



Overview of Marriage Preparation Catechetical Curriculum

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A working document to share proper teachings and preparations on the Sacrament of Matrimony.

A NOTE TO THE READERS:

This document is a working text that is awaiting the addition of the following topics.

- ❖ Historical Sacramental Overview of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony
- ❖ Catechetical Lesson Plans
- ❖ Specific aspects of the Rite itself
- ❖ Canonical outlines
- ❖ Stories about the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony-Inquiry
- ❖ Lay Theology of the Body component from adolescence to adulthood.
- ❖ Specific Moral Foundations related to the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony (Title page prepared in anticipation.)

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INTRODUCTION

The great evangelist to the Gentiles, St. Paul, reminds us, in his letter to the Colossians, the importance of centering everything we do in Christ Jesus, Our Lord and Savior. He echoes these words:

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Col 3:1-3

The essential premise of every Catechist is to witness the love of Christ to all who will listen. One of the key tenets, of this witness, falls in the proper catechetical instruction of the faith. In this particular structure, the individuals involved are preparing for the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. This key component, coupled with the words of St. Paul, reflect on the primary duty of a Catechist, in this ministry, to witness and instruct in the Catholic faith.



Catechesis On Marriage

Catechesis on Marriage

At the heart of any doctrinal instruction is Jesus Christ. Our instruction reflects the involvement of Christocentric character, meaning everything we do is in the name of Jesus Christ.

Our aim, in this journey of faith, is to engage the couple towards an understanding of Salvation History. Who is the couple in light of God our Father and Creator? Why we are created in the image and likeness of God? Reflecting on these questions, the couple is directed to seek an understanding in his/her role in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Mt 28:17-20).

“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers”

Acts 2:42

Catechesis

Those to be catechized, and those who will catechize, are what make-up the initial body of catechesis. Jesus Christ is the Word that became flesh through the Divine Will of the Father sent forth through the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we might have life and live-it abundantly. It was through Jesus Christ, God’s Incarnate Word, which the Father established for us those redemptive qualities that we receive in our Profession of Faith, the Mass, Sacraments, Commandments, and in prayer that allow us to filly share in the history of Salvation. We, as the people of God, are a faith sharing community, created in the image of God, to profess and proclaim the Gospel message. This mission of catechesis has been practiced from the moment Christ was born. As part of the Church- community, we hold a responsibility not only to learn our Catholic faith, but to teach it to all who will listen. The ministry of catechesis serves the Church in a decisive mission. This teaching, first and foremost, is passed on through the apostles and their successors, the Bishops of the Catholic Church.

“The ‘moment’ of catechesis is that which corresponds to the period in which conversion to Jesus Christ is formalized, and provides a basis for first adhering to him.”

(GDC 63)

“The name of catechesis was given to the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, so that believing they might have life in His name, and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ.”

(CT 1, CCC 4)

Catechetical Instruction

Catechetical Instruction refers to the study of the Catholic faith, to which, catechists intentionally pass on the traditions, beliefs, values, and practices of their religion. Catechetical instruction is conducted, by committed, prepared, adult Catholics, to provide a clear explanation of our teachings, values, and mission to those seeking sound information.

In the Structure of the Family, parents must be the primary catechetical figures, following, teaching and reinforcing sacred tradition and information provided by catechist outside the family. It is the Baptismal commitment of the parent/guardian to pass on the Deposit of Faith. Children will apply the taught values, doctrine, and prayers, in his/her daily life, by first witnessing sacred tradition, of the Catholic Church, with in their homes. To assure the Deposit of Faith is being passed on; one must know that “Catechesis is an education of children, young people and adults in the faith, which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life” (CT 18, CCC 5).

The educational mission of the Church is an integrated ministry embracing three interlocking dimensions: the message revealed by God (didache), fellowship in the life of the Holy Spirit (koinonia), and service to the Christian community and the entire human community (diakonia).

Pope John Paul II has stressed that religious education; “must concern itself not only with nourishing and teaching the faith, but also with arousing it increasingly with the help of grace, with opening the heart, with converting, and with preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ on the part of those who are still on the threshold of faith” (CT 19).

Religious educators are given the mission to enlighten God’s People, young and old, to better know the living Jesus and “to know His ‘mystery,’ the kingdom of God proclaimed by Him, the requirements and promises contained in His Gospel message, and the paths that He has laid down for anyone who wishes to follow Him.” (CT 20). The words “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12) established the cornerstone of faith and direction of the catechetical ministry.

Catechetical Models

Pope John Paul II reminds us “the parish community must continue to be the prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis” (CT 67). The parish and its foundation “must rediscover its vocation, which is to be a fraternal and welcoming family home, where those who have been baptized and confirmed become aware of forming the People of God. In that home, the bread of good doctrine and the Eucharistic Bread are broken for them in abundance, in the setting of the one act of worship; from that home they are sent out day by day to their apostolic mission in all the centers of activity of the life of the world (CT 67).”

Sacramental Preparation Program

Pastors have the responsibility for sacramental preparation and all catechesis, so that the faith of the faithful becomes living, explicit and productive through formation in doctrine and the

experience of Christian living (CIC 843.2; 773; 777). All the sacraments follow the order set forth by the Bishop through the Diocesan Manual for the Sacraments of Initiation in conformity with the general laws established by the Church.

**Important Catechetical Documents
On
Marriage and Family**

AP	Ad Paucos Dies Letter to Children Pope John Paul II, 1994
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> Libreria Vaticana Editrice, 1994. (1 st Ed.)
CR	Charter to the Rights of the Family The Holy See, 1983
CIC	Code of Canon Law (1983 ed.)
CT	<i>Catechesi Tradendae</i> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, 1979.
EN	Evangelii Nuntiandi <i>On Evangelization In the Modern World</i> Pope Paul VI, 1975
EV	Evangelium Vitae <i>The Gospel of Life</i> Pope John Paul II, 1995
FC	Familiaris Consortio Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World Pope John Paul II,
GCD	<i>The General Catechetical Directory</i> Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, 1971.
GDC	<i>The General Directory for Catechesis</i> Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, 1997
GMD	<i>Go and Make Disciples: National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States</i> USCC, November 1992
GS	Gratissimam Sane

- Letter to Families
Pope John Paul II, 1994
- GS Guadium Et Spes
Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World
Documents of the Second Vatican Council, 1965
- HV Humane Vitae
On Human Life
Pope Paul VI, 1973
- LW Letter to Women
Pope John Paul II, 1995
- MD Mulieris Dignitatem
On the Dignity and Vocation of Women
Pope John Paul II, 1988
- OM *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*
- RCIA RCIA *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*
USCC, Publication 1214-4, 1988
- The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality
Guidelines for Education within the Family
Pontifical Council for the Family, 1995
- TOB Theology of the Body
Pope John Paul II, 1983
- VS *The Splendor of Truth*
(Veritatis Splendor) Pope John Paul II, August 5, 1993



**Scriptural and
Doctrinal Norms
On
Holy Matrimony**

**Scriptural and Doctrinal Norms
On
Holy Matrimony**

Biblical Foundations

Scripture is a living breathing tradition of the Church (CCC 136-137). Authentic interpretation of Scripture is meant to be a revelation towards our salvation (CCC 136-137).

1. The origin of Marriage – Gen 1:27; 1 Jn 4, 8, 16; Gen 2:18
2. God our Father. – Jn 1:15-18
3. They are no longer two but one – Mt 19:6
4. Nativity Lk. - 2:1-20
5. Annunciation/Visitation - Lk. 1:26-56
6. Presentation in the Temple - Lk. 2:22-40
7. Purpose of Jesus' coming - Lk. 19:9-10
8. Marriage as a new covenant of Christ and His Church – Eph 5:31-32
9. Blessing of Children Mk. 10:13-16
10. Marriage as a Holy Institution centered in Christ – 1 Cor 7:39
11. The Call of the Twelve Mk. 3:13-19; Lk. 5:1-11
12. The indissolubility of Marriage – Mt 19:6-8; Mk 8:34;
13. Reception of the Holy Eucharist and the Rite of Marriage. – 1 Cor 10:17
14. The Spousal love of Christ and His Church. – Eph 5:26-27
15. Proper matrimonial consent. Gen 2:24; Mk 10:8; Eph 5:31
16. The Establishment of the Church. Primary events.- Acts 1:12-14, 2:42-47
17. Pentecost - Acts 2:1-41, Jn. 16:7-14
18. Commands to preach the Good News to all the Nations. - Mk. 16:15-16; Mt. 28:16-20

19. Peter's Primacy and authority as the Kephas, the foundation of the Church. Mt. 16:15-16; Mt. 28:16-20
20. The Marriage Bond. - Mk. 10:9
21. Mission of the Disciples - Lk. 10:1-12; Mt. 5:13-16
22. Sacred Tradition & Revealed Truths - Jn. 14: 25-26, Jn. 16: 12-13, 21:25
23. The institution of the Eucharist by Jesus - Mt. 26:26-28; Lk. 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26
24. Mary as the Mother of the Church - Jn. 19:25-27

Doctrinal Foundations

1. Faith is an adherence to God's call for us on earth. CCC 26
2. Faith in God equates to faith in His Son Jesus Christ. CCC 444-454
3. Faith is seeking understanding. CCC 158
4. The universality of Catholicism, Magisterium. CCC 172-175
5. The Mystery of God CCC 206-230
6. Our Profession of Faith lies in the Creed. CCC 194
7. Marriage has been part of God's plan from the very beginning. CCC 1602-1605
8. The Nature of the Trinity. Three persons in one nature. We are a Trinitarian people made in His image and likeness. Temples of the Holy Spirit. CCC 252, 782, 789, 810
9. The Mystery of Christ through his Divine and Human natures as one with God. CCC 481
10. Our Blessed Mother Mary and her Immaculate Conception as being free from the stain of sin. CCC 508
11. Marriage and the perils of sin. CCC 1606-1608
12. Marriage under the moral law-Ten Commandments. CCC 1609-1611
13. Spouses form a nuptial covenant with God. CCC 1612-1617
14. Jesus' public life, his profession of faith, his death. CCC 535-560, 565-570, 635- 636
15. Virginity for the sake of the Kingdom within marriage. CCC 1619-1620

16. The Liturgy and the Sacrament of Marriage. CCC 1621-1624
17. Realize Jesus descending into Hell, conquering death and rising as the heavenly priest who will always intercede for us. CCC 635-636, 662, 667
18. The Church is part of that Salvation History, instituted from the creation of Adam and Eve to Christ, glorified and fulfilled through death His on the cross and resurrection. CCC 759-769
19. We are called to sustain a unity of prayer with Christ and the Communion of Saints. CCC 953, 2665, 2673, 2697-2699
20. The exchange of matrimonial consent, laying the foundation for marriage. CCC 1625-1632
21. "I do." CCC 1631-1632
22. Trust in the Holy Spirit in living a life with Christ. CCC 684, 737, 739, 741
23. The Church's mission is to proclaim the good news of Christ through our Redemption, signifying the reign of God. CCC 6-7, 127, 737-738, 830-831, 1070
24. We are the Body of Christ, active and alive in the Holy Spirit as a people of God. CCC 836-838, 1322-1323, 1391, 1396, 1405, 1691
25. The grace of the sacrament of Marriage. CCC 1638-1642
26. The goods and requirements of conjugal love. CCC 1643.
27. Indissolubility. CCC 1644-1645
28. The Incarnation. CCC 464, 479, 483
29. Fidelity in Marriage. CCC 1646-1651
30. Openness to life. CCC 1653-1654
31. Mary's role as, a virgin mother, a perfect mother to us a model of perfect charity and obedience to God. CCC 496, 499, 510, 773, 829, 963-975
32. Marriage and the Domestic Church. CCC 1655-1659
33. We are united in Christ through our Creation by God. CCC 283-285, 293-298

Sacramental Foundations

1. Baptism is a communion with Christ. CCC 1271
2. We are Baptized in Trinitarian form Father, Son, Holy Spirit. CCC 1256, 1278, 1284
3. Recognize that the Eucharist represents the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, the true single sacrifice. CCC 1365-1367
4. There are two forms of reception of Christ, bread, or bread and wine. CCC 1390
5. Know that the sacrifice of the mass is Christ offering His body for the salvation of all. CCC 1410
6. Recognize that all Catholics must go to confession at least once a year. CCC 1457
7. Realize that Jesus established authority to forgive sins to his priests through His name. Only priests can safeguard the administration of this sacrament along with the consecration of the Eucharist. CCC 1461,1495, 1411
8. Know that the ultimate priest is Christ who shared his ministerial priesthood with the Apostles. CCC 1545, 1550, 1584
9. Know marriage as the Paschal Mystery of Christ celebrated at Mass. CCC 1621, 1663
10. Know that marriage is a covenant between the consenting couple.
11. CCC 1625-1628, 1662, 1639, 1647

Church Foundations

1. We are called to work and celebrate in the Liturgy. CCC 1071
2. The mass as the ultimate form of prayer.
3. Discuss the importance of Eucharistic Adoration as a means to strengthen Marriage.
4. Encourage frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
5. The sacraments of initiation leave an indelible mark. CCC 1121
6. Grace is being poured out through reception of the sacraments. CCC 1131
7. The whole mass is centered on the Death and Resurrection of Christ on the Cross.

8. Baptism is a necessity for our salvific call to holiness with God. Baptism confers acceptance into the Community of God. It is part of our mission to serve and profess the faith. CCC 1257-1260, 1276-1277, 1281
9. Being confirmed in the Holy Spirit, Confirmation is not only a right of Christian maturity for the initiated, it is a call to obedience, proclamation, and evangelization of our Catholic faith through the exposition of the Church to all. CCC 74, 91-93, 897-913, 1308
10. When the sacraments are celebrated the Church is at its highest point. The Sacraments celebrate the fullness of what it means to be part of the Church CCC 959, 1068, 1071, 1116, 1118
11. The Eucharist is the actual body, blood, soul, and divinity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in the form of bread and wine being transformed (transubstantiation). CCC 1374-1376, 1413
12. The sacraments reveal the true nature of the Church through the outward signs professed through the sacraments. CCC 1068, 1071-1072, 1115, 1136, 1140, 1144, 1416
13. We are united in the Mystical Body of Christ in the Eucharist. CCC 1396, 1398
14. Explain concupiscence in relation to Baptism and the inclination of sin. CCC 1426
15. True reconciliation is achieved by confessing one's sins and receiving absolution, so that we are reconciled with God. CCC 1484, 1497
16. Anointing of the sick is a sacrament of unity with God in times of serious illness, pending death and old age. CCC 1514, 1515, 1528, 1529
17. Explore the church's teachings on the Sacraments of Matrimony, Holy Orders and the single or religious life realizing that all are called by God. (Vocations) CCC 1533-1666, 1694-1696
18. *The Mass is the ultimate form of prayer in celebrating the Paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection.

