

# IN *perfect* UNION

living the sacrament of marriage



STATE OF WISCONSIN  
CATHOLIC MARRIAGE COMPENDIUM



IN  
*perfect*  
UNION

---

---

living the sacrament of marriage



STATE OF WISCONSIN  
CATHOLIC MARRIAGE COMPENDIUM



FOR AN INTERACTIVE ELECTRONIC VERSION OF  
THIS CATHOLIC MARRIAGE COMPENDIUM, VISIT  
[www.johnpaul2center.org/nazarethproject.htm](http://www.johnpaul2center.org/nazarethproject.htm)



# TABLE OF contents

---

---

- 2 A LETTER FROM YOUR BISHOPS
- 3 THE MARRIAGE PROCESS
- 7 THE THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE
- 39 PASTORAL GUIDELINES FOR  
MARRIAGE PREPARATION
- 49 RESOURCES FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

A LETTER FROM YOUR  
**bishops**

---

DEAR ENGAGED COUPLES,

Marriage is a sacred relationship. It can also be one of the greatest sources of strength, hope and encouragement in a person's life. But sustaining a grace-filled marriage requires patience, sacrifice, flexibility and a lifetime of honest communication.

The Catholic Church deeply values marriage and wants people to have successful marriages that bring them happiness and joy, therefore it believes that marriage should not be entered into lightly.

When you choose to get married in the Catholic Church, you are asking for more than a ceremony, a church building and a musician. This is a momentous promise and commitment. You will make a vow before God, family, friends and your future spouse to stay married for the rest of your life.

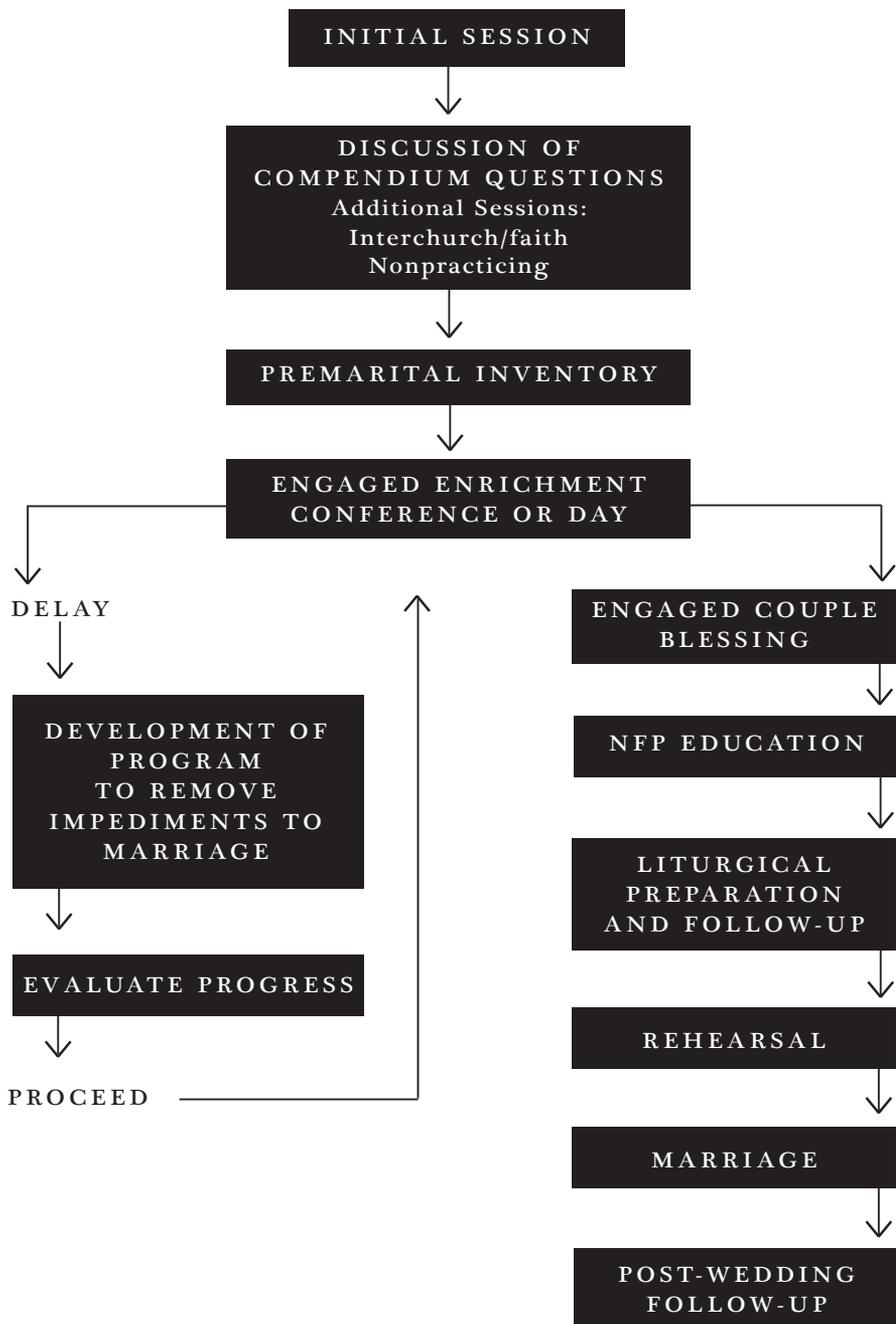
In an effort to help you prepare for that commitment, the Catholic Church requires that you participate in a marriage preparation process. The process will provide you with an opportunity to talk about your personal values, such as how you view faith, money, work, sex, children and your extended families in your life together. It seeks to help you identify what you expect from marriage and your spouse. By talking about these things in advance, you can come to a greater understanding of areas that will require special sensitivity and openness in your marriage.

