

Archdiocesan Norms and Guidelines for Marriage

Introduction:

God's hand has inscribed the vocation to marriage in the very nature of man and woman (*see Gn 1:27-28, 2:21-24*). Marriage is a special blessing for Christians because of the grace of Christ, but marriage is also a natural blessing and gift for everyone in all times and cultures. It is a source of blessing to couples, to their families and to society and includes the wondrous gift of co-creating human life. Indeed, as Blessed Pope John Paul II never tired of reminding us, the future of humanity depends on marriage and family (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 86).¹

It is therefore crucial that pastors and others who teach and form disciples in the Church persevere with great fidelity in passing on the Church's teaching on marriage. They must strive diligently to ensure that engaged couples discern well their vocational call and are properly formed so as to be ready to assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity.

Christian marriage is addressed in the Code of Canon Law, canons 1055 – 1165, and norms for the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage are found in the liturgical books. The following norms and guidelines have been established for marriages celebrated within the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, as well as for all marriage preparation conducted within the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas even if the wedding celebration takes place elsewhere. These norms and guidelines are intended to assist members of the Church who are responsible for preparing engaged couples, as well as the engaged couples themselves, so that marriages will be validly, licitly and joyfully celebrated. Additionally, it is hoped that these norms and guidelines will help lay a foundation for a life-long and fruitful marital commitment that witnesses Christ's love to the world. This document includes elements from the universal law of the Church, but also contains other prescriptive elements that constitute particular law for the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas.

1) Readiness for Marriage in General:

- a. Preparation for marriage, at least in its remote sense, must be included in Christian formation of children and teens. Parishes, elementary and secondary schools, as well as schools of religion should assist parents in this task and should incorporate in formation curricula components that include the meaning of Christian marriage, discernment of vocation and, at the appropriate age, teachings about the theology of the body.
- b. In accord with the prescripts of c.1063, pastors of souls have a particular obligation through their parish or faith community to offer preaching and catechesis about the meaning of Christian marriage and about the meaning and responsibilities of being a spouse and parent. Pastors should ensure that all available means of communication, including social communication, are employed for this purpose. The faithful should be enlightened about the truth of God's plan for marriage so as to be better equipped to discern their own vocational call and to be enabled to defend the Church's teaching on marriage in the midst of a culture that is growing ever more hostile to traditional marriage and family.

¹ USCCB Pastoral Letter, *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, 2009.
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- c. Concerning proximate and immediate preparation for marriage, the readiness of the engaged couple to marry should be determined by the cleric involved in preparing the couple, and normally in consultation with a married couple that is trained in the ministry of marriage preparation.
- d. The parish pastor*, parochial vicar (associate pastor) or deacon (authorized by the pastor to prepare couples for marriage) has a serious moral obligation to provide personal pastoral care by meeting with the couple and assisting them in their proximate and immediate preparation for marriage. He should be particularly concerned that they understand and appreciate the sacramental, liturgical, moral and spiritual aspects of marriage. Since marriage demands a lifelong commitment, those involved with marriage preparation, especially clerics, have the pastoral obligation to help those who desire to marry, to make a prayerful and mature judgment about their readiness for so sacred a decision. (*In this document “pastor” also means those who take the place of a pastor in accord with the norms of c.540 – parochial administrator)
- e. The use of such inventories and instruments as *FOCUS* or *Prepare II* are highly recommended for use in the early stages of the preparation of engaged couples.
- f. In making the assessment of a couple’s readiness for marriage, the following criteria may be helpful:

SPIRITUAL: A minimum degree of faith must exist, at least on the part of the baptized Catholic. This should include, among other things, the acceptance and practice of the faith, or the serious intention to resume such practice, which intention is reinforced by definite signs of returning to that practice. This should also include the acceptance of the religious nature of marriage.

PERSONAL: The degree of maturity required for marriage should be judged on the basis of the couple’s ability to accept and sustain the essential obligations of marriage. In psychosocial terms, this would include a sufficient degree of independence, a sufficient sense of responsibility, a sufficient judgment and a sufficient selflessness in their relationship.

CANONICAL: A determination must be made of the freedom to marry and the freedom from any known impediments of the law. (cf c.1066) The prenuptial interview on the archdiocesan Pre-nuptial Form will be an aid in assessing a couple’s freedom to marry.