Moral Foundations (References to be added)

1. Recognize the nature and origin of sin.
2. Begin to establish a relationship with Christ as a moral compass for daily actions.
3. The meaning of Prudence as a means of making wise choices in relation to one's faith.
4. The importance of a well-informed conscience with Christ as the central core of being.
5. Hope in God is part of our call to holiness.

6. Recognize that Sunday is truly the “Lord’s day”, the day of resurrection.
7. Know and understand what evil is in relation to the devil, acts against Christ’s love for us.
8. The difference between mortal and venial sins.
9. Know and understand the seven capital sins along with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.
10. The importance of living a pure, chaste life in respect to your spouse.
11. Exercise the cardinal virtues of temperance and fortitude in relation to sexual pressures and promiscuity within the sacrament of Holy matrimony.
12. Develop a deeper awareness of what is pure and of Christ in relation to the sacrament of Holy Matrimony between spouses.
13. A person’s right to life is a precious gift instituted by God for the sake of praising and worshiping the Lord.
14. Our Gospel values are to protect one another in Christ from any undue, unjust harm, spiritually or physically.
15. A performed deliberate abortion constitutes a direct killing of an innocent life and is a grave sin against the fifth commandment.
16. Application of a moral code utilizing all four cardinal virtues, especially prudence within the sacrament of Holy Matrimony.
17. Everything the married couple does should be centered on Christ.
18. We are temples of the Holy Spirit and should not harm ourselves in anyway physically (drugs), sexually (pre-marital sex), or in any form of abuse against God’s creation.
19. Explore responsibility and awareness of forming a strong conscience in relation to Christ.
20. Sin is a denial of God’s love for us. Review venial and mortal sin, refer back to number 8.
21. We are called by Christ to keep the commandments true to our faith.
22. Establish the importance of maintaining a pure chaste life in regard to our Christian understanding about sex and sexuality within marriage.

Prayer Foundations

1. The Holy Spirit is our guide and pathway to Christ in prayer. CCC 2615
2. Prayer is a gift instituted by God. CCC 2658
3. The “Our Father” serves as the ultimate form of prayer. CCC 2777-2796
4. The Lord’s Prayer is the summary of the whole Gospel. CCC 2761-2766
5. There is a universal call to prayer. CCC 2566, 2569
6. Jesus teaches us how to pray. CCC 2607-2615
7. Jesus hears our prayers. CCC 2616
8. Mary’s Prayer. CCC 2617-2619
9. Different forms of prayer i.e. petition, adoration, thanksgiving, intercession, blessing, praise. CCC 2626-2643
10. Expressions of Prayer vocal, meditation, contemplative. CCC 2700-2719



Catechetical, Doctrinal, Liturgical, and Pastoral Principles

Catechetical, Doctrinal, Liturgical, and Pastoral Principles

Catechetical

Remote Catechesis – Initial Inquiry into the Sacrament

“Catechesis on Christian marriage and distinctively Christian family values should be given to adolescents and teenagers during their high school years. Children begin learning the meaning of married love at a very early age from their parents, both through the example of their lives and through their more formal instruction. The family is the most effective school for catechesis on Christian marriage and family life” (NDC142-143).

1. The Home

The home is the central place where remote catechesis for this sacrament takes place. The child's parents are both catechists and models. From her/his earliest years, a child learns what a Christian marriage is through daily contact with the adults in the home environment. Establishing the integrity of the Gospel message is what the mission of Catechesis is all about. “Jesus proclaimed the Gospel integrally . . . because I have made known to you all that I have heard from my Father (Jn 15:15)” (GDC 111).

“Spouses, conscientiously living out their married life in mutual love and respect and in the upbringing of their children, reflect the mutual love of Christ and His Church. They not only enrich each other’s lives, but they inspire and provide examples for their children. Inspired by the example and family prayer of their parents, children, and in fact everyone living under the family roof, will more easily set out upon the path of a truly human training, of salvation, and of holiness” (Gaudium et Spes, #48).

“The church has always considered catechesis one of her primary tasks,”
(Catechist, Pope John Paul II pg. 37).

2. Religious Education/Youth Ministry Programs

Catechesis for the Sacrament of Marriage should be an integral part of the parish religious education program. The scope and depth of this catechesis is to be adapted to the age of the students. Marriage, as one of the sacraments of the Church, should be presented at elementary level. For junior high and high school students, the sacramentality, indissolubility, grace of the sacrament marriage, covenantal relationship forged with Jesus Christ, fidelity, love of spouse, and love of children, should be carefully presented.

3. Remote Catechesis Content

Remote catechesis includes, but is not limited to, the following concepts:

- a. Christian marriage is between a baptized man and a baptized woman. CCC 160-1612

- b. Man and Woman are mutually, freely chosen. CCC 1625-1632
- c. The Marriage covenant reflects the union of Christ with the Church. CCC 1638-1642
- d. Christian marriage is a permanent, exclusive commitment to each other regardless of the pressures of society or peers. CCC 1644-1645
- e. Spouses are open to each other in love, to each other's emotional, spiritual and social growth, to the procreation and the Christian parenting of children. CCC 1646-1651
- f. Marriage is a vocation. CCC 1621
- g. Characteristics of genuine love as distinguished from infatuation or as a process for mutual self-satisfaction. CCC 1646-1651
- h. Reasons for and readiness for marriage.
- i. Human sexuality especially in the context of human growth and development and sexual intimacy. CCC 1643, 2361
- j. Communication and inter-personal relationships.
- k. Marriage as a Christian lifestyle CCC 1655-1658

PROXIMATE CATECHESIS-CONTINUAL EVANGELIZATION AND DOCTRINAL FORMATION

In addition to the guidelines outlined above, a couple preparing for marriage should receive specific catechesis to assist them in their readiness for celebrating this sacrament. Catechesis is appropriate for those wishing to enter into marriage for the first time, those who have been in a previous marriage, and those who have been married outside the Church and wish to have their marriage sanated or validated. The proximate preparation for marriage should, ordinarily, begin when all impediments to the marriage have been removed. The priest, deacon or pastoral administrator who interviews the couple, carries out much of this catechesis. Other parish ministers and faithful married couples should also participate in this ministry.

1. General Catechetical Concepts

Couples preparing for marriage should understand clearly all the key doctrinal points outlined in remote catechesis content (listed above) and the implications for a lifelong experience of marriage. Proximity, to the actual celebration of the sacrament, brings those concepts out of the theoretical realm, and into the very practical context of immediate applicability.

Examples of Key Doctrinal Points:

- The Sacrament Holy Matrimony is one of the Seven of the Sacraments of the Catholic Church. Gen 1:26-27
- The Catholic couple entering into the marriage covenant must be Baptized.
- Both parties must be free to marry i.e. there is no constraint or impediment arising from any natural or ecclesiastical law. CCC 1625; CIC 1057, 1071
- In the Latin Rite, marriage between two Catholics usually takes place during Holy Mass because of the sacramental connection to the Paschal mystery. CCC 1621
- Reception of the sacrament of Penance is encouraged as part of the Marriage preparation for the couple. CCC 1622; FC 67
- Two distinctive graces of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony are the love of spouse and the love of Children.
- Marriage is indissoluble before the eyes of the Church. CCC 1644; Mt 19:6; FC 19
- The intimate union of marriage, as a mutual self-giving of two persons, and the good of children, demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable union between them. GS 48, 1

2. Other Catechetical Considerations

- a. Proper catechesis helps couples understand marriage as a holy covenantal relationship, centered on Christ, for the duration of life itself. Their fidelity to one another reflects their fidelity to Christ and His Church.
- b. Proper catechesis emphasizes the sacrament of marriage is the mutual self-giving of one another in conjugal fidelity, support, and growth of love between husband and wife in their relationship with Christ. CC 1643-1650
- c. Proper catechesis will lead to openness to procreation (life) and the parenting of children, one of the foundational requirements in a Christian marriage. CCC 1652-1654

“Marriage to be sure is not instituted solely for procreation; rather, its very nature as an unbreakable compact between persons, and the welfare of the children, both demand that the mutual love of the spouses be embodied in a rightly ordered manner, that it grow and ripen. Therefore, marriage persists as a whole manner and communion of life, and maintains its value and indissolubility, even when despite the often intense desire of the couple, offspring are lacking” (Gaudium et Spes, 50).

- d. "Catechesis also includes a clear presentation of the Church's teaching concerning moral methods of regulating births (Natural Family Planning), the evil crime of abortion, artificial birth control and of sterilization for that purpose; it should stress the protection due to human life once conceived" (NCD131). See also: CCC 2271; 2273; 2270
- e. Proper catechesis will demonstrate the value of the Catholic faith as a source of strength for the couple, should be clearly emphasized. CCC 1456-1460 While, it recognizes the

sacramental nature of interchurch marriages, the Church encourages marriages within the faith. CCC 1633-1637

- f. Proper catechesis is provided even when only one spouse in a marriage is Catholic. Proper catechesis includes the norms (Rite) and laws (Code of Canon Law) of the Church pertaining to Christian marriage (CCC 1633-1637).
- g. When a Catholic is about to enter into marriage with a non-Christian, the Catholic party requests a canonical dispensation. As the unity of Christian belief will not be available to them in their married life, catechesis should encourage the couple to explore honestly the difficulties that will affect them as a result of this reality.
- h. Couples are encouraged to participate in two or three marriage preparation programs, e.g., Engaged Encounter; Pre-Cana; Sponsor Couple Program etc.
- i. Catechetical instruction, under special circumstance, is needed for those who have suffered the trauma of losing a former spouse through death or annulment of a former marriage. In the latter case, a decree of invalidity may be obtained through the diocesan Marriage Tribunal. The declaration of invalidity states that a valid marriage never existed between the parties according to the Church's understanding and definition of marriage.
- j. "Catechesis on the Church's teaching concerning the consequences of remarriage after divorce is not only necessary but will be supportive for the divorced" (NCD #131). The entire parish community should share concern for those involved in a divorce.

ONGOING CATECHESIS-Continual Call to Conversion, The New Evangelization, Mystagogy

After the couple has given themselves to each other in the bonds of Holy Matrimony, it is very important for continual catechesis, renewal, and conversion to further the outpouring of graces of the Sacrament of Marriage. Continual spiritual, moral, and doctrinal support serves as three primary areas where on-going catechesis enriches the lives of the married couple. Examples of these areas are as follows:

- Fostering a genuine prayer where the couple offers themselves to Christ in prayer and intercede for one another through Mass, the intercession of the Saints, Eucharistic Adoration, Novenas, and living an active liturgical life through the liturgical season.
- Treat each other with dignity, remembering your spouse was created by God and for God in His likeness and image. Respect each other as husband and wife freely giving of each other in conjugal fidelity.
- Continue to enrich their hearts and minds in the teachings of the Catholic Church through adult catechesis i.e. Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Other areas of ongoing catechesis may include, but is not limited to the following:

1. All the areas described above in the remote and proximate catechesis.
2. Programs of marriage enrichment should be part of every parish adult catechetical agenda and include opportunities for (a) those newly married, (b) new parents or those about to

be parents, (c) those who want to revitalize their marriages, (d) those who are celebrating a significant family milestone or crisis, and (e) those who are celebrating a significant anniversary, e.g. 25th or 50th.

3. Special training programs provided by parishes, organized by competent staff, should be utilized for effective training of sponsor couples. Couples who are married and are active parishioners should be involved in catechesis concerning marriage. Parishes should continue pastoral involvement with the newly married couple through the early stages of the marriage.
4. Catechesis and pastoral care should always be available to those who have experienced the agony of failure in their efforts to live out their marriage commitment.

Doctrinal

Effective Sacramental Preparation

1. Clarification of all misconceptions towards the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. Perpetration provides an understanding of the balance between the value of adequate preparation and proper disposition of sacraments, instituted by Christ himself.
2. Inclusion of the engaged couple, their families, the larger parish community and trained catechists. CCC 1655-1658
3. Adapts to the ages, needs, and circumstances of the engaged couple. CCC 1625-1629
4. Focuses on the meaning of the sacrament, including scriptural and doctrinal foundation, historical development, and the sacramental rite itself. CCC1601-1605
5. Fosters effective evangelization, catechetical instruction, and a missionary spirit. CCC 1638-1642
6. Promotes an active, life-long, participation in the sacramental life. CCC 1641; 1646-1651

Pastoral

Pastoral and Catechetical Principles for Marriage

1. Active participation in the Mass and reception of the Eucharist is the source and summit of unity, Catholic life, and life itself. (CCC 1324)
2. To receive the sacrament of Marriage fruitfully, the spouses are strongly advised to receive the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist in preparation for their wedding. (CIC 1065 .2)
3. Catholics who have not yet received the sacrament of confirmation should receive it before being admitted to marriage, if it can be done without grave inconvenience. (CIC 1065.1)

4. Communion under both species may be offered during the Eucharistic celebration. Receiving from the cup should be the decision of the communicant, not of the presider.
5. Effective catechesis requires sound doctrinal, liturgical and pastoral practice.

Liturgical

The Rite of Marriage

Introduction

1. Communal Participation

The celebration of this sacrament is not only for the wedding party: all present are to be active witnesses and participants. Hence, the preparation of a simple worship aid (program booklets) is urged to enable all to take part as fully as possible.

