

“WHAT GOD HAS JOINED...”

**PARTICULAR NORMS FOR
CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE**



ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER

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DOCUMENT ABBREVIATIONS

- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), United States Catholic Conference.
- CIC *Codex Iuris Canonici* (January 25, 1983), Canon Law Society of America.
- GDC Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (August 11, 1997), United States Catholic Conference.
- 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).
- PSM Pontifical Council for the Family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* (May 13, 1996), Daughters of St. Paul.

INTRODUCTION

"There are already many good things happening in marriage preparation programs throughout the archdiocese. But there is also a great need to redouble our efforts in proclaiming the full truth of Church teaching on the sacred, sacramental nature of marriage and family life."¹ In order to assist our local Church in meeting this "great need," the Office of Marriage & Family Life and the Metropolitan Tribunal, with the help of priests, deacons, and pastoral workers throughout the archdiocese, have revised the Norms for Christian Marriage.

The goal is to establish a consistent and updated marriage policy for our local Church that more adequately addresses the needs of today's engaged couples. *What God Has Joined* is inspired by and based on the document *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*. In conjunction with these norms, it is advised that everyone involved in marriage preparation in the archdiocese familiarize him or herself with this document (PSM) by the Pontifical Council for the Family.

Marriage preparation programs have taken various forms over the years in the archdiocese. These include individual formation guided by the parish priest or deacon, classes or couple-to-couple formation provided at the parish level, programs provided by the Archdiocesan Office of Marriage & Family Life, and Catholic Engaged Encounter. After careful review of the particular needs of the archdiocese and the pastoral approaches of other diocese across the country,² our new policy seeks to adapt a "tag team" approach between parish and archdiocesan programs and resources.

This will allow continued flexibility at the parish level, while at the same time ensuring some measure of consistency and security of content for all engaged couples in the archdiocese.

The process by which a couple enters marriage is closely regulated by canon law, by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and by particular policies of the local Church, which are herein revised. All of these have one goal: to prepare couples adequately to live their call to holiness through the Sacrament of Marriage. Every effort has been made to outline the new policies as clearly as possible. However, in specific cases not foreseen by these norms, or in complicated situations, priests and deacons should contact the Tribunal for further clarification.

These revised norms are not intended to complicate the marriage preparation process for the engaged, nor for the pastoral ministers who prepare them. While they are in some ways more "demanding" than previous policies, so are the pastoral needs of today's engaged couples more demanding than in the past. With God's grace, the leadership of pastors, and the united effort of all priests, deacons, and other pastoral workers in implementing *What God Has Joined*, the Church of Denver can rise to the challenge of addressing these needs more adequately.

The *What God Has Joined-Supplement* is to be used in conjunction with these norms. It contains sections on Catholic teaching on marriage, marriage preparation ministers, special circumstances encountered in marriage preparation, pastoral care after marriage, and an appendix devoted to the pastoral care of sexually active / cohabiting engaged couples.

STAGES OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION

The various periods of marriage preparation cannot be rigidly defined. However, it is useful as a working model to divide marriage preparation into *remote*, *proximate*, and *immediate stages*. This, of course, is followed by the *celebration of marriage* itself. Each will be considered in turn according to the following outline.

(1) Remote Preparation: Begins "in the womb" and continues throughout childhood, adolescence, and up to the period of engagement.

- based primarily in the family with the assistance of the Church and schools

(2) Proximate Preparation: Begins 8-12 months before the wedding and concludes approximately 10 weeks prior to the wedding.

- process of evangelization and catechesis similar to the catechumenate
- collaborative approach between parish and archdiocesan resources

(3) Immediate Preparation: Last 10 weeks prior to the marriage celebration.

- review and solidify prior preparation
- prepare the wedding liturgy

(4) Celebration of Marriage

- marriage should be celebrated in the parish church
- should be characteristic of a celebration of faith, normally within the context of the Eucharist

(1) Remote Preparation

According to PSM, this preparation actually begins *in the womb* in the atmosphere in which the child is awaited and welcomed by his parents.³ It continues throughout infancy, childhood, adolescence, and up to the period of engagement. The witness of the parents' own married love is the very foundation of remote marriage preparation.

"It is in the bosom of the family that parents are 'by word and example...the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation.'"⁴ Parents should realize that celibacy "for the kingdom" (Mt 19: 12) is also a full participation - and even more directly so - in the "nuptial mystery" of Christ's love for the Church.

While parents are the primary educators of their children throughout childhood and adolescence, they need suitable assistance in fulfilling their responsibilities. The Church, schools, and the larger society all play increasing roles in preparing young men and women for marriage.

