family life in first-world countries. This, of course, can only be explained within the broader context of the widespread abandonment of Christian teaching on the meaning of human sexuality.

⁴⁴ This latter case is extremely rare. Only 1 out of 162 cohabiting couples surveyed in the Archdiocese of Denver were not also sexually active.

⁴⁶ Larry Bumpass & James Sweet, *Cohabitation, Marriage, and Union Stability: Preliminary Findings*, Center for Demography and Ecology: University of Wisconsin, 1995

⁴⁷ Teachman, Thomas, & Paasch, “Legal Status & the Stability of Coresidential Unions.” *Demography* (November 1991), 571-583

Engaged couples today grow up in a society that has almost completely severed the inherent, God-given connection between sexual union and marriage. This severance has been largely afforded by the “contraceptive revolution.” By severing sex from its inherent connection with procreation (i.e. from the establishment of a family), contraception has logically led to the severance of sex from the commitment of marriage. We can see that the possibility of pregnancy serves as a “check” to keep sexual activity where it can alone be lived in truth - in a marriage which itself remains open to life. Once this lynch pin has been removed, man finds himself on a slippery slope: beginning with the severance of sex from procreation and marriage, and ending in the justification and even legalization of his most base perversions,⁴⁸ not the least of which is the murder of “unwanted” children in the womb.⁴⁹

Thus, in today's “contraceptive culture,” sexual activity outside of marriage is seen as the norm. In faithfulness to the teachings of Christ, which are always meant for our good and the safeguarding of authentic love, the Church has consistently taught that non-marital sexual activity is always a grave objective evil. Sound reason rejects the notion that premarital sex and cohabitation are helpful in preparing for marriage. Such behavior is, in reality, more often preparation for divorce. The following points indicate some of the reasons for this:

- Indulging in a sexual relationship which is dissoluble, uncommitted to life-long fidelity, and closed to life,⁵⁰ cannot prepare a couple to commit to a sexual relationship (marriage) which demands indissolubility, life-long fidelity, and openness to life. By consistently choosing such behavior, the couple is demonstrating that they are, in fact, *ill-prepared* for the commitment of marriage because they have been psychologically “trained” in its opposite.

⁴⁸ While Sigmund Freud is not known for his endorsement of Christian sexual ethics, he understood this point well. In 1905 he wrote, “The abandonment of the reproductive function is the common feature of all sexual perversions. We actually describe a sexual activity as perverse if it pursues the attainment of pleasure as an aim independent of reproduction” (*Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis*, p. 266). The inner logic is clear. If sexual relations need not be related in any inherent way to procreation, why need “normal” sexual climax be limited to genital intercourse between a husband and wife? The logic that accepts contraception, if it is to remain consistent with itself, must end in the acceptance of virtually every imaginable form of sexual indulgence: from masturbation, to fornication and adultery, to sodomy, etc.

⁴⁹ For those with the eyes to see, it is clear that the “contraceptive mentality” contains the seeds of the “abortion mentality.” As Pope John Paul II stated in *Evangelium Vitae*:

It is frequently asserted that contraception, if made safe and available to all, is the most effective remedy against abortion. ...It may be that many people use contraception with the view to excluding the subsequent temptation of abortion. But the negative values inherent in the “contraceptive mentality”...are such that they in fact strengthen this temptation when an unwanted life is conceived (n. 13).

Even the United States Supreme Court recognizes the inherent connection between contraception and abortion:

In some critical respects abortion is of the same character as the decision to use contraception. For two decades of economic and social developments, people have organized intimate relationships and made choices that define their views of themselves and their places in society, in reliance on the availability of abortion in the event that contraception should fail (*Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 1993).

⁵⁰ Premarital sex almost always involves the consistent use of contraception. However, even if a couple engaging in premarital sex were desirous of conceiving a child, they could not be considered “open to life” in the full sense of that expression. A proper “openness to life” is inherently marital. That is, it recognizes the right of the child to be conceived by parents who are already committed by marriage to his or her upbringing in a stable, loving environment.

- Authentic love is ready to sacrifice everything for the good of the beloved. Above all, it never entices another to do evil. To engage in gravely sinful kinds of behavior, and encourage one's beloved to do so as well, manifests an attitude *diametrically opposed* to authentic love. At the very least, it manifests a blatant ignorance of the meaning and demands of that love which must be the foundation of the Sacrament of Marriage.
- Premarital sexual activity establishes a pattern of self indulgence that fosters the very vices (lust, pride, selfishness, dishonesty, distrust, sloth, etc.) that serve to undermine - and if not addressed, unravel- the relationship of a husband and wife.
- The love required for the Sacrament of Marriage demands a profound purity, humility, selflessness, honesty, trust, and willingness to sacrifice that can *only* be established by embracing the virtue of chastity (i.e., lived respect for the truth and meaning of sexuality outside *and within* marriage).
- Sexual intimacy clouds a couple's judgment preventing them from reaching the objective assessment essential to discerning an authentic vocation to marriage.
- By their choice of lifestyle, cohabiting couples and those that are otherwise sexually active, deprive themselves of the fullness of Christ's grace in any sacramental encounter, save Reconciliation.