2. Time of Celebration

If a marriage is celebrated on a day having a penitential character, especially during Lent, the pastor is to counsel the spouses to take into account the special nature of that day. The celebration of Marriage on Friday of the Passion of the Lord and Holy Saturday is to be avoided altogether. (OM 32) This admonition may affect the decoration of the worship space.

3. Ministers Needed

The primary ministers are the couple. The priest or deacon is the presider and official witness for the Church. Other ministers normally needed in the celebration of a sacrament are lectors, extra ordinary ministers of the Eucharist, altar servers, and ministers of hospitality. All individuals involved should be prepared for their proper roles in this sacrament. The use of members of the wedding party and members of the two families in these roles where possible is to be encouraged. After them, members of the parish community should be considered.

Physical Preparation

The ceremony will always take place in a church or college chapel. When Marriage is celebrated within Mass, everything normally needed for the celebration of Mass should be prepared. Whatever may be called for in the use of a devotional, e.g., holy water, lasso, arras, unity candle, etc. should also be prepared.

Outline of Rite

Celebration of the Eucharist, when only one may receive communion, in cases of Catholics marrying non-Catholics, the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage outside of Mass should be encouraged in order to strengthen this sacrament of unity, since it could weaken the

sacramental sign.

Celebration of Marriage Within Mass

1. Entrance Rites

Procession – instrumental, followed by Gathering Hymn sung by all

- or Procession with communal hymn
- or Procession – instrumental

Greeting and Welcome, Opening Prayer

(Penitential Rite and Gloria omitted)

2. Liturgy of the Word (always and only Scripture)

- Readings with psalm response, Gospel acclamation, Gospel and homily
- "After the reading of the Gospel, the Priest in the Homily uses the sacred text to expound the mystery of Christian Marriage, the dignity of conjugal love, the grace of the Sacrament, and the responsibilities of married people, keeping in mind, however, the various circumstances of individuals" (OM 57).

3. Liturgy of Marriage

- Exchange of Consent
- Blessing and exchange of rings
- Devotional (optional--see "Cultural Adaptations' below)
- General Intercessions

4. Liturgy of the Eucharist

- Presentation of the Gifts: Members of the wedding party who are active practicing Catholics may bring unconsecrated bread and wine to the bride and groom who may then hand them to the priest.
- Nuptial Blessing is given.
- Sign of Peace- Care should be taken to keep this exchange brief, so as not to create the impression that this is a general "reception."
- After Communion a song of thanksgiving by the community may be sung.
- Prayer after Communion may be followed by a devotional action.

5. Dismissal Rites

- Blessing
- Dismissal (which may include presentation of the couple to the community)
- Recessional as usual.

Celebration of Marriage Outside Mass

1. Entrance Rites

Procession – instrumental, followed by Gathering Hymn sung by all

or Procession with communal hymn
or Procession – instrumental

Greeting and Welcome, Opening Prayer

(Penitential Rite and Glory to God omitted)

2. Liturgy of the Word (Only from Sacred Scripture)

- Readings with psalm response, Gospel acclamation, Gospel and homily
- "After the reading of the Gospel, the Priest in the Homily uses the sacred text to expound the mystery of Christian Marriage, the dignity of conjugal love, the grace of the Sacrament, and the responsibilities of married people, keeping in mind, however, the various circumstances of individuals" (OM 57).

3. Liturgy of Marriage

- Exchange of Consent
- Blessing and exchange of rings
- Devotional (optional--see "Cultural Adaptations" below)
- Sign of Peace (pastoral practice, not required by Rite)
- General Intercessions
- Nuptial Blessing
- Lord's Prayer
- Solemn Blessing
- Devotional (optional)
- Presentation of the Couple (optional)
- Recessional

1. Symbols - The couple is itself the principal symbol, sealed by the spoken vows; care should be taken that the vows are audible to the community.

The ring(s) and other images, e.g. lazo, arras, etc., serve to highlight other facets of the basic symbol.

2. Gesture - More than a hand movement, gesture extends to the total body language of the ritual. Attention should be paid, for example, to the planning of the wedding procession. One makes a statement in presenting the wedding party. Questions such as, "Does the

wedding party enter as logical procession?"; "Are both sets of parents actively engaged in the procession, or are they fringe figures?" understanding the exception of the father of the bride; "Is the ordained minister part of the procession?" These questions have arisen because of the strong (and correct) understanding that the couples are the ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage. Therefore, it is the priest or deacon who presides and are properly apart of the procession, coming at the end.

3. Environment - The community gathered in the place of worship is the proper environment of this Sacrament. Decorations within the place of worship are both traditional and appropriate. A creation of a setting, e.g. a garden scene, should not be sought. Instead, decorations should gracefully enhance the sacrament and the sense of unity. Overly decorated and robust use of symbols, within the place of worship, weakens the impact of Holy Matrimony. Parishes may hold stipulations on decorations during important liturgical seasons, e.g. Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, etc, requesting the preexisting environment to no be disturbed.
4. Cultural Adaptations – If the occasion so suggests, the rite of blessing and giving of the *arras* (coins) may take place following the blessing and giving of rings. According to local custom, the rite of blessing and imposition of the *lazo* (wedding garland) or of the veil may take place before the Nuptial Blessing (OM 67B, 71B).



Specific Moral Foundations related to the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony

Specific Moral Foundations related to the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony

- **Contraception**
- **Fornication**
- **Adultery**
- **Cohabitation**
- **In-Vitro Fertilization**
- **Homosexuality**

(Information on the above topics will be provided shortly.)



General Marriage Preparation Policies

General Marriage Preparation Policies

The following policy statements are drawn from the *Marriage Guidelines for the Dioceses of Texas*, published by the Texas Catholic Conference. For commentary on these policy statements, refer to this TCC publication.

1. Initial Interview – To assure adequate time for marriage preparation, couples planning to marry need to contact the parish 6 to 12 months prior to the provisional date for the wedding. The initial interview is to take place at least four months prior to the provisional date of the wedding. Each engaged couple is to have an initial interview with the pastor, pastoral administrator or clergy representative as soon as feasible at or after the first contact. The interview is for the purpose of:
 - a. Determining the eligibility of the engaged couple according to civil law.
 - b. Determining eligibility according to the Code of Canon Law.
 - c. Explaining the Diocesan Marriage Preparation process.
 - d. Setting a provisional date for the wedding.

Marriage preparation offered by the pastor, pastoral administrator or clergy representative should include the administration of a diagnostic inventory instrument, to facilitate greater mutual understanding. The inventory is to be administered as soon as conveniently possible after the initial interview.

Where canonical permission has been obtained for the marriage to take place in another parish, that parish representative will conduct the initial interview. Where a visiting minister from outside the diocese is coming to officiate, the hosting representative is responsible for the initial interview. After the initial interview, communication between the hosting parish and the visiting minister is needed for a clear understanding on where the pre-nuptial forms will be completed and who will further prepare the engaged couple.

2. Marriage Preparation
 - a. Marriage Preparation is to be experienced by both parties, preferably together. It in no way, replaces the instructions of the pastor, pastoral administrator, clergy representative, and certified catechists both before and after Marriage Preparation.
 - b. Marriage Preparation includes a Pre-Cana, a parish Sponsor Couple program (Fully Engaged) and Natural Family Planning Program.
 - c. Marriage Preparation is to be completed 60 to 90 days before the wedding.
 - d. Refusal to participate in a Marriage Preparation program raises several pastoral concerns. It warrants a re-evaluation of readiness for marriage for the couple and a meeting with the

Pastor to determine the condition and state of the engaged couples and their desire to marry.

- e. Exceptions to participation in a Marriage Preparation Program may include validation of a long-standing civil union and marriages of the elderly or widowed.
3. Pastoral Follow-Up Interview - After Marriage Preparation, the 60 to 90-day period of time permits the pastor, pastoral administrator or clergy representative and the couple to discuss, in a series of interviews, what they discovered about themselves and their relationship during the Marriage Preparation. After these follow-up interviews, if the pastor, pastoral administrator or clergy representative is unable to reach a conclusive assessment regarding the couple's readiness for marriage, he/she should seek immediate consultation with qualified resource personnel, including medical or psychological experts, if such seems appropriate.
4. Marriages of Young People – Defining young to be under 19 years of age at the time of the wedding:
 - a. At least six months should elapse after the completion of the Primary Marriage Preparation.
 - b. Parental consultation and completion of the canonical free state form must take place.
5. Pregnancy - Pregnancy, itself, is not considered sufficient reason to enter marriage or shorten the marriage preparation process if a couple had not planned to marry.
6. Non-Practicing Catholics - Request for marriage in the Catholic faith is a unique opportunity for the evangelization and reconciliation of Catholics who do not practice or do not strongly identify with their faith. The non-practicing Catholic person(s) should be given an opportunity to return to the active practice of the faith. Such person(s) should receive special catechesis in the Catholic faith as well as the Primary Marriage Preparation.
7. Mixed Marriages - Marriage between a Catholic and a person who is not Catholic presents religious issues of major importance. The Church calls on parties to examine these issues by requiring that:
 - a. The Catholic party reaffirms his/her faith in Jesus Christ and His church by adhering to the teachings of the Catholic Church, and, with God's help, intends to continue living that faith in the Catholic Church
 - b. The Catholic party promises to do all in his/her power to authentically witness the faith with the children by having them baptized, exposed and instructed in the Catholic Church.
 - c. Catholic and non-Catholic parties must respect the faith position of his/her spouse.
 - d. The non-Catholic party must be informed of the reaffirmation and promises of the Catholic party i.e. renewal of Baptismal promises and profession of the Apostles Creed.

- e. The priest, deacon or pastoral administrator must be morally certain that the reaffirmation and promises have been sincerely made i.e. not cohabitating, not engaged in contraceptive practices, carefully know and understanding the moral teachings of the Catholic Church.
8. Validation or Sanatio – Persons who married outside the Catholic Church and wish to validate their union will participate in the normal assessment and preparation process, including, for example, Today... Tomorrow... Forever, Jesús Te Invita al Sacramento Del Matrimonio, Fully Engaged with a sponsor couple/group or other parish based enrichment programs.

Couples who marry outside the Church must wait at least **six months** before having the marriage validated.

For validations following annulments or dissolutions, appropriate pastoral care should be given.

Sanatio (*Sanatio In Radice*, the “healing of the marriage in its root”) cases involve the validation of a marriage attempted without sacramental form when the non-Catholic party refuses to go through another ceremony before a priest or deacon and two witnesses, or the couple truly believe they made a commitment at the time of the civil marriage. It is also referred to as a retroactive validation. Contact the Tribunal for more information and the procedure.

9. Previous Marriage - previously married (Catholic or non-Catholic) is an impediment to marriage in the Catholic Church. The parties must disclose to the priest, deacon or pastoral administrator the fact of the previous marriage(s) in an effort to seek resolution. In such cases, the priest, deacon or pastoral administrator is to be careful to *avoid* the following:
 - a. Setting even a tentative date for marriage in the Catholic Church before the priest, deacon or pastoral administrator has received confirmation that the final decree of invalidity has been issued.
 - b. Misleading the parties into expecting an affirmative tribunal decision.
 - c. Offering the parties assurances that the case will be concluded within a specific period of time.
 - d. Arranging for a subsequent marriage to take place without allowing sufficient time for the healing process following the separation and divorce.
10. Places where marriage may be celebrated – Wedding ceremonies, in the diocese, are to be celebrated in a sacred place, normally a Catholic church. Weddings may take place in college chapels. A Catholic ceremony may also take place in a non-Catholic church, with good reasons and special permission. Permission will not be given for weddings in homes, gardens, beaches or similar places.

11. Planning for the ceremony - should follow the liturgical norms set forth by the Church. Under certain circumstances, consideration to ethnic customs are allowed that are in harmony with the spirit of the liturgy e.g. lazo, rosary etc. A meeting with the Pastor and/or his appointed liturgical representative should take place soon after the Initial Interview so the couple knows what options are available in the liturgy and music.

12. Appeal - Since the right to marry derives from natural law, a couple has the right to appeal a decision which delays or prevents their marriage. This appeal is sent to the Bishop's office.



Norms for Readiness

Norms for readiness

The couple is of age and displays maturity appropriate to assuming the rights and responsibilities of marriage. (Appropriate Consent – CCC1625-1632)

Through prayer and discernment, they each believe they are called to the vocation of marriage and that this is the right person with whom to enter into an exclusive relationship for life. (CCC 1632, 1639)

There are no pressures to marry or objections to the marriage. (CCC 1625)

They share a realistic view of marriage and expectations. (CCC 1641)

The priest, deacon, pastoral administrator or their representative has arrived at a prudent assessment that the couple is free to marry according to the terms of both civil and canon law.

If the priest, deacon or pastoral administrator has valid reasons to believe that the couple is not capable of living the necessary commitments of Christian marriage (e.g., a history of violent behavior or chronic addiction) they must take the responsibility of halting the process at this point and do their best to recommend an appropriate course of therapy for the couple.

A positive assessment, on the part of the priest, deacon or pastoral administrator, does not exclude the possibility of doubts about the wisdom of the couple's desire to marry in the Church. Since, no one can know for certain how the couple will make use of the graces that God is willing to give them, hesitancy is resolved, usually correctly, in favor of giving the couple - and God's grace - the benefit of the doubt.

Any concerns about the couple's readiness to marry are to be noted on the prenuptial forms.