- g. In helping the couple assess their readiness for marriage, especially when working with young couples, it may be important to consult with their parents or guardians. The law requires this consultation for a person who has not yet completed his or her eighteenth year (cf c.1071 §1.6 and c.97 §1). Where serious doubt about readiness for marriage or capacity to marry exists, professional assistance from a trained psychologist or counselor should be sought in making the assessment.
- h. A cleric cannot refuse to witness the marriage of a parishioner who is free to marry, however in special cases there may be grounds for delaying marriage. The Code of Canon Law states: “In a special case, the local ordinary can prohibit marriage for his own subjects residing anywhere and for all actually present in his own territory but only for a time, for a grave cause, and for as long as the cause continues.” (c.1077 §1)

The following may be cause for delay of marriage:

- Insufficient faith, or an unwillingness to practice the faith (cf c.1086.2 and c.1125);
- A substantial lack of appreciation for the spiritual and religious meaning of marriage (c.1095, 1101.2);
- Refusal of the parties to take part in the prescribed marriage preparation program or refusal to participate in any way in pre-marriage assessment, evaluation or counseling.

- i. Any consideration by a cleric of delaying a marriage should be discussed with the local ordinary. Should there be a decision that the marriage be delayed, the cleric preparing the couple must immediately tell the couple of this decision and of their right to appeal to the Archbishop or his delegated representative. This information should be given in writing with a copy sent to the Chancery. The engaged couple must be informed as soon as possible in the process and at least 90 days prior to the proposed wedding date.

2) **Marriage Preparation:**

- a. **Planning the Church Wedding:** Every engaged couple, regardless of age, should contact the parish as soon as they decide to marry, preferably six months (and certainly no later than four months) before the desired wedding date. This time is to be viewed as a time of proximate and immediate preparation for marriage, not as a time of waiting.
 - i) For weddings celebrated in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, no wedding date should be placed on the parish calendar until the couple has met with the pastor, parochial vicar (associate pastor), deacon (authorized by the pastor to prepare couples for marriage) or other person authorized by the pastor to conduct initial meetings with engaged couples.
- b. **Marriage Following a Declaration of Nullity:** In cases where marriage requires the granting of an annulment from a previous bond, no date should be set on a parish calendar and no course of marriage preparation should be assigned until the annulment process (including all possible appellate steps) has been completed.
- c. **Required Participation in Approved Marriage Preparation Program:** Participation in one of the approved marriage preparation programs is required for all marriages celebrated in the Archdiocese where at least one of the parties is Catholic and has domicile here. Dispensation from marriage preparation requirements of the Archdiocese must come from the local ordinary or his delegate. The approved marriage preparation programs are classified as either *ordinary* or *extra ordinary*. Section 3.2b of the *Handbook for Priests* contains a current list of the ordinary and extra ordinary forms of marriage preparation programs approved in this Archdiocese.
 - i) Engaged couples, where at least one of the parties is Catholic and has domicile in the Archdiocese, even if the wedding is to be celebrated in another diocese, are required to participate in one of the approved marriage preparation programs.
 - ii) Couples who live outside the Archdiocese, but will be married here, must show evidence of completion of a marriage preparation program that is approved in the diocese of their domicile or that is equivalent to one of the marriage preparation programs approved in this Archdiocese.
 - iii) Even if the wedding is to be celebrated locally in the church of a non-Catholic party, the couple must participate in one of the approved marriage preparation programs referenced above.

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- d. **Selecting the Appropriate Preparation Program:** The Archdiocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life provides guidance to pastors and others concerning the strengths of each approved program and the suitability of each program based on the circumstances of the engaged couple. Clerics engaged in preparing couples for marriage should be sensitive to the pastoral situation of each couple. Special attention must be shown to couples that are not active in the practice of their faith, are cohabitating, or are seeking to marry after one or both of the parties have received a declaration of nullity from a previous union. (*see the Statement from Kansas Bishops on Cohabitation, <http://www.archkck.org/page.aspx?pid=577> and the Statement from the Pennsylvania Bishops, <http://www.pacatholic.org/bishops-statements/living-together/>*)
- i) The extra ordinary form of an approved marriage preparation program is an online option. The online option should be used when ordinary forms of preparation are not feasible for the couple (see Section 3.2b of the *Handbook for Priests*).
- e. **Natural Family Planning:** Natural Family Planning (NFP) instruction helps a couple identify the most opportune time to achieve, as well as delay, a pregnancy. Couples who use NFP soon learn that they have a shared responsibility for family planning. Husbands-to-be are encouraged to learn about their wife’s fertility cycles and both spouses are encouraged to speak openly and frankly about the expression of their sexuality as husband and wife, as well as their ideas about family size. It is the responsibility of those who prepare couples for marriage to encourage engaged couples to be generous in their openness to children throughout their marriage.
- i) All couples of child bearing age who are undergoing marriage preparation in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas (see no. 2 above) are required to attend an approved introductory course in NFP as a component of their marriage preparation.
 - ii) The Archdiocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life maintains a list of approved NFP introductory courses on their website at www.archkck.org/family. The Office of Marriage and Family Life may approve online versions of NFP introductory courses. Official verification of successful completion of such online courses will be required.
 - iii) Engaged couples should complete the “NFP Introductory Class Registration Form” and submit the form as the instructions prescribe. The Archdiocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life will facilitate registration in NFP classes for engaged couples. Registration for any approved online version of an NFP introductory course may be done through the online version’s website.
 - iv) For couples of child bearing age who are participating in marriage preparation programs outside of the Archdiocese, clerics should strongly encourage these couples to attend at least an introductory NFP course in their diocese of domicile or participate in an online NFP program approved for us in this Archdiocese.