All of these factors contribute to the disintegration of men and women as individuals and to any relationship they share. If left unaddressed, establishing a marriage on such patterns of relating is akin to building a house on sand (cf. Mt 7:26). Thus, there is a serious need on the part of sexually active couples to be challenged to grow, and a serious obligation on the part of all MPM's to challenge them out of love for all concerned - first the couple themselves, their future children, the Church, and society at large. Downplaying the damaging affects of premarital sex does a service to no one. What is needed is full appreciation for an appropriation of the merciful, healing love of Christ.

(6b) Definition of the Goal

When cohabiting / sexually active couples express a desire to marry in the Church, it's important for the MPM to recognize this as a teachable moment in the life of the couple. Much of what was stated in the section on the pastoral treatment of the "Marriage of Non-Practicing Catholics" applies here as well. In dealing with the issue, two extremes are always to be avoided: (1) immediately confronting the couple and condemning them for their behavior, and (2) ignoring the topic altogether. *Neither one of these approaches demonstrates authentic Christian charity.*

Cohabitation / premarital sex should be discussed early in the marriage preparation process. In most cases, the topic should be broached within the second or third sessions of proximate preparation. Review of the FOCCUS Inventory offers an open door for the MPM to address the issue in a non-prying, non-confrontational way.

In general terms, there are four main pastoral goals:

Goal #1. To impart with charity, patience, and understanding, not merely what the Church teaches about marriage and sexuality, but more importantly why she teaches it.

This responsibility lies not only with the priest or deacon, but with all the MPM's entrusted with the formation of the engaged. This implies the need for thoroughly knowledgeable and trained pastoral workers and catechists who not only accept the Church's teaching and live it, but know how to explain it thoroughly and convincingly (see footnote 31 above).

MPM's should always stress that the Church's teaching is not a set of "arbitrary" or "repressive" rules. The demands of chastity perfectly correspond with the deepest desire of the human heart for unconditional love. Chastity then, is not first a "no" to illicit sexual behavior, but a positive "YES" to the truth and meaning of sexual love written in our very being. This is a demanding love, for it is modeled after Christ and, therefore, cannot be lived without the help of his grace. Thus, education in chastity must always be placed in the context of our need for redemption in Christ.

Goal #2. To challenge Couples charitably, gently, yet directly to stop having sexual relations until they can be an honest expression of their marriage commitment.

It is the experience of many MPM's that a significant number of sexually active engaged couples seek to embrace the Church's teaching on sexuality once it is proclaimed in love and adequately explained, and, when they have been directly challenged to do so. For example, of the 221 sexually active engaged couples surveyed in the Archdiocese of Denver, after the Church's teaching was presented and explained, and a direct challenge was issued to embrace it, 107 (48%) indicated that they definitely planned on ceasing their sexual activity until they were married. Another 69 couples (31%) indicated that they were considering it.

However, as common experience attests, a desire to stop a given behavior does not always result in its cessation. Breaking long established habits of sexual indulgence is difficult. To be sure, without the help of grace it is impossible. In calling couples to chastity, MPM's are presented with a pointed opportunity to help couples encounter the person of Christ and the power of his redemption in a life-changing way, perhaps for the first time. "For this is the matter under consideration: the *reality* of the redemption of Christ. *Christ has redeemed us!* This means he has given us the *possibility* of realizing the *entire* truth of our being. He has liberated our liberty from the *domination* of concupiscence."⁵¹

This is the *Good News* we have to proclaim to engaged couples whose liberty seems dominated by the pull of sexual sin. Christ can redeem them! Encountering the power of Christ's redemption in this area of life is of crucial importance if a couple is to meet the challenge of their vocation. Merely "getting married" does not take away the subjective patterns of sin that have been established through on-going, non-marital sexual behavior and attitudes. A renewed mind and a converted heart are indispensable if their love for one another as husband and wife is to be truly *marital*.

Cohabitators, beyond being challenged to cease sexual relations, should also be challenged to establish separate living arrangements. When this poses a real practical difficulty for a couple, it presents the parish community with an opportunity to reach out in charity. In cases of real need, it is recommended that pastors appeal to their parishioners to consider opening their homes to engaged persons to facilitate their preparation for marriage. Living with a Catholic family from the parish could serve as an additional means of formation for the engaged and facilitate a sense of belonging to the parish community.

Goal #3. *To help the couple reflect on their situation and why they decided to cohabit and/or engage in sexual relations, providing them with tools to address various practical factors that put them at risk for later marital difficulties.*⁵²

The following statement from the USCCB's Committee on Marriage and Family helps to put this pastoral goal in context. The entire document from which this excerpt is taken is recommended to all MPM's in helping address the issue of cohabitation (call 800-235-8722 to order a copy of *Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples: An Information Report on New Realities and Pastoral Practices*. You can also find this at <http://www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/cohabiting.shtml>).