Readiness of the couple to marry is ultimately determined by themselves, rather than by the clergy or delegated parish ministers. It is they, the bride and groom, who minister the sacrament to each other, due to their natural right to marry. Prudent counsel may assist them to assess their readiness for marriage and preparation to receive the graces of the sacrament. CCC 1622)

<p>Marriage and Family Life Office New Marriage Preparation Ministerial and Administrative Guidelines</p>
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Effective January 2016

- Marriage Preparation is recommended to begin 9-12 Months prior to the wedding date. An initial meeting must be scheduled with a priest, deacon or marriage coordinator before booking a reception site, photographer, etc.
- Diocesan **Primary Marriage Preparation (PMP)** is to be experienced by both parties, preferable together. It in no way replaces the instruction by the Pastor, pastoral administrator or a clergy representative both before and after the PMP. An overview of the required three steps is listed below.
- Refusal to participate in the PMP is a pastoral concern. It warrants a re-evaluation of readiness for marriage.
- **It is strongly encouraged that PMP be completed 60 to 90 days before the wedding.**

PREPARATION SCHEDULE

TIME FRAME

Schedule an initial meeting with the Pastor, deacon, or Marriage Preparation Coordinator	9-12 Months before desired wedding date
Complete the Prenuptial Questionnaire. Start other paperwork and receive information to sign up for Pre-Cana, Natural Family Planning and start Fully Engaged.	Within a few weeks of initial meeting with pastor, deacon or marriage preparation coordinator.
FOR COUPLES IN WHICH BOTH MAN AND WOMAN ARE ENTERING THEIR FIRST MARRIAGE	
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 1-THEOLOGICAL COMPONENT PRE CANA*</p> <p>This six-hour class explains the Sacrament of Marriage in the Catholic Church, the Vows of Consent and sexual morality in marriage.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 2- LIFE SKILLS COMPONENT Fully Engaged – Sponsor Couple Program*</p> <p>A Parish-based program facilitated by a married couple from the parish focusing on life skills; communication, conflict resolution, personalities, finances, and living out your faith.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 3-NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING*</p>	To be completed 60-90 days before the wedding date.

FOR COUPLES IN WHICH ONE OR BOTH HAVE BEEN PREVIOUSLY MARRIED	
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 1-THEOLOGICAL COMPONENT PRE CANA*</p> <p>This six-hour class explains the Sacrament of Marriage in the Catholic Church, the Vows of Consent and sexual morality in marriage.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 2 – LIFE SKILLS COMPONENT Fully Engaged – Sponsor Couple Program*</p> <p>A Parish-based program facilitated by a married couple from the parish focusing on life skills; communication, conflict resolution, personalities, finances, and living out your faith.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 3 – NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING *</p>	<p>To be completed 60-90 days before the wedding date.</p>
FOR COUPLES CIVILLY MARRIED SEEKING CON-VALIDATION (We cannot require preparation for a sanation. It is an administrative act—something done by the Church to the people)	
<p style="text-align: center;">STEP 1 – THEOLOGICAL & SKILLS COMPONENT; Today, Tomorrow, Forever (English)</p> <p>This six-hour class combines the explanation of the Sacrament of Marriage in the Catholic Church, the Vows of Consent, sexual morality in marriage and life skills.</p> <p>Jesus te Invita al Sacramento del Matrimonio (Spanish)</p> <p>This six-hour program for Spanish Speaking Couples civilly married seeking Con-validation or Sanation and for Spanish speaking couple’s cohabitating for more than a year. (The themes covered in this class are Marriage as a Process, Communication, Intimacy, Life Skills, Compatibility, Commitment, and understanding of the teachings of the Catholic Church on the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 2- LIFE SKILLS COMPONENT Fully Engaged for Couples Seeking Convalidation– Sponsor Couple Program*</p> <p>A Parish-based program facilitated by a married couple from the parish focusing on life skills; communication, conflict resolution, personalities, finances, and living out your faith.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STEP 3 – NATURAL FAMILY PLANING*</p>	<p>To be completed 60-90 days before the wedding date.</p>

* Available in English and Spanish



Appendix I

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY
Excerpts from
PREPARATION
FOR THE SACRAMENT
OF MARRIAGE
1996

INTRODUCTION

1. Preparation for marriage, for married and family life, is of great importance for the good of the Church. In fact, the sacrament of Marriage has great value for the whole Christian community and, in the first place, for the spouses whose decision is such that it cannot be improvised or made hastily. In the past, this preparation could count on the support of society which recognized the values and benefits of marriage. Without any difficulties or doubts, the Church protected the sanctity of marriage with the awareness that this sacrament represented an ecclesial guarantee as the living cell of the People of God. At least in the communities that were truly evangelized, the Church's support was solid, unitary and compact. In general, separations and marriage failures were rare, and divorce was considered a social "plague" (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* = *GS*, 47).

Today, on the contrary, in many cases, we are witnessing an accentuated deterioration of the family and a certain corrosion of the values of marriage. In many nations, especially economically developed ones, the number of marriages has decreased. Marriage is usually contracted at a later age and the number of divorces and separations is increasing, even during the first years of married life. All this inevitably leads to a pastoral concern that comes up repeatedly: Are the persons contracting marriage really prepared for it? The problem of preparation for the sacrament of Marriage and the life that follows emerges as a great pastoral need, first for the sake of the spouses, for the whole Christian community and for society. Therefore, interest in, and initiatives for providing adequate and timely answers to preparation for the sacrament of Marriage are growing everywhere.

2. Marriage preparation constitutes a *providential and favourable* period for those oriented toward this Christian sacrament, and a *Kayrós*, i.e., a period in which God calls upon the engaged and helps them discern the vocation to marriage and family life. The engagement period is set within the context of a rich evangelization process. In fact, questions that affect the family converge in the life of the engaged, the future spouses. They are therefore invited to understand the meaning of the responsible and mature love of the community of life and love which their family will be, a real domestic church which will contribute toward enriching the whole Church.

The importance of this preparation involves a process of evangelization which is both maturation and deepening in the faith. If the faith is weak or almost nonexistent (cf. *Familiaris Consortio* = *FC* 68), it must be revived. Thorough, patient instruction that arouses and nourishes the ardor of a living faith cannot be excluded. Especially where the environment has become *paganized*, it will be particularly advisable to offer a "journey of faith, which is similar to the catechumenate" (*FC* 66), and a presentation of the fundamental Christian truths that may help acquire or strengthen the maturity of the faith of the persons contracting marriage. It would be desirable if the favourable moment of marriage preparation could be transformed, as a sign of hope, into a New Evangelization for the future families.

3. This particular attention is highlighted by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council (*GS* 52), the guidelines of the Papal Magisterium (*FC* 66), the ecclesial norms themselves (*Codex Iuris Canonici* =

CIC, can. 1063; *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium = CCEO*, can. 783), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (n. 1632), and other documents of the Magisterium, including the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*. The two most recent documents of the Papal Magisterium — the Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane* and the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (= EV) — constitute a notable aid for our task.

4. The "Magna Carta" for families, the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, which has already been cited, had already pointed out that: "...the changes that have taken place within almost all modern societies demand that not only the family but also society and the Church should be involved in the effort of properly preparing young people for their future responsibilities. (...) The Church must therefore promote better and more intensive programmes of marriage preparation, in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favour positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages" (*FC* 66).

The Code of Canon Law states that there should be "personal preparation for entering marriage, so that the spouses are disposed to the holiness and the obligations of their new state" (*CIC* can. 1063, 2, *CCEO* can. 783, §1). These instructions are also found in the *Ordo celebrandi matrimonium* 12.

In his Address to the Ninth General Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family (October 4, 1991), the Holy Father added: "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". Then, with some more concrete observations regarding the *courses* as such, he went on to say: "You have been able to observe that, given the necessity of having such courses in parishes, in consideration of the positive results of the various methods used, it seems appropriate to start drawing up criteria to be adopted, in the form of a guide or directory, to offer the particular Churches a valuable aid". This is all the more so because in the particular Churches, for much of "the people of life and the people for life", *the family has a decisive responsibility*. This responsibility flows from its very nature as a community of life and love, founded upon marriage, and from its mission to 'guard, reveal and communicate love'" (*EV* 92 and cf. *FC* 17).

5. For this purpose, the Pontifical Council for the Family offers this document which has as its object the preparation for the sacrament of Marriage and its celebration.

The guidelines that emerge constitute an itinerary for the *remote, proximate and immediate preparation for the sacrament of Marriage* (cf. *FC* 66). The material provided herein is addressed first of all to the Episcopal Conferences, the individual Bishops and their co-workers in the pastoral care of marriage preparation, and it is also addressed to the engaged themselves who are the object of the Church's pastoral concern.

6. Particular pastoral attention will be given to the engaged in special situations foreseen by the *CIC* can. 1071, 1072 and 1125, and by the *CCEO* can. 789 and 814. When the guidelines presented in the document cannot be applied completely in their regard, they can still be useful in guiding and accompanying them in a fitting way.

Faithful to the will and teaching of Christ, through her own legislation the Church expresses her pastoral charity in her care for all the situations of the faithful. The criteria offered are means for providing help in a positive way and should not be understood as further, constrictive requirements.

7. The underlying doctrinal motivation that inspires this document comes from the conviction that marriage is a value that takes its origin from the Creation and that it is rooted in human nature. "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this

reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one?" (*Matthew* 19: 4-5). Therefore, what the Church does for the family and marriage certainly contributes to the good of society as such and to the good of all. Furthermore, as an expression of the new life made possible by the Risen Christ, Christian marriage always expresses the truth about married love and is like a prophecy that clearly proclaims a human being's real needs: that man and woman are called upon from the beginning to live in a communion of life and love and that this complementarity will lead to strengthening the human dignity of the spouses, the good of the children and of society itself, through "...the defence and promotion of life...everyone's task and responsibility" (EV91).

8. Therefore, the present document *takes into consideration* both the natural human realities proper to this divine institution, and the specific ones of the sacrament instituted by Christ. It is *divided* into three parts:

- 1) The Importance of Preparation for Christian Marriage;
- 2) The Stages or Periods of Preparation;
- 3) The Celebration of Marriage.

I

THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPARATION FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

9. The starting point for an itinerary of marriage preparation is the awareness that the marriage covenant was taken up and raised to a sacrament of the New Covenant by the Lord Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The sacrament joins the spouses to the self-giving love of Christ the Bridegroom for the Church, his Bride (cf. *Ephesians* 5: 25-32) by making them the image of, and sharers in this love. It makes them give praise to the Lord, it sanctifies the conjugal union and the life of the Christian faithful who celebrate it, and gives rise to the Christian family, the domestic church, the "first and living cell of society" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11), and the "sanctuary of life" (EV92 and also 6, 88, 94). Therefore, the sacrament is celebrated and lived in the heart of the New Covenant, i.e. the paschal mystery. It is Christ, the Bridegroom in our midst (cf. *Gratissimam Sane*, 18; *Matthew* 9: 15), who is the source of its energies. Therefore, Christian couples and families are neither isolated nor alone.

10. As a community of life and love, both as a natural divine institution and a sacrament, marriage always possesses a source of formidable energies (cf. FC43), no matter what difficulties there may be. Through the witness of the spouses, marriage can become Good News, contributing greatly to the new evangelization, and ensuring the future of society.

What is called *Preparation* in this document includes a broad and thorough process of *education* for married life which must be considered in the totality of its values. This is why if the current psychological and cultural situation is taken into consideration, marriage preparation represents an urgent need. In fact, preparation is educating for the respect and care for life which, in the Sanctuary of families, must become a real and proper culture of human life in all its manifestations and stages for those who are part of the people *of* life and *for* life (cf. EV6, 78, 105). The very reality of marriage is so rich that it first requires a process of sensitization so that the engaged will feel the need to prepare themselves for it. Therefore, pastoral care of the family should direct its best efforts towards qualifying that preparation, also making use of pedagogical and psychological aids that have a sound

orientation.

11. Lastly, because of the present circumstances which were mentioned earlier, the Church's concern has become more urgent with regard to marriage preparation. On the one hand, the recovery of values and some important aspects of marriage and the family can be observed together with the flourishing of joyful testimonies by countless Christian spouses and families. However, on the other hand, the number of persons is increasing who ignore or reject the riches of marriage with a form of mistrust that goes so far as to doubt or reject its goods and values (cf. *GS* 48). Today we see with alarm the spread of a "culture" or a mentality that has lost heart with regard to the family as a necessary value for spouses, children and society. Some attitudes and some measures envisaged in laws do not help the family based on marriage and even deny its rights. As a matter of fact, a secularized atmosphere has been spreading in different parts of the world which *especially* affects young people and subjects them to the pressure of a secularized environment in which one ends up losing the meaning of God and consequently the deep meaning of spousal love and the family as well. Is it not denying the truth of God to shut out the very origin and source of this intimate mystery? (cf. *GS* 22). The negation of God in its different forms often includes the rejection of the institutions and structures which are part of God's plan, and which have been laid down since Creation (cf. *Matthew* 19: 3ss). As a result, everything is interpreted as being the fruit of human will and/or consensus that can change.

12. In countries where the process of de-Christianization is more prevalent, the disturbing crisis of moral values stands out, in particular, the loss of the identity of marriage and the Christian family and hence the meaning of engagement. In addition to these losses, there is a crisis of values within the family itself to which a climate of widespread and even legalized permissiveness contributes. This is greatly encouraged by the communications media that present contrary models as if they were real values. What seems to be a cultural fabric is formed, offered to the new generations as an alternative to the concept of conjugal life and marriage, its sacramental value, and its links with the Church.

Phenomena which confirm these situations and reinforce such a culture are connected with new lifestyles which devalue the human dimensions of the contracting parties with disastrous consequences for the family. These include sexual permissiveness, the decrease in marriages or their continuous postponement, the increase in divorces, the contraceptive mentality, the spread of deliberate abortion, the spiritual void and deep dissatisfaction which contribute to the spread of drugs, alcoholism, violence and suicide among young people and adolescents.

13. Permissive laws contribute toward aggravating the situation with all their force in forging a mentality that harms families (cf. *EV* 59) with regard to divorce, abortion and sexual freedom. Many means of communication spread and help strengthen a climate of permissiveness and form what seems to be a cultural fabric that impedes young people from their normal growth in the Christian faith, their ties with the Church, and their discovery of the sacramental value of marriage and the requirements derived from its celebration. It is true that education for marriage has always been necessary, but a Christian culture made its formulation and assimilation easier. Today this is sometimes more arduous and more urgent.

14. For all these reasons, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* — which brings together the results of the 1980 Synod on the Family — His Holiness John Paul II indicates that "More than ever necessary in our times is preparation of young people for marriage and family life" (*FC* 66). He urges the promotion of "better and more intensive programmes of marriage preparation, in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favour positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages" (*Ibid.*).