For many couples, this process is a wonderful time of affirmation. It reminds them of all the good things they have working in their favor. For other couples, the process is an opportunity to discuss issues that should be addressed before they make a lifetime commitment.

Your wedding ceremony and celebration last for one day; your marriage will last for the rest of your life. We hope that this process will help you succeed in your commitment to each other, to God and to the Christian community.

THE ARCHBISHOP AND BISHOPS OF  
**MILWAUKEE**  
**GREEN BAY**  
**LA CROSSE**  
**MADISON**  
**SUPERIOR**

# THE MARRIAGE process



# THE MARRIAGE process

---

---

THE FOLLOWING PROCESS IS RECOMMENDED FOR MARRIAGE PREPARATION  
WITH OPTIMUM CONDITIONS AND NO SPECIAL NEEDS.

---

---

## ① CONTACT I INITIAL SESSION

This meeting is a time to go over the entire marriage preparation experience and to begin the process of completing the necessary forms.

## ② CONTACT II DISCUSSION OF COMPENDIUM QUESTIONS

Couple meets with priest/deacon/parish director/pastoral minister to discuss theology of marriage and compendium questions.

## ③ CONTACT III ADMINISTRATION OF PREMARITAL INVENTORY

Additionally, the parish staff/member or marriage preparation team/trained pre-marriage inventory facilitator is the person(s) responsible for arranging an inventory session. A premarital inventory is not a test or an instrument designed to measure the readiness of a couple for marriage. It is a means for allowing the couple, with the assistance of the marriage preparation minister(s), to explore and strengthen their relationship with each other before marriage.

## ④ CONTACT IV PREMARITAL INVENTORY (FOLLOW-UP)

At this later meeting, the parish member or marriage preparation team member is the responsible party. This meeting is a follow-up session with the engaged couple and the minister(s) in which they focus on the key areas for discussion. In most cases, this requires only one meeting. However when several differences in critical areas are evident, it is appropriate to schedule more follow-up sessions.

## ⑤ CONTACT V ATTENDANCE AT A MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM

Preparation programs, whether a diocesan conference or parish-based day, enable couples to concentrate more intensely on the many facets of married life so they may be more aware of all the dimensions of marriage. The program helps engaged couples explore and determine the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship in terms of their future life together.

## CONTACT VI **CHRISTIAN SEXUALITY/ NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING EDUCATION**

This contact is for the purpose of catechizing the couple on the Church's teaching regarding conjugal love and responsible parenting. **All couples receive a general introduction to Married Sexuality and Natural Family Planning in their marriage preparation program.** Further instruction in a particular method should include a course from an NFP provider that is approved by the USCCB.

## CONTACT VII **LITURGICAL PLANNING AND FOLLOW-UP WITH THE PRIEST/DEACON/PARISH DIRECTOR/PASTORAL MINISTER**

The priest/deacon/parish director/pastoral minister is the responsible person for this session and should review the areas already covered by the couple during their preparation. The minister can discuss with the couple any aspects covered by the couple during their preparation. If not already completed, a minister will also spend time taking care of the necessary canonical papers which have been explained in the initial meeting. These papers invite a discussion on the Church's view of marriage. Finally, the minister and couple can devote time to more specific planning of the wedding liturgy.

