

2. **Pregnancy**

The fact of pregnancy does not diminish the need for the preparation outlined in this Policy. Indeed, it is even more vital in cases of pregnancy that the usual help be given. Additional counseling (pastoral or professional) will also be needed when there was no engagement to marry prior to the pregnancy.

3. **Living Together:**

If a priest/deacon/resident pastoral minister knows that the couple is living together before their upcoming marriage, he/she must approach the premarital process with extreme pastoral care and delicacy. In teaching the couple about the Sacrament of Matrimony and Christian teaching on the meaning of sexual intimacy, the priest/deacon/resident pastoral minister should explain the reasons why the Church exhorts them to live separately and refrain from sexual relationship until after their marriage.

4. **Remarriage:**

Couples who are entering a subsequent marriage are provided special consideration because of their differing circumstances and past experiences with marriage. Those who have been married before may not be immediately free to enter a subsequent marriage in the church. The priest/deacon/resident pastoral minister will address the circumstances of each particular situation and assist the couple accordingly. A preparation program designed specifically for those entering a second or subsequent marriage is offered on a parish or diocesan level. *In a Redeeming State* and *To Trust Again* are two such programs and are offered and available through the Office of Family Ministry.

5. **Validation of Marriage:**

If a couple marries contrary to the laws of the Church, a validation is permitted only after the couple has completed adequate preparation and pastoral counseling.

II. Reasons For Delay Of Marriage:

The couple has a right to be married. However, the priest/deacon/resident pastoral minister may delay, for just cause, the witnessing of a marriage as long as such cause continues **and he/she offers continued pastoral care**. Just cause would include, but is not limited to the following:

- A. Non-practice of the Catholic faith by a Catholic party or parties with no intention of returning to the practice of the faith.
- B. Lack of readiness and maturity for marriage.
- C. Refusal of the parties to participate in the preparation that applies to them.
- D. Substantial lack of appreciation for the spiritual and sacramental aspects of marriage.

III. Appeal

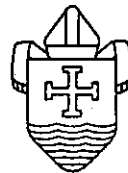
If the marriage is delayed, the couple may first appeal to the dean of their area.

Final appeal may be made to the bishop of the diocese or his official delegate.

No priest/deacon may witness the marriage of a couple whose marriage has been delayed by another, unless the bishop or his official delegate has given the necessary approval.

IV. Exceptions

In rare and unusual circumstances a request for exception to this Policy may be referred to the bishop of the diocese, or his official delegate.



The Marriage Preparation Policy for the Diocese of Jackson will become effective July 1, 1991 and will be reviewed in July 1996.

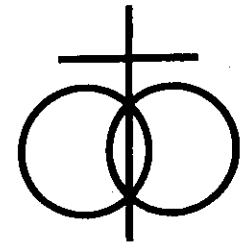
For a more in-depth discussion of this Policy, contact your local church or the Family Ministry Office of the diocese.

Given at Jackson, MS on this the 22nd day of February, 1991, Feast of the Chair of Peter, Apostle.

William R. Houck
Bishop of Jackson

Marriage Preparation Policy

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF JACKSON



INTRODUCTION

Marriage preparation is an educational process that begins early in life and continues throughout one's life. It is not just limited to the period of time close to a couple's wedding. The Church supports couples about to be married by giving them the opportunity to grow in their relationship through marriage preparation that is designed especially for them as engaged couples.

Marriage is a lifelong, faithful union of a man and a woman, mutually committed to sharing life and love together. Indeed, Christ enhanced the dignity of marriage by making the Christian marriage relationship a sacrament.

Like the other sacraments, marriage requires that the parties involved understand what they are about to undertake as they enter into a sacramental union. Christian marriage is more than a socially acceptable way to be married; Christian marriage is a covenant relationship, modeled after God's love for His people.