16. Alive in the tradition of the Church and deepened by the Magisterium, the Word of God stresses that marriage for Christian spouses implies a response to God's vocation and the acceptance of the mission to

be a sign of God's love for all the members of the human family, by partaking in the definitive covenant of Christ with the Church. Therefore, spouses become cooperators with the Creator and Saviour in the gift of love and life. Hence Christian marriage preparation can be described as a journey of faith which does not end with the celebration of marriage but continues throughout family life. Therefore, our perspective does not close with marriage as an act, at the moment of its celebration, but is on-going. This is why preparation is also a "special opportunity for the engaged to rediscover and deepen the faith received in Baptism and nourished by their Christian upbringing. In this way they come to recognize and freely accept their vocation to follow Christ and to serve the Kingdom of God in the married state" (FC 51).

17. From the experience of many pastors and educators it appears that the engagement period can be a time of mutual discovery but also of a deepening of faith. Therefore, it is a period of special supernatural gifts for personal and interpersonal spirituality. Unfortunately, for many, this period which is intended for human and Christian maturation, can be disturbed by an irresponsible use of sexuality which does not help spousal love to mature and, therefore, some make a kind of apologia for premarital relations.

The successful outcome of the engaged couple's deepening in the faith is also conditioned by their previous formation. On the other hand, the way in which this period is lived will certainly have an influence on their future life as spouses and as a family. From this comes the decisive importance of the help offered to the engaged by their respective families and the whole ecclesial community. This also consists in prayer. **In this regard, the blessing of the engaged which is foreseen in the *De benedictionibus* (nos. 195-214) is significant, in which the signs of this initial commitment are mentioned: the ring, the exchange of gifts and other customs (nos. 209-210). In any case, the human depth of the engagement should be recognized and saved from any commonplace approach.**

Therefore, both the *riches* of marriage and the sacrament of Marriage, and the *decisive* importance of the engagement period—which today is often extended for years (with the various kinds of difficulties that this implies), are reasons which call for the particular solidity of this formation.

19. In the formation process, according to what is also referred to in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, three stages or principal periods must be distinguished in marriage preparation: **remote, proximate and immediate.**

The particular goals of each stage will be achieved if — in addition to the fundamental human qualities and the basic truths of the faith — the engaged will also learn about the principal theological and liturgical content that marks the different phases of preparation. As a result, in the effort to adapt their life to those values, the engaged will acquire the true formation that prepares them for married life.

20. Marriage preparation must be set within the urgent need to evangelize culture — by permeating it to its *roots* (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19) — in everything that concerns the institution of marriage: making the Christian spirit penetrate minds and behaviour, as well as the laws and structures of the community where Christians live (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2105). This preparation, both implicitly and explicitly, constitutes one aspect of evangelization, so much so that it can deepen the strength of the Holy Father's affirmation: "The family is the heart of the New Evangelization" (...). The preparation itself "is a responsibility which first concerns married couples, called to be givers of life, on the basis of an ever greater *awareness of the meaning of procreation* as a unique event which clearly reveals that *human life is a gift received in order then to be given as a gift*" (EV 92).

In addition to religious values, abundant good and values that strengthen solidarity, respect, justice and forgiveness in personal and collective relations flow from marriage as the foundation of the family. In

turn, the family, based on marriage, expects from society "a recognition of its identity and an acceptance of its status as a subject in society" (*Gratissimam Sane*, 17), and therefore to become "the heart of the civilization of love" (*Ibid.*, 13).

II

THE STAGES OR PERIODS OF PREPARATION

21. The stages or periods which will be discussed are not rigidly defined. In fact, they cannot be defined either in relation to the age of the participants, nor in relation to their duration. However, it is useful to be familiar with them as working itineraries and instruments, especially for the content to be transmitted. They are broken up into remote, proximate and immediate preparation.

A. Remote preparation

22. Remote preparation includes infancy, childhood and adolescence and takes place first of all in the family and also in the school and formation groups, as a valid assistance to the family. This is the period in which respect for all authentic human values both in interpersonal and social relations is transmitted and instilled, with all this implies for the formation of character, self-control and self-esteem, the proper use of one's inclinations, and respect for persons of the other sex. Moreover, especially for Christians, a solid spiritual and catechetical formation is also required (cf. *FC* 66).

23. In the Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane*, John Paul II mentions two fundamental truths in the task of education: "first, that man is called to live in truth and love; and second, that everyone finds fulfillment through the sincere gift of self" (n. 16). Children's education thus begins before birth in the atmosphere in which the new life is awaited and welcomed, especially through the mother's loving dialogue with her child (cf. *Ibid.*, 16). This continues in childhood since education is "before all else a reciprocal offering on the part of both parents: together they communicate their own mature humanity to the newborn child" (*Ibid.*). "In giving origin to a new life, parents recognize that the child, as the fruit of their mutual gift of love, is, in turn, a gift for both of them, a gift which flows from them" (*EV* 92).

In its integral sense, which implies the transmission and basic growth of human and Christian values, Christian education — as the Second Vatican Council affirms — "not only develops the maturity of the human person ..., but is especially directed towards ensuring that those who have been baptized, as they are gradually introduced to a knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become daily more appreciative of the gift of faith which they have received... They should be trained to live their own lives in the new self, justified and sanctified through the truth" (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 2).

24. In this period, a faithful and courageous education in chastity and love as self-giving must not be lacking. Chastity is not a mortification of love but rather a condition for real love. In fact, if the vocation to married love is a vocation to self-giving in marriage, one must succeed in possessing oneself in order to be able to truly give oneself.

In this regard the sexual education received from parents in the first years of childhood and adolescence is important, as has been indicated in the document of this Pontifical Council for the Family mentioned earlier in n. 10.

25. In this stage of remote preparation some specific objectives should be achieved. Without pretending to make a complete list of them, as an indication it is noted that above all this preparation should attain the goal whereby every member of the faithful called to marriage will understand completely that, in the light

of God's love, human love takes on a central role in Christian ethics. In fact, as a vocation and mission, human life is called to the love that has its source and end in God, "without excluding the possibility of the total gift of self to God in the vocation to the priestly or religious life" (FC 66). In this sense, it should be recalled that even when remote preparation deals more with doctrinal content of an anthropological nature, it is to be placed in the perspective of marriage in which human love becomes a sharing, as well as a sign, of the love between Christ and the Church. Therefore, married love makes present among mankind the same divine love made visible in the redemption. 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: a faith that involves the communion of Grace and love with the Risen Christ.

26. Remote preparation will have achieved its main goals if it succeeds in instilling the essentials for acquiring more and more the parameters of a right judgment regarding the hierarchy of values needed in choosing the best that society has to offer, according to St. Paul's advice: "...test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 *Thessalonians* 5: 19). It should not be forgotten that, through the grace of God, love is also cherished, strengthened and intensified through the necessary values connected with giving, sacrifice, renunciation and self-denial. In this stage of formation, pastoral help should already be directed toward making moral behaviour be supported by faith. The example of parents, which becomes a real *witness* for those who will marry in the future, provides stimulus, support and consistency to this kind of *Christian lifestyle*.

27. This preparation will not lose sight of the importance of helping young people acquire a critical ability with regard to their surroundings, and the Christian courage of those who know how to be in the world without belonging to it. This is what we read in the *Letter to Diognetus*, a venerable and certainly authentic document from the early Christian era: "Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind by either country, speech, or customs...the whole tenor of their way of living stamps it as worthy of admiration and admittedly extraordinary... They marry like all others and beget children; but they do not expose their offspring. Their table they spread for all, but not their bed. They find themselves *in the flesh*, but do not live *according to the flesh*" (V, 1, 4, 6, 7, 8). Formation should arrive at a mentality and personality capable of not being led astray by ideas contrary to the unity and stability of marriage, thus able to react against the structures of the so-called *social sin* that "With greater or lesser violence, with greater or lesser harm, every sin has repercussions on the entire ecclesial body and the whole human family" (Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 16). In the face of these sinful influences and so many social pressures, a critical conscience must be instilled.

28. A *Christian lifestyle*, witnessed to by Christian families, is in itself a form of evangelization and the very foundation of remote preparation. In fact, another goal of this stage is the presentation of the parents' educational mission. It is in the family, the domestic church, that Christian parents are the first witnesses and educators of the children both in the growth of "faith, hope and charity", and in each child discovering his or her own vocation. "Parents are *the first and most important educators* of their own children, and they also possess a *fundamental competence* in this area: they are *educators because they are parents*" (GS 16). For this purpose parents need suitable and adequate assistance.

29. Among the types of assistance, the parish can be listed as the first place of Christian ecclesial formation. It is there that a style of living together as a *community* is learned (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 42). Moreover, the school, other educational institutions, movements, groups, Catholic associations and, of course, associations of Christian families must not be overlooked.

Of particular importance in the educational processes of young people are the means of mass communication which ought to aid the family's mission in society in a positive way and not make it difficult.

30. This educational process must also be taken to heart by catechists, animators of the pastoral care of youth and vocations and, above all, pastors who will take advantage of homilies during liturgical celebrations and other forms of evangelization, personal meetings, and ways of Christian commitment, in order to stress and highlight the points that contribute to a preparation directed toward possible marriage (cf. *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, 14).

31. Therefore, the ways and means must be "invented" for the on-going formation of adolescents in the period preceding engagement which follows the stages of Christian initiation. Exchanging information about the most appropriate experiences in this regard is extremely useful. Families joined together in the parishes, institutions and different forms of association, help create a social atmosphere in which responsible love will be healthy. Wherever it may be corrupted, for example, by pornography, they can react through the family's right. All of this is part of a "human ecology" (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 38).

B. Proximate preparation

32. Proximate preparation takes place during the period of engagement. It consists of specific courses and must be distinguished from immediate preparation which is usually concentrated during the last meetings between the engaged and pastoral workers before the celebration of the sacrament. During proximate preparation, it seems useful to provide the possibility to verify the maturation of the human values pertaining to the relationship of friendship and dialogue that should characterize the engagement. In view of the new state in life as a couple, the opportunity should be offered to deepen the life of faith, especially regarding knowledge about the sacramentality of the Church. This is an important stage of evangelization in which the faith must involve the personal and community dimensions both of the individual engaged persons and their families. In this process, it will also be possible to identify any difficulties they may have in living an authentic Christian life.

33. The period of proximate preparation generally coincides with the period of youth. Therefore it includes everything that pertains to the pastoral care of youth as such which is concerned with the integral growth of the faithful. The pastoral care of youth cannot be separated from the framework of the family as if young people make up a kind of separate and independent "social class". It should reinforce the young people's social sense, first with regard to the members of their own family, and orient their values toward the future family they will have. The young people should have already been helped to discern their vocation through their own personal efforts and with the aid of the community, and above all the pastors. This discernment must take place before any commitment is made to get engaged. When the vocation to marriage is clear, it will be sustained first by grace and then by adequate preparation. The pastoral care of youth should also keep in mind that, because of various kinds of difficulties — such as a "prolonged adolescence" and remaining longer in one's family (a relatively new and troubling phenomenon), young people today tend to put off the commitment to get married for too long.

34. Proximate preparation should be based first of all on a catechesis sustained by listening to the Word of God, interpreted with the guidance of the Magisterium of the Church, in view of an ever greater understanding of the faith and giving witness to it in concrete life. Instruction should be offered in the context of a community of faith between families, especially in the parish, who participate and work in the formation of young people, according to their charismas and roles, and expand their influence to other social groups.

35. The engaged should receive instruction regarding the natural requirements of the interpersonal relationship between a man and a woman in God's plan for marriage and the family: awareness regarding freedom of consent as the foundation of their union, the 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. All of this is aimed at knowing the moral

truth and forming the personal conscience.

Proximate preparation should certainly ascertain whether the engaged have the basic elements of a psychological, pedagogical, legal and medical nature for marriage and family life. However, especially with regard to total self-giving and responsible procreation, the theological and moral formation will have to be given in a particular way. In fact, conjugal love is total, exclusive, faithful and fruitful (cf. *Humanae Vitae*, 9).

Today the scientific basis² of the natural methods for the regulation of fertility are recognized. Knowledge about these methods is useful. When there is just cause, their use must not only be a mere behavioral technique but be inserted into the pedagogy and process of the growth of love (cf. *EV97*). Then the virtue of chastity will lead the spouses to practice periodic continence (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2366-2371).

This preparation should also ensure that Christian engaged persons have correct ideas and a sincere "sentire cum ecclesia" regarding marriage itself, the mutual roles of a woman and a man in a couple, the family and society, sexuality and openness towards others.

36. Young people should also be helped to become aware of any psychological and or emotional shortcomings they may have, especially the inability to open up to others, and any forms of selfishness that can take away from the total commitment of their self-giving. This help will also aid in discovering the potential and the need for human and Christian growth in their life. For this purpose, the persons in charge of marriage preparation should also be concerned with giving solid formation to the moral conscience of the engaged so that they will be prepared for the free and definitive choice of marriage which is expressed in the mutually exchanged consent before the Church in the marriage covenant.

37. During this stage of preparation, frequent meetings will be necessary in an atmosphere of dialogue, friendship and prayer, with the participation of pastors and catechists. They should stress the fact that "The family *celebrates the Gospel of life* through *daily prayer*, both individual prayer and family prayer. The family prays in order to glorify and give thanks to God for the gift of life, and implores his light and strength in order to face times of difficulty and suffering without losing hope" (*EV93*). Moreover, Christian married couples who are apostolically committed, in a vision of sound Christian optimism, can contribute to shedding greater light on Christian life in the context of the vocation to marriage and in the complementarity of all the vocations.

38. In line with the sound pedagogical principles of a gradual and comprehensive personal growth, proximate preparation must not neglect formation for the social and ecclesial tasks proper to those who will have new families as a result of their marriage. Family intimacy should not be conceived as being closed in on itself, but rather as a capacity to interiorize the human and Christian riches inherent in married life in view of an ever greater giving to others. Therefore, in an open concept of the family, married and family life requires the spouses to recognize themselves as subjects having rights but also duties towards society and the Church. In this regard, it will be very useful to encourage reading and reflecting on the following documents of the Church which are a rich and encouraging source of human and Christian wisdom: *Familiaris Consortio*, the Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane*, the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, *Evangelium Vitae*, and others.