Two fundamental truths that must be instilled in this remote preparation are: "first, that man is called to live in truth and love; and second, that everyone finds fulfillment through the sincere gift of self."⁵ *Today* children grow up in a culture where the meaning of "truth" and "love" is continually eroded. Furthermore, sincere self-giving is often replaced by an ethic of self-indulgence.

Since children and adolescents are particularly susceptible to the influence of society, solid remote preparation is all the more essential.

Key Points of Remote Preparation (taken from PSM, nos.22-31)

- Involves formation of character, self-control and self-esteem, the proper use of one's inclinations, growth in virtue, and respect for persons of the opposite sex.
- Requires a solid spiritual and catechetical formation.
- A faithful and courageous education in chastity and love as self-giving must be instilled. Chastity is a condition for real love. One cannot give himself away if he does not first possess himself.
- The journey or conversion from a rather external and vague level of faith, typical of many young people, to a discovery of the "Christian *mystery*" is both essential and decisive.
- Formation should arrive at a mentality and personality capable of not being led astray by ideas contrary to the unity and stability of marriage.

Most of today's engaged couples know very little about the rich teaching of the Church on marriage, sexuality, and family life. If remote preparation is carried out successfully, proximate and immediate preparation will only need to reinforce what couples have already learned throughout their lives.

POLICY: It is the task of the Church first to equip and then to assist parents in their role as primary educators of their children in the area of remote marriage preparation.

Thus, remote marriage preparation is to be carried out through the systematic implementation of *Marriage & Human Sexuality: A Catechesis*. While this implementation is already underway, efforts must be redoubled to ensure its success.

(2) Proximate Preparation

Proximate preparation begins during the earliest days of the engagement period and continues until the final weeks just prior to the marriage celebration.⁶ It involves a process of evangelization and a journey of faith similar to the catechumenate, providing an opportunity for the engaged to rediscover and deepen the faith they received in Baptism. Pastors are encouraged to establish rituals that incorporate the marriage preparation process into the life of the parish.

The engaged must be sensitized to the "profound mystery" of Christian Marriage through an explicit catechesis so that they will feel a need to prepare for it by embracing God's plan. However, "frequently many who present themselves for catechesis truly require genuine conversion.

...Only by starting with conversion...can catechesis, strictly speaking, fulfill its proper task of education in the faith. "7

Thus, preparation in this stage is directed toward an evangelization and catechesis that enables a couple to embrace consciously and freely, what the Church intends by the Sacrament of Marriage. The way in which the engagement period is lived is certain to have an influence on the couple's ability or inability to do so.

Key Points of Proximate Preparation (taken from PSM. nos. 32-49)

- The foundation of this preparation must be a reflection in faith on the Sacrament of Marriage through the Word of God and the guidance of the Church's teaching. To become "one flesh" in Christ means that the couple's love will become a concrete expression of Christ's love for his Church.
- "It is essential that the time and care necessary should be devoted to *doctrinal* preparation. The security of the content must be the center and essential goal of the courses in a perspective which makes spouses more aware of the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage and everything that flows from it regarding the responsibility of the family" (John Paul II).
- Instruction in the *natural* requirements of marriage should include: freedom of consent; unity and indissolubility of marriage; the correct concept of responsible parenthood; the human aspects of conjugal sexuality; the conjugal act with its requirements and ends; and the proper education of children.

- Especially with regard to total self-giving and responsible procreation, the theological and moral formation will have to be given special attention according to the clear teaching of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.
- Adequate instruction in methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP) should be given to all. These methods must not be presented merely as a behavioral technique for regulating fertility, but must be presented in the full context of a lifestyle that fosters authentic conjugal love.
- The engaged should be helped to become aware of psychological and/or emotional shortcomings they may have that take away from their total commitment to one another.
- This should not only be a time for theoretical study but for formation of the engaged that prepares them to give themselves as a couple to Christ. Here premarital chastity takes on its full meaning. Any practices that violate this chastity must be abandoned with recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- It must not neglect formation for the family's role in the Church and society.
- It should provide reflections on the themes of pertinent Church documents such as *Familiaris Consortio*, *Letter to Families*, *Evangelium Vitae*, *Humanae Vitae*, etc. with the goal of helping couples understand their rich content.
- It should help the engaged to regain the dynamism of the sacraments remembering that by celebrating the memory of

- The engaged should be taught how to preserve and cultivate married love through marital communication and how to overcome the inevitable "crises" of married life.
- The engaged must be given formation and strengthened in the values concerning the defense of human life in view of the fact that they will become "the domestic church" and "sanctuary of life."
- The final result of proximate preparation should be a clear awareness of the essential characteristics of Christian Marriage: unity, fidelity, indissolubility, fruitfulness; the priority of the sacramental grace which associates the spouses to the love of Christ the Bridegroom of the Church; and the willingness to carry out the mission proper to families in the educational, social, and ecclesial areas.