Because of the dignity of Christian marriage and the commitment the couple makes to each other and to others, each parish community has the primary responsibility to nurture the love relationship of its engaged couples from the time of their engagement to the day of the wedding and then throughout their married life. Diocesan and area programs are offered only as a supplement to parish programs. This support and nurturing places the emphasis on the preparation for the lifelong relationship of the couple, rather than on the wedding itself. The wedding is only for a day. It is the ceremonial, holy celebration of the couple's love for each other. The marriage is for a lifetime.

Thus, this Marriage Preparation Policy is a call to each parish community to challenge its engaged couples to embrace a vision of Christian marriage. It is a guide to help insure adequate preparation for marriage so that all couples everywhere may find the fullness of life possible for them through their chosen vocation of marriage. This Marriage Preparation Policy is not meant to be seen as a mere set of rules that restrict marriage. Rather, it is a public declaration of the Church's care, love and support for Christian marriage.

I. Marriage Preparation

In order to insure that sufficient time is available for adequate marriage preparation and pastoral counseling, couples should contact their priest/deacon/resident pastoral minister at least four, and preferably six months in advance of the anticipated date of their wedding. The proposed date for the wedding will be considered conditional and dependent upon completion of the marriage preparation. This amount of time is usually necessary in order that a couple may adequately prepare for marriage. The preparation has both pastoral and educational components.

A. The Pastoral Component:

1. The priest/deacon/resident pastoral minister welcomes the couple with genuine hospitality and understanding. This is even more necessary if one or both have been remiss in the practice of the faith. The priest/deacon/resident pastoral minister explains the process of marriage preparation as an expression of the Church's conviction that good preparation can help to give the couple the motivation and skills to live happily as a sacramental couple. He/she should work with the couple **throughout** the preparation process.
2. Use of a preparation instrument is strongly recommended, such as FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication Understanding & Study), PMI (Premarital Inventory), PREPARE AND ENRICH. These instruments can be very helpful to the couple as they explore their relationship and to the priest/deacon/resident pastoral minister in counseling them.
3. Work on the pertinent marriage forms can also be an occasion to show the Church's care and concern for the couple.
4. The priest/deacon/resident pastoral minister meets with the couple on at least one occasion to plan the wedding liturgy. Materials such as *Together for Life* or *Planning Your Wedding Ceremony* are provided to the couple for study and prayer prior to this session.
5. Contact with the couple after the marriage, as well as invitations to become involved in parish life, are also encouraged.

B. The Education Component:

1. Couples preparing for marriage in the Diocese of Jackson are required to participate in a parish or diocesan-based marriage preparation program.
2. Since the primary obligation of preparing couples rests with the pastor and parish community, parish-based programs such as *Evenings for the Engaged*, *The Sponsor Couple*, *When Families Marry* or *To Trust Again* and *In a Redeeming State* (for second marriages) are the most desirable. Participation of the priest/deacon/resident pastoral minister in these programs is expected. The Office of Family Ministry will offer training to couples and priests involved in these programs.
3. If a parish for a good reason is unable to provide a parish-based program, the couple is asked to participate in a diocesan program such as *Engaged Encounter* or *When Families Marry*.
4. Every preparation program whether parish or diocesan-based must offer at least one presentation on Natural Family Planning. Materials on Natural Family Planning are available from the Office of Family Ministry.
5. After completing the marriage preparation program, the couple meets with the priest/deacon/resident pastoral minister to prepare for and ascertain readiness for marriage.
6. In an interreligious marriage, the couple should attempt to understand each other's beliefs while at the same time respecting the conscience of each other.
7. It is also important for the priest/deacon/resident pastoral minister to discuss with the couple the Church's position on the religious upbringing of their children.

C. Special Pastoral Circumstances:

1. **Marriage of Minors:**
Special care and concern will be given to very young couples because of the difficulty early marriages experience. Therefore, if either party is not yet eighteen years old, consideration of marriage in the Church will be given after the priest/deacon/resident pastoral minister has completed adequate pastoral preparation, which will include some form of evaluation of maturity, and possibly consultation with the parents.