39. The proximate preparation of young people should make them understand that the commitment they take on through the exchange of their consent "before the Church" makes it necessary for them to begin a path of reciprocal fidelity in the engagement period. If necessary, any practices to the contrary must be abandoned. This human commitment will be enhanced by the specific gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to the engaged who invoke him.

40. Since Christian love is purified, perfected and elevated by Christ's love for the Church (cf. *GS* 49), the engaged should imitate this model and develop their awareness of self-giving which is always connected with the mutual respect and self-denial that help this love grow. Reciprocal self-giving thus implies more and more the exchange of spiritual gifts and moral support in order to make love and responsibility increase. "The indissolubility of marriage flows in the first place from the very essence of that gift: *the gift of one person to another person*. This reciprocal giving of self reveals the *spousal nature of love*" (*Gratissimam Sane*, 11).

41. Spousal spirituality, by involving human experience which is never separated from moral life, has its roots in Baptism and Confirmation. Preparation of the engaged should therefore include regaining the dynamism of the sacraments, with a special role of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. The sacrament of Reconciliation glorifies divine mercy toward human misery and makes the vitality of Baptism and the dynamism of Confirmation grow. From this the pedagogy of redeemed love is strengthened which lets the greatness of God's mercy be discovered before the drama of man, created by God and wonderfully redeemed. By celebrating the memory of Christ's giving to the Church, the Eucharist develops the affective love proper to marriage in daily giving to one's spouse and children, without forgetting and overlooking that "the celebration which gives meaning to every other form of prayer and worship is found in *the family's actual daily life together*, if it is a life of love and self-giving" (*EV*93).

42. For this kind of multifaceted and harmonious preparation, the persons who will be in charge will have to be identified and given adequate formation. It would be useful to create a group, on different levels, of pastoral workers who are aware of being sent by the Church. This group should be composed of Christian married couples in particular, and include experts possibly in medicine, law, psychology, with a priest who will prepare them for the roles they will play.

43. The pastoral workers and persons in charge must have a solid doctrinal preparation and unquestionable fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church so that they will be able to transmit the truths of the faith and the responsibilities connected with marriage with sufficient in-depth knowledge and life witness. It is quite obvious that these pastoral workers, as educators, will also have to be capable of welcoming the engaged, whatever their social and culture extraction, intellectual formation and concrete capacities may be. Moreover, their faithful life witness and joyful giving are indispensable conditions for carrying out their task. Based on their own experiences in life and human problems, they can offer some starting points for enlightening the engaged with Christian wisdom.

44. The above implies the need for an adequate formation programme for the pastoral workers. The formation leaders' preparation should prepare them to present the fundamental guidelines of marriage preparation which we have spoken about with clear adherence to the Church's Magisterium, a suitable methodology and pastoral sensitivity, and also enable them to offer their specific contribution, according to their own expertise, to the immediate preparation (nos. 50-59). The pastoral workers ought to receive their formation in special Pastoral Institutes and be carefully chosen by the Bishop.

45. The final result of this period of proximate preparation should be a clear awareness of the essential

characteristics of Christian marriage: unity, fidelity, indissolubility, fruitfulness; the conscience of faith regarding the priority of the sacramental Grace which associates the spouses, as subjects and ministers of the sacrament, to the love of Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church; the willingness to carry out the mission proper to families in the educational, social and ecclesial areas.

46. As *Familiaris Consortio* notes, the formative journey of young engaged persons should therefore include: deepening of personal faith and the rediscovery of the value of the sacraments and the experience of prayer. Specific preparation for life as a couple "will present marriage as an interpersonal relationship of a man and a woman that has to be continually developed, and it will encourage those concerned to study the nature of conjugal sexuality and responsible parenthood, with the essential medical and biological knowledge connected with it. It will also acquaint those concerned with correct methods for the education of children, and will assist them in gaining the basic requisites for well-ordered family life" (*FC* 66); "preparation for the family apostolate, for fraternal solidarity and collaboration with other families, for active membership in groups, associations, movements and undertakings set up for the human and Christian benefit of the family" (*Ibid.*).

Moreover, the engaged should be helped beforehand to learn how to preserve and cultivate married love later, interpersonal, marital communication, the virtues and difficulties of conjugal life, and how to overcome the inevitable conjugal "crises".

47. However, the center of this preparation must be a reflection in the faith on the sacrament of Marriage through the Word of God and the guidance of the Magisterium. The engaged should be made aware that to become "una caro" (*Matthew* 19:6) in Christ, through the Spirit in Christian marriage, means imprinting a new form of baptismal life on their existence. Through the sacrament, their love will become a concrete expression of Christ's love for his Church (cf. *LG* 11). In the light of the sacramentality, the married acts themselves, responsible procreation, educational activity, the communion of life, and the apostolic and missionary spirit connected with the life of Christian spouses are to be considered valid moments of Christian experience. Although still not in a sacramental way, Christ sustains and accompanies the journey of grace and growth of the engaged toward the participation in his mystery of union with the Church.

48. With regard to a possible Directory that will bring together the best experiences with marriage preparation, it seems useful to recall what the Holy Father John Paul II stated in his concluding Discourse to the General Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family held from September 30-October 5, 1991: "It is essential that the time and care necessary should be devoted to *doctrinal* preparation. The security of the content must be the centre 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. Questions concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage, and all that regards the meaning of the union and of procreation in married life and its specific act, must be treated faithfully and accurately, according to the clear teaching of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (cf. nn. 11-12). This is equally true for everything that pertains to the gift of life which parents must accept responsibly and joyfully as the Lord's collaborators.

The courses should not only emphasize what concerns the mature and vigilant freedom of those who want to contract marriage, but also their own mission as parents, the first educators of their children and their first evangelizers".

With deep satisfaction, this Pontifical Council observes that the tendency is growing towards greater commitment and awareness of the importance and dignity of the engagement period. Similarly, it urges that the specific courses will not be so brief as to reduce them to a mere formality. On the contrary, they should provide sufficient time for a good, clear presentation of the fundamental subjects indicated

earlier.3

The course can be carried out in the individual parishes, if there are enough engaged persons and well-prepared collaborators, in the Episcopal or forane Vicariats, or in parish coordinating structures. Sometimes they can be given by persons in charge of family movements, associations or apostolic groups guided by a competent priest. This is an area which should be coordinated by a *diocesan organism* that works on behalf of the Bishop. Without neglecting the various aspects of psychology, medicine and other human sciences, the content should be *centred* on the *natural and Christian doctrine of marriage*.

49. In proximate preparation, especially today, the engaged must be given formation and strengthened in the values concerning the defense of human life. Particularly in view of the fact that they will become the domestic church and "Sanctuary of life" (EV92-92), they will become part in a new way of the "people of life and for life" (EV6, 101). The contraceptive mentality which is prevalent today in so many places, and the widespread, permissive laws with all they imply in terms of contempt for life from the moment of conception to death, constitute a series of multiple attacks to which the family is exposed and wounded in the most intimate part of its mission, and which impede its development according to the requirements of authentic human growth (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 39). Therefore, today more than before, formation is needed of the minds and hearts of the members of new families not to conform to the prevailing mentality. In this way, through their own new family life, one day they will be able to contribute towards creating and developing the culture of life by respecting and welcoming new lives in their love, as the testimony and expression of the proclamation, celebration and service to every life (cf. EV83-84, 86, 93).

C. Immediate preparation

50. If a suitable itinerary and specific courses have been followed and have worked well during the period of proximate formation (cf. n. 32ss.), the aims of immediate preparation could consist of the following:

- a) A synthesis of the previous preparation, especially its doctrinal, moral and spiritual content, thus filling in eventual gaps in basic formation;
- b) Experiences of prayer (retreats, spiritual exercises for the engaged) in which the encounter with the Lord can make them discover the depth and beauty of the supernatural life;
- c) A suitable liturgical preparation which also envisages the active participation of the engaged, with special attention to the Sacrament of Reconciliation;
- d) Good use the canonical talks that are envisaged with the parish priest, so that everyone can get to know one another better.

These ends will be achieved through special meetings of a more intensive nature.

51. The pastoral usefulness and positive experience of marriage preparation courses show that they can be dispensed with *only for proportionally serious reasons*. Therefore, if couples present themselves with the urgency of celebrating their marriage soon and without proximate preparation, the parish priest and his co-workers will have the responsibility of offering them some occasions to make up an adequate knowledge of the doctrinal, moral and sacramental aspects set out in the proximate preparation for marriage and finally include them in the phase of immediate preparation.

This is required because of the necessity to personalize the formative itineraries in a real way, to take every occasion to deepen the meaning of what takes place in the sacrament, but without rejecting those

who show they are well disposed towards the faith and the sacrament just because they were absent from some stages of preparation.

52. The immediate preparation for the sacrament of Marriage must find suitable occasions to introduce the engaged couple to the rite of marriage. As well as deepening the Christian doctrine on marriage and the family with particular attention to moral duties, in this preparation the engaged should be guided to take an informed and active part in the marriage celebration, and understand the meaning of the liturgical actions and texts.

53. This preparation for the sacrament of Marriage should be the culmination of a catechesis which helps engaged Christians to retrace their sacramental journey intelligently. It is important that they know that they are uniting themselves in marriage as persons baptized in Christ, and that they should behave in conformity to the Holy Spirit in their family life. Thus it is right that future spouses dispose themselves for the celebration of marriage so that it may be valid, worthy and fruitful, by receiving the sacrament of Penance (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1622). The liturgical preparation for the sacrament of Marriage should make the most of the elements of ritual that are currently available. 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.

54. In order to make the Church visible in the diocese and articulate this in the parishes, it is understandable that all the canonical-pastoral preparation for marriage should culminate in the parish and diocese. Thus it is more in conformity with the ecclesial meaning of the sacrament for the marriage to be celebrated normally in the church of the parish community to which the spouses belong (*CIC*, Canon 1115).

It is desirable that the whole parish community take part in this celebration, around the families and friends of the engaged. Provisions for this should be made in various dioceses, taking local situations into account, but also decisively favoring truly ecclesial pastoral action.

55. Those who will take an active part in the liturgy should be invited also to prepare themselves properly for the sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. It should be explained to the witnesses that they are not only the guarantors of a juridical act, but also representatives of the Christian community which, through them, participates in a sacramental act relevant to it, because a new family is a cell of the Church. On account of its essentially social character, marriage calls for the participation of society and this is to be expressed through the presence of the witnesses.

56. The family is the most appropriate place where, according to the decision of the local Ordinary and through the common priesthood, parents can carry out sacred acts and administer some sacramentals, such as for example in the context of Christian Initiation, in the joyful or sad events of daily life, in saying grace at meals. A special place should be given to family prayer. This creates an atmosphere of faith within the home and will be the means of living out a richer fatherhood and motherhood for the children, teaching them to pray and introducing them to the gradual discovery of the mystery of God and personal dialogue with him. Parents should remember that they carry out their mission of proclaiming the Gospel of life through educating their children (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, 92).

57. Immediate preparation is a propitious occasion to begin the on-going pastoral care of marriage and the family. From this point of view, the preparation needs to be carried out so that spouses know their mission in the Church. Here they can be helped by the richness offered by specific family movements, so as to cultivate a spirituality of marriage and the family and the way they fulfil their tasks within the family, the Church and society.

58. The preparation of the engaged should be accompanied by sincere and deep devotion to Mary, Mother of the Church, the *Queen of the Family*. The engaged themselves should be taught to recognize that Mary's presence is as active in the family, the Domestic Church, as it is in the wider Church. Likewise they should be taught to imitate Mary in her virtues. Thus the Holy Family, the home of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, makes the engaged discover "how sweet and irreplaceable education in the family is" (Paul VI, *Discourse at Nazareth*, January 5, 1964).

59. A gift and enrichment for the whole Church will be sharing with others whatever is creatively proposed in various communities to make these proximate and immediate phases of preparation deeper and more adequate.

III

THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

60. Preparation for marriage leads to married life, through the celebration of the sacrament, which is the culmination of the journey of preparation which the spouses have made and the source and origin of their married life. Therefore, the celebration cannot be reduced only to a ceremony, the product of culture and sociological conditioning. Nevertheless, praiseworthy customs that belong to various peoples or ethnic groups can be brought into the celebration (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 77; *Familiaris Consortio*, 67), provided that they express above all the coming together of the ecclesial assembly as a sign of the faith of the Church, which recognizes in the sacrament the presence of the Risen Lord uniting the spouses to the Love of the Trinity.

61. Through diocesan liturgical commissions, the bishops should give precise directions and supervise how these are applied in practice, in order to put into effect, in the celebration of marriage, what is indicated in article 32 of the Constitution on the Liturgy, so that even externally the equality of the faithful may be evident and, further, that any appearance of pomp be avoided. The active participation of those present is to be favoured in every way. Suitable materials should be provided to help them comprehend and savour the richness of the rite.

62. Mindful that where two or three are gathered in the name of Christ (cf. *Matthew* 18:20), there he is present, a restrained style of celebration (which should also continue in the feasting that follows) must not only be an expression of the community of faith, but a motive for praising the Lord. To celebrate getting married in the Lord and before the Church means professing that the gift of grace made to the spouses by the presence and love of Christ and His Spirit calls for a practical response, with a life of worship in spirit and truth, in the Christian family, the "domestic church". Precisely because the celebration is to be understood not only as a legal act but also as a moment in the history of salvation of those being married, and through their common priesthood, for the good of the Church and society, it will be good to help all present to take part actively in the celebration itself.

63. It will be the duty of whoever presides to make use of the possibilities which the ritual itself offers, especially in its second typical edition promulgated in 1991 by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, so as to highlight the role of the ministers of the sacrament who, for Christians of the Latin Rite, are the spouses themselves, as well as the sacramental value of the community celebration. With the formula of the exchange of consent, the spouses will always remember the personal, ecclesial and social aspect gained from this consent for all their life, as a gift of one to the other even unto death.⁴

The Eastern Rite reserves the role of the minister of marriage to the assisting priest. In any case,

according to the law of the Church, the presence of a priest or a duly authorized minister is necessary for the validity of the matrimonial union and clearly sets forth the public and social meaning of the spousal covenant, both for the Church and for all of society.