POLICY: To ensure that the engaged couples have adequate time to prepare in a serious way, and to ensure that this stage of preparation is truly "proximate" and not "immediate," it should begin at least *eight months to one year*⁸ in advance of the couple's anticipated wedding date, and conclude no closer than ten weeks prior to that date.

Proximate preparation should generally consist of six sessions or components. Additional sessions may be appropriate for couples with specific needs. On the other hand, some parishes may wish to combine sessions (e.g. sessions 1 and 2 or sessions 3 and 5).

A "tag team" approach between parish and archdiocesan programs and resources offers continued flexibility in format at the parish level, while seeking to ensure a measure of consistency for all engaged couples throughout the archdiocese.

The breakdown of sessions is as follows:

- Session 1: Initial Interview (parish)
- Session 2: Pre-nuptial Inquiry & Inventory (parish)
- Session 3: Review of Inventory (parish)
- Session 4: Instructional Workshop I (parish or archdiocese)
- Session 5: Instructional Workshop (parish or archdiocese)
- Session 6: Natural Family Planning Instruction (parish or existing apostolates)

Session I: Initial Interview

Couples approaching the Church for marriage are usually enthusiastic but also unaware of most archdiocesan and parish policies concerning marriage preparation. It is critical that the first person they encounter be positive and welcoming. The initial interview should be given by the parish priest or deacon. The goals of this interview are to:

- Begin developing a warm, welcoming relationship with the couple.
- Begin to ascertain the couple's attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about themselves and their desire for marriage in the Church.
- Begin the process of assessing the couple's readiness for the sacrament. (Is the couple living an active Christian life?) Some may wish to conduct the pre-nuptial inquiry required by canon law at this time (if so, refer to Session 2).

- Explain to them what is involved in their proximate and immediate preparation for the sacrament and assist them in planning accordingly (scheduling of the inventory, presenting potential dates for the instructional sessions, parish programs. etc.).

In explaining the process of preparation, the priest or deacon should stress that it is a positive aid to the couple. It should not be seen as a "hoop to jump through" before the couple is "permitted" to marry in the Church. As in preparing to receive any of the sacraments, proper formation is necessary to ensure that marriage is celebrated in faith and established on the sure foundation which is Christ.

Session 2: Pre-nuptial Inquiry & Inventory

The pre-nuptial inquiry should be led by the parish priest or deacon. If necessary, the marriage preparation inventory can be administered by a properly trained lay person. The goals of this session are to:

- Conduct the pre-nuptial inquiry required by canon law (MA, MB, and MC forms). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has decreed that the following should be observed:
 - Parties should be questioned as to their freedom to marry;
 - Catholics should present a recently issued annotated baptismal certificate;
 - If necessary, additional documentation (such as affidavits from parents) attesting to a Catholic party's freedom to marry should be presented;
 - Baptized non-Catholics should present satisfactory proof of baptism and freedom to marry;
 - Unbaptized persons should present satisfactory proof of freedom to marry.

- Ensure that nothing stands in the way of a valid and licit marriage (see reasons to deny or delay marriage in *What God Has Joined –Supplement*).
- Set a *tentative* wedding date. Couples should be advised not to make definitive plans for reception sites, etc. until it is determined that they are properly disposed towards the sacrament and a definitive wedding date has been set.
- Administer the FOCCUS or other marriage preparation inventory.⁹

During the pre-nuptial inquiry, the prospective bride and groom should be interviewed individually so as to allow complete freedom in each of their responses. If a Catholic has not yet received the Sacrament of Confirmation, he or she should receive it before marriage, if it can be done without serious inconvenience.¹⁰

Analysis of the data from diocesan Tribunals indicates that a large number of couples attempt marriage without understanding to what they are committing themselves. Therefore, direct and specific instruction must be given on the meaning and implications of the canonical promises of indissolubility, fidelity, and openness to children to ensure that couples intend what the Church intends by marriage.

Furthermore, pastoral workers who administer the FOCCUS Inventory should be very familiar with the means of doing so as explained in the facilitator's guide. Prior to the third session, the instrument should be scored (contact the Office of Marriage & Family Life for scoring 303 715-3259, please allow two weeks).