## CONTACT VIII **REHEARSAL**

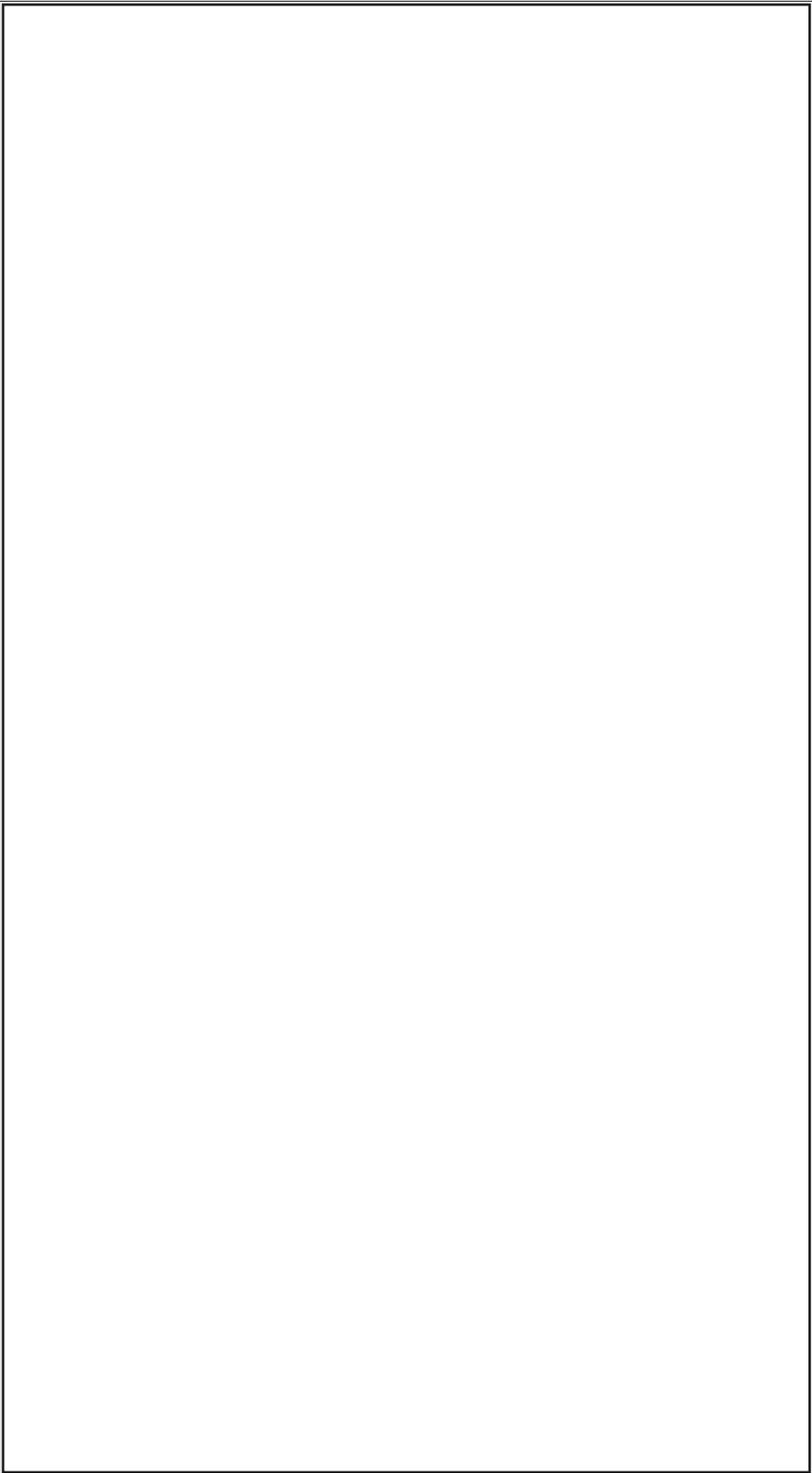
The priest/deacon/parish director/pastoral minister or church volunteer will lead this session.

## CONTACT IX **WEDDING**

The priest/deacon is responsible for the wedding ceremony.