64. Bearing in mind that marriage is normally celebrated during Mass (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 78; *Familiaris Consortio*, 57), when dealing with a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic, the celebration will take place according to the special liturgical and canonical provisions (cf. *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium - OCM*, 79-117).

65. The celebration will lead to more active participation if apposite introductions to the meaning of the liturgical texts and the content of the prayers are used. The simplicity of these introductions should favour recollection and understanding the importance of the celebration (cf. *OCM*, 52, 59, 87, 93, 99), and avoid turning the celebration into a didactic moment.

66. The celebrant who presides and presents the ecclesial meaning of the marriage commitment for the assembly, will try to involve those who are being married, together with their relatives and the witnesses, so that they can comprehend the structure of the rite. This applies especially to the most characteristic parts, such as: the Word of God, the consent exchanged and ratified, the blessing of the signs that symbolize marriage (rings etc.), the solemn blessing of the spouses, the reference to the spouses in the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer. "The various liturgies abound in prayers of blessing and epiclesis asking God's grace and blessing on the new couple, especially the bride." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1624). It will also be necessary to explain the gesture of imposing hands on the "subject ministers" of the sacrament. Standing, the sign of peace or other rites determined by the competent authorities, etc. will be appropriately brought to the attention of all present.

67. To achieve a style of celebration at once restrained and noble, whoever presides should be helped by the presence of assistant ministers, of people who will animate and sustain the singing of the faithful, lead the responses and proclaim the Word of God. With particular concrete attention to those who are being married and their situation, and absolutely avoiding any preference for persons, the celebrant should adapt himself to the truth of the signs used in the liturgical action. Thus, in welcoming and greeting those about to be married, their parents if present, the witnesses and others who attend, he will be the living spokesman of the community that welcomes those who are being married.

68. The proclamation of the Word of God is to be made by suitable and prepared lectors. They can be chosen from among those present, especially witnesses, family members, friends, but it does not seem appropriate for the bride and groom to be lectors. In fact, they are the primary receivers of the proclaimed Word of God. However, the choice of readings can be made in accord with the engaged couple during the phase of immediate preparation. In this way they will more easily bear the Word of God in mind so as to put it into practice.

69. The homily, which is obligatory, will have as its centre the presentation of the "great mystery" being celebrated before God, the Church and society. "Saint Paul uses a concise phrase in reference to family life: it is a *great mystery* (*Ephesians* 5: 32)". (*Gratissimam Sane*, 19). Beginning with the proclaimed texts of the Word of God and/or the liturgical prayers, light should focus on the sacrament, hence the consequences for the life of the spouses and their families should be illustrated. Superfluous personal references to the spouses should be avoided.

70. If the rite takes place during the celebration of Mass, the gifts may be brought to the altar by the spouses themselves. In any case, the well-prepared prayer of the faithful should be neither too long nor lacking in concrete content. As may be pastorally appropriate, Holy Communion can be given under both Species.

71. Care should be taken that the details of the marriage celebration are characterized by a restrained, simple and authentic style. The festive tone should not be disturbed by excessive display.

72. The solemn blessing of the spouses recalls that the gift of the Holy Spirit is invoked in the sacrament of Marriage. Through this gift, the married couple are made more constant in their mutual concord and spiritually sustained in carrying out their mission, also in the difficulties of their future life. In the framework of this celebration, it will certainly be appropriate to present the Holy Family of Nazareth as a model of life for Christian spouses.

73. With regard to the periods of remote, proximate and immediate preparation, while it is good to bring together actual experiences in order to effect a major change of mentality and practices associated with the celebration, pastoral workers should take care to follow and make comprehensible what is already set down and established by the liturgical rite. It is obvious that such understanding will depend on the whole process of preparation and the community's level of Christian maturity.

Vatican City State, May 13, 1996
Alfonso Cardinal López Trujillo
President of the Pontifical Council
for the Family



Appendix II

The Catechism and the Sacrament of Matrimony

THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

1601 "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."⁸⁴

I. MARRIAGE IN GOD'S PLAN

1602 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."⁸⁵ Scripture speaks throughout of marriage and its "mystery," its institution and the meaning God has given it, its origin and its end, its various realizations throughout the history of salvation, the difficulties arising from sin and its renewal "in the Lord" in the New Covenant of Christ and the Church.⁸⁶

Marriage in the order of creation

1603 "The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws. . . . God himself is the author of marriage."⁸⁷ The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator. Marriage is not a purely human institution despite the many variations it may have undergone through the centuries in different cultures, social structures, and spiritual attitudes. These differences should not cause us to forget its common and permanent characteristics. Although the dignity of this institution is not transparent everywhere with the same clarity,⁸⁸ some sense of the greatness of the matrimonial union exists in all cultures. "The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life."⁸⁹

1604 God who created man out of love also calls him to love the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love.⁹⁰ Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes. And this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation: "And God blessed them, and God said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'"⁹¹

1605 Holy Scripture affirms that man and woman were created for one another: "It is not good that the man should be alone."⁹² The woman, "flesh of his flesh," his equal, his nearest in all things, is given to him by God as a "helpmate"; she thus represents God from whom comes our help.⁹³ "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."⁹⁴ The Lord himself shows that this signifies an unbreakable union of their two lives by recalling what the plan of the Creator had been "in the beginning": "So they are no longer two, but one flesh."⁹⁵

Marriage under the regime of sin

1606 Every man experiences evil around him and within himself. This experience makes itself felt in the relationships between man and woman. Their union has always been threatened by discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy, and conflicts that can escalate into hatred and separation. This disorder can manifest itself more or less acutely, and can be more or less overcome according to the circumstances

of cultures, eras, and individuals, but it does seem to have a universal character.

1607 According to faith the disorder 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. Their relations were distorted by mutual recriminations;⁹⁶ their mutual attraction, the Creator's own gift, changed into a relationship of domination and lust;⁹⁷ and the beautiful vocation of man and woman to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth was burdened by the pain of childbirth and the toil of work.⁹⁸

1608 Nevertheless, the order of creation persists, though seriously disturbed. To heal the wounds of sin, man and woman need the help of the grace that God in his infinite mercy never refuses them.⁹⁹ Without his help man and woman cannot achieve the union of their lives for which God created them "in the beginning."

Marriage under the pedagogy of the Law

1609 In his mercy God has not forsaken sinful man. The punishments consequent upon sin, "pain in childbearing" and toil "in the sweat of your brow,"¹⁰⁰ also embody remedies that limit the damaging effects of sin. After the fall, marriage helps to overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one's own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving.

1610 Moral conscience concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage developed under the pedagogy of the old law. In the Old Testament the polygamy of patriarchs and kings is not yet explicitly rejected. Nevertheless, the law given to Moses aims at protecting the wife from arbitrary domination by the husband, even though according to the Lord's words it still carries traces of man's "hardness of heart" which was the reason Moses permitted men to divorce their wives.¹⁰¹

1611 Seeing God's covenant with Israel in the image of exclusive and faithful married love, the prophets prepared the Chosen People's conscience for a deepened understanding of the unity and indissolubility of marriage.¹⁰² The books of *Ruth* and *Tobit* bear moving witness to an elevated sense of marriage and to the fidelity and tenderness of spouses. Tradition has always seen in the *Song of Solomon* a unique expression of human love, insofar as it is a reflection of God's love - a love "strong as death" that "many waters cannot quench."¹⁰³

Marriage in the Lord

1612 The nuptial covenant between God and his people Israel had prepared the way for the new and everlasting covenant in which the Son of God, by becoming incarnate and giving his life, has united to himself in a certain way all mankind saved by him, thus preparing for "the wedding-feast of the Lamb."¹⁰⁴

1613 On the threshold of his public life Jesus performs his first sign - at his mother's request - during a wedding feast.¹⁰⁵ The Church attaches great importance to Jesus' presence at the wedding at Cana. She sees in it the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence.

1614 In his preaching Jesus unequivocally taught the original meaning of the union of man and woman as the Creator willed it from the beginning: permission given by Moses to divorce one's wife was a concession to the hardness of hearts.¹⁰⁶ The matrimonial union of man and woman is indissoluble: God himself has determined it "what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder."¹⁰⁷

1615 This unequivocal insistence on the indissolubility of the marriage bond may have left some perplexed and could seem to be a demand impossible to realize. However, Jesus has not placed on spouses a burden impossible to bear, or too heavy - heavier than the Law of Moses.¹⁰⁸ By coming to restore the original order of creation disturbed by sin, he himself gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the Reign of God. It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves, and taking up their crosses that spouses will be able to "receive" the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ.¹⁰⁹ This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life.

1616 This is what the Apostle Paul makes clear when he says: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her," adding at once: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church."¹¹⁰

1617 The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery; it is so to speak the nuptial bath.¹¹¹ which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist. Christian marriage in its turn becomes an efficacious sign, the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church. Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between baptized persons is a true sacrament of the New Covenant..¹¹²

Virginité for the sake of the Kingdom

1618 Christ is the center of all Christian life. The bond with him takes precedence over all other bonds, familial or social.¹¹³ From the very beginning of the Church there have been men and women who have renounced the great good of marriage to follow the Lamb wherever he goes, to be intent on the things of the Lord, to seek to please him, and to go out to meet the Bridegroom who is coming.¹¹⁴ Christ himself has invited certain persons to follow him in this way of life, of which he remains the model:

"For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it."¹¹⁵

1619 Virginité for the sake of the kingdom of heaven is an unfolding of baptismal grace, a powerful sign of the supremacy of the bond with Christ and of the ardent expectation of his return, a sign which also recalls that marriage is a reality of this present age which is passing away.¹¹⁶

1620 Both the sacrament of Matrimony and virginité for the Kingdom of God come from the Lord himself. It is he who gives them meaning and grants them the grace which is indispensable for living them out in conformity with his will.¹¹⁷ Esteem of virginité for the sake of the kingdom¹¹⁸ and the Christian understanding of marriage are inseparable, and they reinforce each other:

Whoever denigrates marriage also diminishes the glory of virginité. Whoever praises it makes virginité more admirable and resplendent. What appears good only in comparison with evil would not be truly good. The most excellent good is something even better than what is admitted to be good.¹¹⁹

II. THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

1621 In the Latin Rite the celebration of marriage between two Catholic faithful normally takes place during Holy Mass, because of the connection of all the sacraments with the Paschal mystery of Christ.¹²⁰

In the Eucharist the memorial of the New Covenant is realized, the New Covenant in which Christ has united himself for ever to the Church, his beloved bride for whom he gave himself up.¹²¹ It is therefore fitting that the spouses should seal their consent to give themselves to each other through the offering of their own lives by uniting it to the offering of Christ for his Church made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice, and by receiving the Eucharist so that, communicating in the same Body and the same Blood of Christ, they may form but "one body" in Christ.¹²²

1622 "Inasmuch as it is a sacramental action of sanctification, the liturgical celebration of marriage . . . must be, per se, valid, worthy, and fruitful."¹²³ It is therefore appropriate for the bride and groom to prepare themselves for the celebration of their marriage by receiving the sacrament of penance.

1623 According to Latin tradition, the spouses as ministers of Christ's grace mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church. In the tradition of the Eastern Churches, the priests (bishops or presbyters) are witnesses to the mutual consent given by the spouses,¹²⁴ but for the validity of the sacrament their blessing is also necessary.¹²⁵

1624 The various liturgies abound in prayers of blessing and epiclesis asking God's grace and blessing on the new couple, especially the bride. In the epiclesis of this sacrament the spouses receive the Holy Spirit as the communion of love of Christ and the Church.¹²⁶ The Holy Spirit is the seal of their covenant, the ever available source of their love and the strength to renew their fidelity.

III. MATRIMONIAL CONSENT

1625 The parties to a marriage covenant are a baptized man and woman, free to contract marriage, who freely express their consent; "to be free" means:

- not being under constraint;
- not impeded by any natural or ecclesiastical law.

1626 The Church holds the exchange of consent between the spouses to be the indispensable element that "makes the marriage."¹²⁷ If consent is lacking there is no marriage.

1627 The consent consists in a "human act by which the partners mutually give themselves to each other": "I take you to be my wife" - "I take you to be my husband."¹²⁸ This consent that binds the spouses to each other finds its fulfillment in the two "becoming one flesh."¹²⁹

1628 The consent must be an act of the will of each of the contracting parties, free of coercion or grave external fear.¹³⁰ No human power can substitute for this consent.¹³¹ If this freedom is lacking the marriage is invalid.

1629 For this reason (or for other reasons that render the marriage null and void) the Church, after an examination of the situation by the competent ecclesiastical tribunal, can declare the nullity of a marriage, i.e., that the marriage never existed.¹³² In this case the contracting parties are free to marry, provided the natural obligations of a previous union are discharged.¹³³

1630 The priest (or deacon) who assists at the celebration of a marriage receives the consent of the spouses in the name of the Church and gives the blessing of the Church. The presence of the Church's minister (and also of the witnesses) visibly expresses the fact that marriage is an ecclesial reality.

1631 This is the reason why the Church normally requires that the faithful contract marriage according to the ecclesiastical form. Several reasons converge to explain this requirement:¹³⁴

- Sacramental marriage is a liturgical act. It is therefore appropriate that it should be celebrated in the public liturgy of the Church;
- Marriage introduces one into an ecclesial order, and creates rights and duties in the Church between the spouses and towards their children;
- Since marriage is a state of life in the Church, certainty about it is necessary (hence the obligation to have witnesses);
- The public character of the consent protects the "I do" once given and helps the spouses remain faithful to it.

1632 So that the "I do" of the spouses may be a free and responsible act and so that the marriage covenant may have solid and lasting human and Christian foundations, preparation for marriage is of prime importance.

The example and teaching given by parents and families remain the special form of this preparation.