Session 3: Review of Marriage Preparation Inventory

This session can be led by the priest, deacon, or lay minister who administered the inventory. This is also an excellent opportunity to enlist the help of properly trained "mentor couples" in preparing the engaged for marriage. The goals of this session are to:

- Review with the couple the results of their FOCCUS (or other) inventory.
- Affirm the unique gifts each brings to the relationship and help the couple address any "problem" areas. If the issue of cohabitation or premarital sex has not yet surfaced, it should be discussed (see the Appendix "Pastoral Care of Sexually Active/ Cohabiting Engaged Couples" in the *What God Has Joined-Supplement*).
- Based on the issues brought up by the inventory and the previous sessions, assess the general readiness of the couple to proceed with the normal process of marriage preparation. (If this session is carried out by a mentor couple or other qualified lay person, close collaboration with the priest or deacon will be necessary).
- In some instances, it won't be possible to review the inventory adequately in one session. Additional sessions should be scheduled as needed. Again, a very successful approach is to have properly trained mentor couples facilitate the review in their homes over the course of

one to three meetings, as needed. The experience of established married couples who are actively living their faith provides an invaluable witness for the engaged (when appropriate, mentor couples can combine the review of the FOCCUS inventory with instruction in the "life skills" required of Session 5).

Session 4: instructional Workshop 1

Couples are encouraged to fulfill this component of proximate marriage prep by attending a one-day workshop entitled *God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage*. Hosted by the Office of Marriage & Family Life,

These workshops will be held on a regular basis during the year in various locations throughout the archdiocese. The goal (as resources permit) is to offer all engaged couples an opportunity to attend a class in their own area (dates and locations are made available through brochures given to each parish as well as online at www.archen.org/marriage).¹¹ At the completion of the course, couples will be given a certificate of attendance to be placed in their prenuptial file.

This two-part course explains in a positive, contemporary way the timeless wisdom of Catholic teaching on God's plan for marriage and human sexuality and offers practical suggestions on how couples can implement it in their own lives. Evangelistic in nature, it seeks to reawaken people's faith, stressing the importance of making Christ the foundation of marriage. Honest, positive discussion throughout the course aims to demonstrate that embracing God's plan for marital love is not a burden, but a joy.

The morning session, *Catholic Faith & Your Marriage*, provides an overview of biblical teaching on marriage (drawing primarily from Genesis 1-3, Matthew 19, and Ephesians 5) and explains the meaning and importance of the commitments made in the exchange of vows. The afternoon session, *Sacramental Sexuality*, draws from the scriptural foundation already laid to present the beauty and goodness of God's plan for sexual union. The goal is to explain the *whys* behind the *whats* of Catholic teaching in a way that makes sense to men and women today. Particular attention will be given to the important moral distinction between contraception and natural family planning.

This workshop is not intended to replace the efforts of the parish to evangelize and catechize the engaged, which remains indispensable. It is designed to *reinforce* those efforts and provide a measure of consistency for engaged couples throughout the archdiocese. Pastors who wish to host this workshop at their own parish are encouraged to contact the Office of Marriage and Family Life at 303-715-3259.

Note: This class also doubles as an appropriate means of training lay marriage preparation ministers, all of whom are encouraged to attend.

Session 5: Instructional Workshop II, "Life Skills"

Self-knowledge, knowledge of one's future spouse, handling conflict, decision making, communication, career expectations, finances, family of origin, etc.- all of these issues demand certain "life skills" for a successful marriage.

Parishes are encouraged to establish a team of exemplary Catholic couples, who, either in a class setting, or through the "couple-to-couple" approach, can help couples evaluate and develop their "life skills" in the pertinent areas.¹² As stated above, it may be appropriate

to combine this session with the review of the marriage preparation inventory. A certificate or other record of completion of the "Life Skills" segment of proximate preparation should be placed in the couple's file. In lieu of a parish based Life Skills Workshop, attendance at a *Catholic Engaged Encounter Weekend* will fulfill the requirement of Workshop II (visit www.archden.org/marriage for more information about CEE or call 303-715-3259).

Session 6: Natural Family Planning Instruction

Instruction in NFP is one of the most practical ways that the Church can help couples conform to the will of God in their lives. In his Pastoral Letter *Of Human Life*, Archbishop Chaput directed the archdiocese to require adequate instruction in NFP as part of all marriage preparation programs.¹³ Thus, as far as practical realities permit, a course of NFP instruction should be a regular part of proximate marriage preparation.

The number of certified NFP instructors in the archdiocese is growing. Still, more instructors are needed to ensure the adequate instruction of all those preparing for marriage. Ideally, every parish should have its own certified NFP instructor or teaching couple. With a united effort on the part of pastors and the lay faithful to promote NFP at the parish level and recruit more instructors, this is an achievable goal.