## CONTACT X **POST-WEDDING FOLLOW-UP**

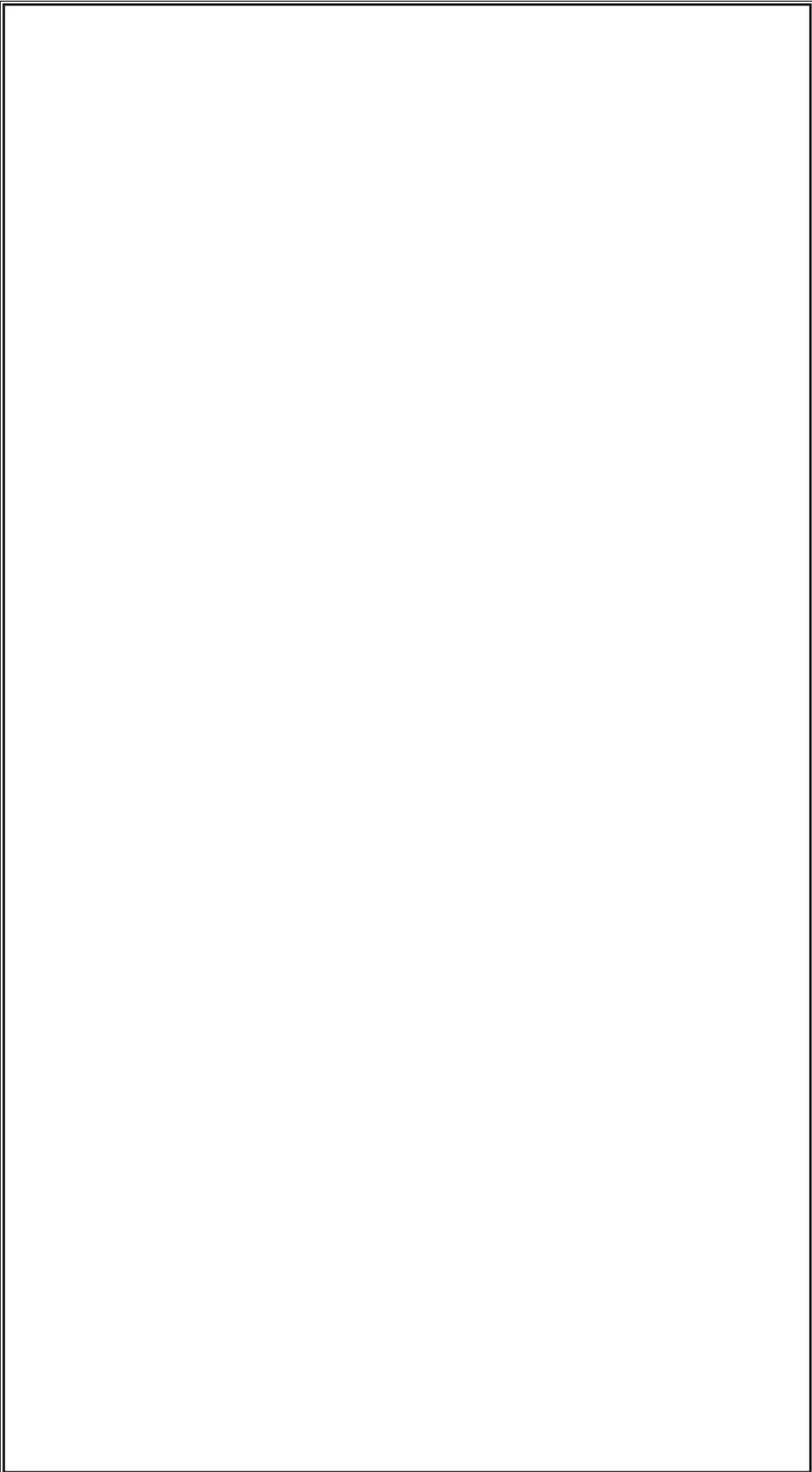
A diocesan priest/deacon/parish director/pastoral minister or parish mentor couple, or a facilitator of the diocesan newly-married follow-up program, leads this post-wedding follow-up session – which should be in the first year of marriage, preferably around six months – and deals with expectations, adjustments and building strengths.



# THE THEOLOGY OF marriage

“HUMAN BEINGS WERE CREATED NOT TO  
LIVE SOLITARY LIVES, BUT TO LIVE IN  
COMMUNION WITH GOD AND WITH ONE  
ANOTHER, A COMMUNION THAT IS BOTH  
LIFE-GIVING AND LOVING.”

*Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan, USCCB*



THE THEOLOGY OF  
**marriage**

---

I. defining marriage

Is marriage a social arrangement that humans invented?

Is it merely a legal concept, or only a religious tradition?

How far back in history does marriage go?