Note: Proficiency in the practice of NFP typically requires not only an introductory class, but also a more detailed program, taught by an NFP practitioner, that trains the couple how to practice the NFP life-style. It is advisable that the introductory NFP courses be attended at least 4 months prior to the wedding so as to allow sufficient time for the couple to engage in a more detailed program in how to use the specific NFP method if they opt to do so.

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- f. **Responsibility of Each Pastoral Region:** Each pastoral region in the Archdiocese is responsible for providing access, within the region, to at least one of the approved ordinary forms of marriage preparation. Additionally, each pastoral region must insure that sufficient introductory NFP courses (within or outside of the region) are available to those preparing for marriage in the region; the Marriage and Family Life Office will assist pastoral regions in procuring NFP instructors and facilitating enrollment in NFP Introductory Classes. Registration forms for marriage preparation programs and NFP classes are available from the Office of Marriage and Family Life.
- g. **Cases Involving Pregnancy:** Premarital pregnancy must be considered as an added reason to proceed with caution. Hopefully, the decision to marry was made prior to the awareness of the pregnancy. In cases where the decision to marry was made after the couple became aware of the pregnancy, the cleric should consider referring them to an approved counselor for pre-marriage evaluation. Care must be taken to ensure that the pregnancy does not so impact the situation so as to diminish the couple's freedom in choosing to marry.
- h. **Convalidation of "Civil Marriage":** If a couple has attempted marriage contrary to the laws of the Church, a validation is permitted only after they have completed the prescribed marriage preparation and assessment process and only after one year has elapsed since the attempted marriage.

In the case of a convalidation of a civil marriage of five (5) or more years, formal marriage preparation described in Item 2 above is not required. However, the cleric preparing the couple may request them to participate in one of the approved programs if he believes it is indicated. If participation in a marriage preparation program is not deemed necessary, the cleric must submit a letter with the prenuptial paperwork indicating that he has met with the couple and affirm that they have a clear understanding of Catholic teaching on Christian marriage and of the obligations of the married state. Such couples, if of childbearing age and if they do not currently practice Natural Family Planning, should attend an NFP introductory class prior to the convalidation.

3) **Canonical Considerations:**

- a. **Pre-nuptial Forms:** The Archdiocesan Pre-nuptial Form should be completed by the cleric preparing the couple for marriage and must be submitted, along with all accompanying documents, to the Chancery one (1) month prior to the wedding. A *Nihil Obstat* is required from the local ordinary or his delegate for every marriage celebrated in the Archdiocese, even if the marriage is celebrated in a non-Catholic church.
 - i) If the wedding is to be celebrated in another diocese, the Pre-nuptial Form should be submitted to the Chancery at least two (2) months prior to the date of the wedding.
 - ii) A certificate indicating that the couple to be married has completed one of the approved marriage preparation programs, a certificate of completion of an NFP Introductory Class (for couples of child-bearing age), together with any other required documents or evaluations of readiness for marriage, must be sent to the Chancery with the Pre-nuptial Form.