Until then, instructors will need to be shared between parishes as far as is possible. For those who are particularly motivated, home-study courses in NFP are also available (call 303-715-3259). Contact the Office of Marriage & Family Life for a complete list of NFP instructors.

(3) Immediate Preparation

Immediate preparation consists of the final meetings between the engaged and pastoral workers in the last ten weeks (approximately) prior to the celebration of the sacrament. Its aim is to solidify the formation received in prior preparation (if necessary), prepare the wedding liturgy, and make final preparations for the couple's worthy celebration of their sacrament.

Key Points of Immediate Preparation (taken from PSM. nos. 50-59)

- It should provide a review of previous preparation, especially its doctrinal, moral, and spiritual content according to the couple's needs.
- It should include experiences of prayer.
- It must introduce the couple to the Rite of Marriage helping them to understand the meaning of liturgical actions and texts.
- It should include a suitable liturgical preparation envisaging the active and informed participation of the engaged.
- A special invitation to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation must be extended to all Catholics as a means of encouraging the worthy celebration of marriage.
- A special place should be given to the importance of family prayer and creating an atmosphere of faith within the home. The engaged should be reminded that as parents they will carry out their mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Life through educating their children in the ways of faith.

POLICY: Securing appropriate means of addressing the key points listed above is left to the discretion of the pastor. The particular needs of each couple will dictate the appropriate steps to take in this final stage of preparation. In general, three sessions are recommended (these can be combined when necessary and appropriate):

- Session 1: Review of Previous Preparation
- Session 2: Time of Prayer / Opportunity for Reconciliation
- Session 3: Planning of the Liturgy

Session 1: Review of Previous Preparation

It is recommended that the priest or deacon witnessing the marriage meet with the couple at least once in the immediate stage of preparation to review and synthesize the previous preparation (as the couple's needs dictate) and answer any remaining Questions the couple may have about the Church's vision of marriage and their final preparations for the sacrament. The wisdom and experience of a mentor couple can also be of great service at this stage of preparation.

Session 2: Time of Prayer / Opportunity for Reconciliation

In light of the rates of cohabitation and premarital sexual activity, it is particularly important for couples to be reconciled to Christ, the Church, and one another before celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage. Pastoral sensitivity will recognize the appropriate ways of encouraging the couple to set aside extra time for prayer and reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The interrelation of the Sacraments of Marriage, Reconciliation, and the Eucharist should be stressed. The experience of a mentor couple can also be of great service in helping engaged couples learn how to pray together and establish a marital spirituality.

Attendance at a *Catholic Engaged Encounter Weekend*, if it was not already part of a couple's proximate preparation, could also be an excellent part of immediate preparation. Beyond covering important life skills, *Engaged Encounter* offers a retreat setting for the couple to reflect on their relationship with Christ and His Church, and an evening devoted to helping couples learn to pray together.

Session 3: Planning of the Liturgy

Pastors, liturgists, and/or other pertinent pastoral workers should devote appropriate time with the engaged couple to ensure their active and informed participation in the liturgy. Care and sensitivity should be taken in explaining what is and what is not appropriate in the context of the wedding liturgy.

(4) The Celebration of Marriage

The journey of preparation leads the couple to the celebration of marriage, the source and origin of their conjugal life. "To indicate a clearer relationship between the nuptial sacrament and the paschal mystery, the celebration of marriage is normally set within the celebration of the Eucharist."¹⁴

While it is understandable that the beauty of Colorado leads many couples to desire outdoor weddings, canon law requires that a marriage between Catholics, or a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic, be celebrated in the parish church (canon 1118). Only by permission of the local Ordinary may it be celebrated in another designated church or oratory. Patient care must be demonstrated in explaining the sound pastoral reasons for this. Such patience most often enables couples to see that the parish church is the appropriate place for the celebration of their sacrament

Key Points of the Celebration of Marriage (taken from PSM, nos. 6072)

- Pastoral workers should take care to follow and make comprehensible what is already set down and established by the liturgical rite.
- Praiseworthy customs that belong to various peoples or ethnic groups can be brought into the celebration provided they are appropriate signs of faith.
- The active participation of those present is to be favored in every way. Suitable materials should be provided to help them comprehend the richness of the rite.
- The celebrant should help those present to understand the structure of the rite.
- The homily (which is obligatory) should have as its center the presentation of the "great mystery" of marriage (as spoken of by St. Paul in Eph. 5).
- Care should be taken that the details of the marriage celebration are characterized by a restrained, simple, and authentic style.

POLICY: It is the responsibility of the priest or deacon presiding at the marriage to ensure that the above criteria are met.

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