The role of pastors and of the Christian community as the "family of God" is indispensable for the transmission of the human and Christian values of marriage and family,¹³⁵ and much more so in our era when many young people experience broken homes which no longer sufficiently assure this initiation:

It is imperative to give suitable and timely instruction to young people, above all in the heart of their own families, about the dignity of married love, its role and its exercise, so that, having learned the value of chastity, they will be able at a suitable age to engage in honorable courtship and enter upon a marriage of their own.¹³⁶

Mixed marriages and disparity of cult

1633 In many countries the situation of a *mixed marriage* (marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic) often arises. It requires particular attention on the part of couples and their pastors. A case of marriage with *disparity of cult* (between a Catholic and a non-baptized person) requires even greater circumspection.

1634 Difference of confession between the spouses does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle for marriage, when they succeed in placing in common what they have received from their respective communities, and learn from each other the way in which each lives in fidelity to Christ. But the difficulties of mixed marriages must not be underestimated. They arise from the fact that the separation of Christians has not yet been overcome. The spouses risk experiencing the tragedy of Christian disunity even in the heart of their own home. Disparity of cult can further aggravate these difficulties. Differences about faith and the very notion of marriage, but also different religious mentalities, can become sources of tension in marriage, especially as regards the education of children. The temptation to religious indifference can then arise.

1635 According to the law in force in the Latin Church, a mixed marriage needs for liceity the *express permission* of ecclesiastical authority.¹³⁷ In case of disparity of cult an *express dispensation* from this impediment is required for the validity of the marriage.¹³⁸ This permission or dispensation presupposes

that both parties know and do not exclude the essential ends and properties of marriage; and furthermore that the Catholic party confirms the obligations, which have been made known to the non-Catholic party, of preserving his or her own faith and ensuring the baptism and education of the children in the Catholic Church.¹³⁹

1636 Through ecumenical dialogue Christian communities in many regions have been able to put into effect a *common pastoral practice for mixed marriages*. Its task is to help such couples live out their particular situation in the light of faith, overcome the tensions between the couple's obligations to each other and towards their ecclesial communities, and encourage the flowering of what is common to them in faith and respect for what separates them.

1637 In marriages with disparity of cult the Catholic spouse has a particular task: "For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband."¹⁴⁰ It is a great joy for the Christian spouse and for the Church if this "consecration" should lead to the free conversion of the other spouse to the Christian faith.¹⁴¹ Sincere married love, the humble and patient practice of the family virtues, and perseverance in prayer can prepare the non-believing spouse to accept the grace of conversion.

IV. THE EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

1638 "From a valid marriage arises a *bond* between the spouses which by its very nature is perpetual and exclusive; furthermore, in a Christian marriage the spouses are strengthened and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state *by a special sacrament*."¹⁴²

The marriage bond

1639 The consent by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself.¹⁴³ From their covenant arises "an institution, confirmed by the divine law, . . . even in the eyes of society."¹⁴⁴ The covenant between the spouses is integrated into God's covenant with man: "Authentic married love is caught up into divine love."¹⁴⁵

1640 Thus *the marriage bond* has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved. This bond, which results from the free human act of the spouses and their consummation of the marriage, is a reality, henceforth irrevocable, and gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God's fidelity. The Church does not have the power to contravene this disposition of divine wisdom.¹⁴⁶

The grace of the sacrament of Matrimony

1641 "By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God."¹⁴⁷ This grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple's love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace they "help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children."¹⁴⁸

1642 *Christ is the source of this grace*. "Just as of old God encountered his people with a covenant of love and fidelity, so our Savior, the spouse of the Church, now encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of Matrimony."¹⁴⁹ Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens, to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ,"¹⁵⁰ and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love. In the joys of their love and family life he gives them here on earth a foretaste of

the wedding feast of the Lamb:

How can I ever express the happiness of a marriage joined by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels, and ratified by the Father? . . . How wonderful the bond between two believers, now one in hope, one in desire, one in discipline, one in the same service! They are both children of one Father and servants of the same Master, undivided in spirit and flesh, truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, one also is the spirit.¹⁵¹

V. THE GOODS AND REQUIREMENTS OF CONJUGAL LOVE

1643 "Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter - appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands *indissolubility* and *faithfulness* in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to *fertility*. In a word it is a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values."¹⁵²

The unity and indissolubility of marriage

1644 The love of the spouses requires, of its very nature, the unity and indissolubility of the spouses' community of persons, which embraces their entire life: "so they are no longer two, but one flesh."¹⁵³ They "are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving."¹⁵⁴ This human communion is confirmed, purified, and completed by communion in Jesus Christ, given through the sacrament of Matrimony. It is deepened by lives of the common faith and by the Eucharist received together.

1645 "The unity of marriage, distinctly recognized by our Lord, is made clear in the equal personal dignity which must be accorded to man and wife in mutual and unreserved affection."¹⁵⁵ *Polygamy* is contrary to conjugal love which is undivided and exclusive.¹⁵⁶

*** The fidelity of conjugal love**

1646 By its very nature conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of the spouses. This is the consequence of the gift of themselves which they make to each other. Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement "until further notice." The "intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children, demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable union between them."¹⁵⁷

1647 The deepest reason is found in the fidelity of God to his covenant, in that of Christ to his Church. Through the sacrament of Matrimony the spouses are enabled to represent this fidelity and witness to it. Through the sacrament, the indissolubility of marriage receives a new and deeper meaning.

1648 It can seem difficult, even impossible, to bind oneself for life to another human being. This makes it all the more important to proclaim the Good News that God loves us with a definitive and irrevocable love, that married couples share in this love, that it supports and sustains them, and that by their own faithfulness they can be witnesses to God's faithful love. Spouses who with God's grace give this witness, often in very difficult conditions, deserve the gratitude and support of the ecclesial community.¹⁵⁸

1649 Yet there are some situations in which living together becomes practically impossible for a variety of reasons. In such cases the Church permits the physical *separation* of the couple and their living apart. The spouses do not cease to be husband and wife before God and so are not free to contract a new union. In this difficult situation, the best solution would be, if possible, reconciliation. The Christian community is called to help these persons live out their situation in a Christian manner and in fidelity to their marriage bond which remains indissoluble.¹⁵⁹

1650 Today there are numerous Catholics in many countries who have recourse to civil *divorce* and contract new civil unions. In fidelity to the words of Jesus Christ - "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery"¹⁶⁰ the Church maintains that a new union cannot be recognized as valid, if the first marriage was. If the divorced are remarried civilly, they find themselves in a situation that objectively contravenes God's law. Consequently, they cannot receive Eucharistic communion as long as this situation persists. For the same reason, they cannot exercise certain ecclesial responsibilities. Reconciliation through the sacrament of Penance can be granted only to those who have repented for having violated the sign of the covenant and of fidelity to Christ, and who are committed to living in complete continence.

1651 Toward 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:

They should be encouraged to listen to the Word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts for justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace.¹⁶¹

The openness to fertility

1652 "By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory."¹⁶²

Children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute greatly to the good of the parents themselves. God himself said: "It is not good that man should be alone," and "from the beginning [he] made them male and female"; wishing to associate them in a special way in his own creative work, God blessed man and woman with the words: "Be fruitful and multiply." Hence, true married love and the whole structure of family life which results from it, without diminishment of the other ends of marriage, are directed to disposing the spouses to cooperate valiantly with the love of the Creator and Savior, who through them will increase and enrich his family from day to day.¹⁶³

1653 The fruitfulness of conjugal love extends to the fruits of the moral, spiritual, and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children by education. Parents are the principal and first educators of their children.¹⁶⁴ In this sense the fundamental task of marriage and family is to be at the service of life.¹⁶⁵

1654 Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice.

VI. THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

1655 Christ chose to be born and grow up in the bosom of the holy family of Joseph and Mary. The Church is nothing other than "the family of God." From the beginning, the core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers "together with all [their] household."¹⁶⁶ When they were converted, they desired that "their whole household" should also be saved.¹⁶⁷ These families who became believers were islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world.

1656 In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*.¹⁶⁸ 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."¹⁶⁹

1657 It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the *priesthood of the baptized* in a privileged way "by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity."¹⁷⁰ Thus the home is the first school of Christian life and "a school for human enrichment."¹⁷¹ Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous - even repeated - forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life.

1658 We must also remember the great number of *single persons* who, because of the particular circumstances in which they have to live - often not of their choosing - are especially close to Jesus' heart and therefore deserve the special affection and active solicitude of the Church, especially of pastors. Many remain *without a human family* often due to conditions of poverty. Some live their situation in the spirit of the Beatitudes, serving God and neighbor in exemplary fashion. The doors of homes, the "domestic churches," and of the great family which is the Church must be open to all of them. "No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who 'labor and are heavy laden.'"¹⁷²

IN BRIEF

1659 St. Paul said: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church . . . This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church" (*Eph 5:25, 32*).

1660 The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament (cf. CIC, can. 1055 § 1; cf. *GS 48 § 1*).

1661 The sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life (cf. Council of Trent: DS 1799).

1662 Marriage is based on the consent of the contracting parties, that is, on their will to give themselves, each to the other, mutually and definitively, in order to live a covenant of faithful and fruitful love.

1663 Since marriage establishes the couple in a public state of life in the Church, it is fitting that its celebration be public, in the framework of a liturgical celebration, before the priest (or a witness authorized by the Church), the witnesses, and the assembly of the faithful.

1664 Unity, indissolubility, and openness to fertility are essential to marriage. Polygamy is incompatible with the unity of marriage; divorce separates what God has joined together; the refusal of fertility turns married life away from its "supreme gift," the child (*GS* 50 § 1).

1665 The remarriage of persons divorced from a living, lawful spouse contravenes the plan and law of God as taught by Christ. They are not separated from the Church, but they cannot receive Eucharistic communion. They will lead Christian lives especially by educating their children in the faith.

1666 The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family home is rightly called "the domestic church," a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity.

84 CIC, can. 1055 § 1; cf. *GS* 48 § 1.

85 *Rev* 19:7, 9; cf. *Gen* 1:26-27.

86 *1 Cor* 7:39; cf. *Eph* 5:31-32.

87 *GS* 48 § 1.

88 Cf. *GS* 47 § 2.

89 *GS* 47 § 1.

90 Cf. *Gen* 1:27; *1 Jn* 4:8, 16.

91 *Gen* 1:28; cf. 1:31.

92 *Gen* 2:18.

93 Cf. *Gen* 2:18-25.

94 *Gen* 2:24.

95 *Mt* 19:6.

96 Cf. *Gen* 3:12.

97 Cf. *Gen* 2:22; 3:16b.

98 Cf. *Gen* 1:28; 3:16-19.

99 Cf. *Gen* 3:21.

100 *Gen* 3:16, 19.

101 Cf. *Mt* 19:8; *Deut* 24:1.

102 Cf. *Hos* 1-3; *Isa* 54; 62; *Jer* 2-3; 31; *Ezek* 16; 23; *Mal* 2:13-17.

103 *Song* 8:6-7.

104 *Rev* 19:7,9; cf. *GS* 22.

105 Cf. *Jn* 2:1-11.

106 Cf. *Mt* 19:8.

107 *Mt* 19:6.

108 Cf. *Mk* 8:34; *Mt* 11:29-30.

109 Cf. *Mt* 19:11.

110 *Eph* 5:25-26,31-32; Cf. *Gen* 2:24.

111 Cf. *Eph* 5:26-27.

112 Cf. DS 1800; CIC, Can. 1055 § 2.

113 Cf. *Lk* 14:26; *Mk* 10:28-31.

114 Cf. *Rev* 14:4; *1 Cor* 7:32; *Mt* 2:56.

115 *Mt* 19:12.

116 Cf. *Mk* 12:25; *1 Cor* 7:31.

117 Cf. *Mt* 19:3-12.

118 Cf. *LG* 42; PC 12; OT 10.

119 St. John Chrysostom, *De virg.* 10,1:PG 48,540; Cf. John Paul II, *FC* 16.

120 Cf. *SC* 61.

121 Cf. *LG* 6.

122 Cf. *1 Cor* 10:17.
123 *FC* 67.
124 Cf. CCEO, can. 817.
125 Cf. CCEO, can. 828. 126 Cf. *Eph* 5:32.
127 CIC, can. 1057 § 1.
128 *GS* 48 § 1; OCM 45; cf. CIC, can. 1057 § 2.
129 *Gen* 2:24; cf. *Mt* 10:8; *Eph* 5:31.
130 Cf. CIC, can. 1103.
131 Cf. CIC, can. 1057 § 1.
132 Cf. CIC, cann. 1095-1107.
133 Cf. CIC, can. 1071.
134 Cf. Council of Trent: DS 1813-1816; CIC, can. 1108.
135 Cf. CIC, can. 1063.
136 *GS* 49 § 3.
137 Cf. CIC, can. 1124.
138 Cf. CIC, can. 1086.
139 Cf. CIC, can. 1125.
140 *1 Cor* 7:14.
141 Cf. *1 Cor* 7:16.
142 Cf. CIC, can. 1134.
143 Cf. *Mk* 10:9.
144 *GS* 48 § 1.
145 *GS* 48 § 2.
146 Cf. CIC, can. 1141.
147 *LG* 11 § 2.
148 *LG* 11 § 2; cf. *LG* 41.
149 *GS* 48 § 2.
150 *Eph* 5:21; cf. *Gal* 6:2.
151 Tertullian, *Ad uxorem*. 2,8,6-7:PL 1,1412-1413; cf. *FC* 13.
152 *FC* 13.
153 *Mt* 19:6; cf. *Gen* 2:24.
154 *FC* 19.
155 *GS* 49 § 2.
156 Cf. *FC* 19.
157 *GS* 48 § 1.
158 Cf. *FC* 20.
159 Cf. *FC* 83; CIC, cann. 1151-1155.
160 *Mk* 10:11-12.
161 *FC* 84.
162 *GS* 48 § 1; 50.
163 *GS* 50 § 1; cf. *Gen* 2:18; *Mt* 19:4; *Gen* 1:28.
164 Cf. *GE* 3.
165 Cf. *FC* 28.
166 Cf. *Acts* 18:8.
167 Cf. *Acts* 16:31; *Acts* 11:14.
168 *LG* 11; cf. *FC* 21.
169 *LG* 11.
170 *LG* 10.
171 *GS* 52 § 1.
172 *FC* 85; cf. *Mt* 11:28.



Foot Notes