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- b. **Place of the Marriage:** Marriage between two Catholics is to be celebrated in the parish in which either party has domicile, quasidecile, or month-long residence. With the permission of the proper ordinary or proper pastor it may be celebrated elsewhere (cf c.1115).
- i) “Marriage between Catholics or between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic party is to be celebrated in a parish church” (c.1118, §1). Weddings where at least one party is Catholic may be celebrated in oratories of stable archdiocesan faith communities (e.g. Latin Mass Communities or Korean Catholic Community) or in oratories that were once parish churches when the Archbishop has granted prior permission for such usage of those buildings. In these later cases (stable faith communities and other oratories as described above) general permission for weddings to be celebrated is granted, at the discretion of the chaplain, rector or other cleric who oversees the oratory (cf c.1118, §1 and c.1115).
 - ii) In the case of a Catholic marrying a baptized non-Catholic, the wedding should take place in the parish church of the Catholic party unless permission for the priest or deacon to officiate at the wedding in a non-Catholic church has been obtained from the proper ordinary (cf c.1118), or unless a dispensation from canonical form has been granted.
 - iii) “Marriage between a Catholic party and a non-baptized party can be celebrated in a church or in some other suitable place.” (c.1118, §3)
 - iv) Unless a dispensation from canonical form is granted, a church is the only “suitable” place for such weddings to be celebrated in this Archdiocese.
- c. **Interfaith Marriages:** Permission for Catholics desiring to marry baptized non-Catholics should be requested on the Pre-nuptial Form. In all marriages with non-Catholics, “the Catholic party declares that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of falling away from the faith and makes a sincere promise to do all in his or her power to have all the children baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church” (cf. Pre-nuptial Form). “The other party is to be informed at an appropriate time of these promises which the Catholic party has to make, so that it is clear that the other party is truly aware of the promise and obligation of the Catholic party.” (c.1125, 1°, 2°)
- d. **Witnessing Marriages in a Non-Catholic Church:** If a non-Catholic and a Catholic seek and obtain permission for their wedding to be celebrated in a non-Catholic Church and request a priest or deacon to canonically witness their marriage (see Pre-nuptial Form), that priest or deacon must make certain that he is canonically delegated to witness the marriage (cf c.1111 §1 and 2).
- i) If the marriage takes place within his parish territory, the pastor, parochial vicar and deacon (with the necessary faculties and permission of the pastor) are authorized. If outside his assigned parish territory, he must obtain delegation from the local ordinary or from the pastor of the territorial parish within which the marriage is celebrated. This delegation is necessary for validity. This applies whether the marriage is celebrated in the church of the non-Catholic party which is within boundaries of the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas or in a non-Catholic church outside the boundaries of the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, in either case delegation from the local ordinary or the proper pastor is required.

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- e. **Dispensation from Canonical Form:** Catholics are to be married before a priest or deacon (who has the requisite faculties or delegation) and two witnesses (cf c.1108). The Catholic party in an inter-faith marriage or disparity of cult marriage has a right to petition his or her ordinary for a dispensation from canonical form (see Pre-nuptial Form). There must be serious difficulties blocking the observance of the form. Some possible examples are:
- The non-Catholic party has a conscientious objection to the Catholic celebration.
 - The non-Catholic party requests that a parent or other close relative officiate at the ceremony.
 - To achieve family harmony or avoid family alienation.
- i) With the dispensation there must be assurance of some form of public celebration taking place (cf c.1127, §2). See item 3b above concerning place of marriage between two baptized parties.
- f. **Recording of Marriages:** In accord with the prescripts of c. 1121 the pastor of the place of celebration, or the person who takes his place, even if neither assisted at the marriage, is to note as soon as possible in the parish marriage register the names of the spouses, the person who assisted, the witnesses, and the place and the date of the celebration of the marriage. Additionally, notices must be sent to the parish of baptism for each Catholic party so that the notation may be added to the baptismal record (c.1122, §1 and §2).
- i) Marriages contracted with a dispensation from canonical form should be inscribed in the marriage register of the parish of the Catholic party (cf c.1121, §3).
- ii) Concerning canonical form marriages celebrated in a non-Catholic church, in addition to the prescripts of c.1121, §1 the marriage should be recorded in the marriage register of the parish of the Catholic party. As above, notices must be sent to the parish of baptism for each Catholic party so that the notation can be added to the baptismal record.
- g. **Official Witness - Civil Considerations:** The laws of the State of Kansas permit any cleric who has canonical faculties to ask for and receive the consent of the wedding couple (cf KSA 23-2504) in accord with the prescripts of c.1108, *CIC* and after a state marriage license has been issued. All clerics from outside of the Archdiocese who desire to officiate at a Catholic wedding within the Archdiocese must request the appropriate faculties and delegation and must present to the Chancellor, well in advance of the wedding, a testimonial of suitability from their ordinary or major religious superior.
- 4) **Liturgical Considerations:** (see Section 3.2a of *Handbook for Priests* for more details)
- a. **Context of The Rite of Marriage:** The celebration of the marriage of Catholics “normally should be within the Mass”. (Rite of Marriage, Introduction #6)
- i) In a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic, “the regulations which appear in the rite of marriage outside Mass shall be observed. If the ordinary of the place gives permission, the rite for celebrating with Mass may be used.” (Rite of Marriage, Introduction #8)
- ii) In the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, the Archbishop grants general permission, at the discretion of the pastor of the church in which the marriage is celebrated, to celebrate the rite of marriage within Mass for wedding between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic.