⁵¹ DRP

⁵² A recommended resource that can help MPM's address the necessary issues with cohabiting couples can be found at the USCCB website, <http://www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/cohabiting.shtml> .

Individuals who chose to cohabit have certain attitudes, issues, and patterns that lead them to make the decision to cohabit. These same attitudes, issues and patterns often become the predisposing factors to put them at high risk for divorce when they do choose to move from cohabitation to marriage. The cohabitation experience itself also creates risk factors and bad habits that can sabotage the subsequent marriage. These attitudes and patterns can be identified and brought to the couple preparing for marriage for examination, decision-making, skill-building, change. Without creating “self-fulfilling prophecies,” those preparing cohabiting couples for marriage can help them identify and work with issues around commitment, fidelity, individualism, pressure, and appropriate expectations.⁵³

While all engaged couples should have adequate instruction in NFP as a normal part of marriage preparation, there are additional reasons for pastors to require a formal class of instruction in NFP to those who are sexually active before marriage. Learning about and eventually practicing NFP offers the couple a very practical tool for creating a new habit of life that respects the meaning of sexuality and serves to unravel the distorted pattern of relating that results from a non-marital sexual relationship.

Goal #4. To help couples heal from the spiritual and emotional wounds they have inflicted upon themselves through their disordered behavior, which, if not properly addressed, will inevitably have a deleterious effect on their marriage (This includes not only their present relationship, but also previous sexually active relationships).

Misuse of God's great gift of sexuality always inflicts deep personal wounds. Even more than the tools needed to address practical issues brought on by irregular relationships, engaged couples need tools to help them heal from the spiritual wounds caused by sin. This healing begins with repentance on the part of the couple and a return to the sacramental life of the Church as soon as possible, especially Reconciliation and the Eucharist. It also requires that the couple ask forgiveness of each other for compromising their relationship and encouraging the other in a life of sin. None of this is possible unless the couple experiences *a radical reorientation towards the person and message of Christ.*

In some instances, particularly in cases of long-term sexual activity, numerous sexual partners, sexual addiction, sexual abuse, long-term involvement with pornography, etc., counseling offered by competent professionals who understand and respect the Catholic vision of sexuality may be necessary. The Office of Marriage & Family Life can provide contact information for local and national resources that can help in this regard.

⁵³ MPC, n.5

Yet again, when at all practically possible, a full course in NFP should be required. Countless couples who have discovered NFP after living unchastely can witness to the emotional and spiritual healing effects it has on their marriages.

(6c) Determining the Final Course of Action

After the priest or deacon has asked the couple to consider chaste, separate living and given the couple sufficient time to reflect on their decision, a final course of action must be determined.⁵⁴

- If the sexually active (non-cohabiting) couple strives to live a chaste life and returns to the sacraments, the usual preparation continues.
- If the cohabiting couple separates, strives to live a chaste life and returns to the sacraments, the usual preparation continues.
- If the cohabiting couple promises to establish separate sleeping quarters in the same residence, practices a chaste relationship, and returns to the sacraments, the usual preparation continues.
- If a couple refuses to attempt to live chastely or shows a lack of good will in the preparation process, then the priest or deacon in conscience may see the need to postpone the marriage in order to secure the time needed to help the couple sufficiently understand the meaning of marriage and the sacredness of sexuality. The priest or deacon continues to work with the couple, with the goal of their evangelization, always holding out to them the availability of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the grace of conversion it affords.
- If the couple refuses to cease sexual relations before marriage, and the *pastor* decides that the marriage can eventually take place, the priest or deacon should still encourage the Sacrament of Reconciliation (The discrepancy between wanting marriage in the Church and living contrary to its teaching is the least they can be sorry for, by the very admission of lifestyle).
- If a couple, after thorough preparation and having been given *every opportunity for conversion*, is still unable to acknowledge God's plan for marriage and sexuality and the need for sacramental reconciliation, then it may be advisable, in the judgment of the *pastor*, to hold the wedding outside of Mass in a ceremony that is reserved and simple.

⁵⁴ Special recognition is extended to the Diocese of Peoria from whose norms this section was adapted.

Cohabitation / premarital sex is not in itself a canonical impediment to marriage. Therefore a couple may not be refused the sacrament *solely* on the basis of cohabitation or sexual activity prior to marriage. However, a priest or deacon has the right and obligation to follow his conscience if he is convinced that marriage ought to be delayed.

It is the goal of the preparation process to bring the sexually active / cohabiting couple to realize the serious contradiction between sexual activity outside of marriage and the very meaning of the “one flesh” union as a sacramental sign of Christ's love for the Church. A couple who, after having been given every opportunity for conversion, still refuses to acknowledge the contradiction of their behavior, must realize that the course of action taken by the pastor is not a “punishment” for wrong doing, but the natural consequence of their own choices necessary to maintain the integrity of the sacrament and the avoidance of scandal.

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