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- iii) In a marriage between a Catholic and one who is not baptized, the rite without Mass which appears in the ritual is to be observed. (Rite of Marriage, Introduction #8 and the Rite of Marriage #55ff)
 - b. **When Marriages May Be Celebrated:** In accord with local custom, weddings should not be celebrated on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation in this Archdiocese.
 - i) All marriages taking place in a parish church on Saturdays must be completed at least one hour prior to the regularly scheduled Saturday evening Mass. In accord with local custom, weddings in this Archdiocese should not be celebrated on Saturday evenings.
 - ii) Marriage may be validated on any day.
 - iii) When a marriage is celebrated during Advent the parish priest should advise the couple to take into consideration the special nature of these times. (cf. Introduction to Rite of Marriage #11)
 - iv) In accord with local custom, no weddings should be celebrated during the season of Lent in this Archdiocese.
 - c. **Liturgical Ministers at Weddings:** “The reading of Scripture during a Eucharistic celebration in the Catholic Church is to be done by members of that Church. On exceptional occasions and for a just cause, the Bishop of the diocese may permit a member of another Church or ecclesial Community to take on the task of reader” (*Directory for the Applications of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 133). In the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, permission to use non-Catholic readers during wedding liturgies, celebrated both during and outside of Mass, is habitually granted at the discretion of the pastor of the parish where the celebration is to take place.
 - i) Ministers from ecclesial communions that do not possess recognized orders may participate in the wedding liturgy as readers of scripture and in the announcement of the petitions of the prayer of the faithful. Only a priest or deacon is permitted to proclaim the gospel reading and offer the prescribed blessings of the liturgy. Only a priest, deacon or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion (who must be a practicing Catholic) may distribute Holy Communion at wedding Masses.
 - d. **Liturgical Music:** Music used during the liturgical celebration of holy matrimony should be taken from the rich tradition of the Church’s liturgical heritage and repertoire. Popular songs, regardless of how well they attempt to express the ideals of love or how meaningful a role they may have played during the courtship of the wedding couple, should be reserved for the reception that typically follows the liturgy. The Church’s liturgy is properly celebrated with music intended for the liturgy. The tradition of the Church also embraces appropriate classical instrumental works to accompany certain moments in the liturgy, such as the procession of the ministers and the recessional.
- 5) **Marriage Enrichment:** Last, but certainly not least, is the importance of marriage enrichment programs for couples that are already married, as well as programs and resources to assist married couples that face significant struggles in their marriage. Marriage enrichment – the strengthening and sustaining of the vocation of marriage throughout the life cycle – is both a challenge and an opportunity for the Church. While many dioceses and parishes have very well-

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developed and comprehensive marriage preparation processes, couples are often left on their own to seek and find ways to nurture and sustain their marriage.²

Parishes that identify lead couples to help prepare engaged couples for marriage have a ready asset to assist with marriage enrichment and marriage support in the parish. These lead couples ideally befriend the soon-to-be-wed couples that they help prepare and can be valuable assets to the newlyweds as they grow in their own married life and can be available to support them should struggles in their marriage arise. The Archdiocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life desires to assist parishes in identifying resources for marriage enrichment and marriage support. Resources are available at the website www.archkck.org/family.

- 6) **Resources for Clerics:** To assist pastors and those who work with them in ministering to engaged and married couples during the proximate and immediate phases of marriage preparation, the Archdiocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life provides a resource binder that explains the prescribed marriage preparation process and contains information to assist with marriage preparation. Additionally, the binder has a list of resources for marriage enrichment. The binder and the resources on the website mentioned above serve to assist those who work in marriage ministry at the parish or regional level.

Note:

The lists of approved ordinary and extra ordinary marriage preparation programs are contained in Section 3.2b of the Handbook for Priests. The list of approved marriage preparation programs, Natural Family Planning resources and other information about marriage preparation and enrichment are available from the Archdiocesan Marriage and Family Life Office website, www.archkck.org/family.

² Butch and Linda Moses, *The Parish Community and Marriage Enrichment*, Holy Family Catholic Parish, Irving, TX.

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