- 1 The origin of marriage is found in the beginning of humanity, arising from our divinely created, biological nature as men and women, and out of our desire to enter into a deeply exclusive relationship with another person. The creation accounts in the Book of Genesis, centering on the story of Adam and Eve, offer crucial insights into the beginnings of marriage and into its essential and unchangeable characteristics.
- 2 Marriage between a man and a woman is a legal concept because it is one of the building blocks of civilization and is the primary means for forming new members of society. The concept of marriage is at the core of several religions of the world; it is an especially important element of Christianity. Thus, it is true to say that marriage is a biological (or natural), social, legal and religious reality all at the same time.

How is the marriage of one man and one woman  
a reflection of God's own nature?

- 3 The physical complementarity of men and women is a reflection of their emotional complementarity and their deep capacity to give and receive love. Marriage is not mere biological instinct. It requires an act of the will and a choice to live life in a manner that always seeks the well-being of someone else.
- 4 Christians understand that men and women, in a way different than every other creature, are made in the image and likeness of the Trinitarian God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We can reason, we can freely choose and we can love. Just like the Trinity in whose image we are made, we are made to be in relationships.
- 5 The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as co-equal divine persons, continually give and receive love in a beautiful union that produces the abundant life of all the universe. In marriage, men and women, as equals in their complementary differences, continually give and receive love from each other in an earthly reflection of the life and love of the Trinity, a reflection that becomes all the more clear when their union brings forth children.

# Why is marriage only between one man and one woman?

- 6 Marriage is, by nature and as a reflection of the Trinity, a union fashioned from sexual difference. Men and women are created equal, but they are not identical. The sexual differences between men and women are at the core of a wide variety of other mutually complementing attributes; when a man and woman are joined as husband and wife, they create a true unity out of diversity because they are made for each other.
- 7 While it may be legally possible for two people of the same sex to attempt to live as a couple and adopt children, it is not naturally possible for them to do so. Two people of the same sex are not physically capable of joining their own bodies in a way that new life can result from that union. Such a union is inherently sterile because it is not rooted in sexual difference and complementarity. This biological, or natural, fact cannot be ignored because marriage grows directly from our biological reality into our emotional and spiritual reality. The biological impossibility of intercourse, or of new life emerging from such a union, demonstrates that, whatever one may call such a union, it is not marriage.
- 8 We grasp the truth of this from our study of the natural world. As Christians we are further aided by the truth of divine revelation in the Scriptures and in the teachings of the Church, which affirm that only one man and one woman can be married. The marital union of one man with one woman as husband and wife carries with it several layers of religious symbolism and truth that cannot be altered without seriously distorting the entire Christian language of salvation. Finally, we are aided by sociological data about the serious emotional harm done to us as persons when we engage in sexual intercourse with multiple partners. All of these sources reveal the truth that marriage is by definition a stable, monogamous, heterosexual relationship.

## What is a basic definition of marriage?

- 9 Marriage is the public joining of a man and a woman as two becoming one: physically, legally, emotionally and spiritually. They enter into this loving union freely and without reservation, and they do so with the intention of maintaining this exclusive union for the rest of their lives, while always being open to the possibility of welcoming the creation of new children from their union. Their union as husband and wife is the foundation on which an entire lifetime of mutual service, sharing, commitment and responsibility rests; from it a whole new pattern of life and relationships emerge, and from it the whole social order of civilization is constructed.

## What does the Church have to do with marriage? Isn't it between a man, a woman and God?

- 10** Catholics understand that our relationship with God never exists apart from a relationship with the community of the Church. Marriage is inherently public. Separating ourselves from regular participation in Mass, the sacraments and parish involvement also separates us from God's saving power. Entering into marriage changes our status not only as individuals but also within the whole community of believers. Marriage begets a family and the family is the fundamental community of the Church.
- 11** A married couple must always be dependent upon God in all things; this truth is best communicated by a church setting for the wedding ceremony itself. A church setting is also a reminder that the community of the Church promises to walk with and support a new husband and wife during their entire married life, and that the whole community will benefit from their loving witness as a couple.
- 12** Also, as a husband and wife bring forth children and create a family, this new group of relationships takes on the characteristics of the Church, which is the universal family of God. In other words, a family is a domestic church. As moms and dads and children grow together, they are shaped by the essential characteristics of family life that are the same characteristics that God has incorporated into his one, holy, Catholic and apostolic church.

### Does it make a difference if I am baptized?

#### What does it mean to say marriage is a sacrament?

- 13** When two baptized Christians validly enter into marriage, a new layer is added to its biological and social nature – marriage becomes a sacrament. As a sacrament, the married love of a husband and wife becomes a symbol that shows to the world the quality of love that God has for us, while at the same time accomplishing the transformation of the married couple themselves, filling them more and more with the love and life of God.
- 14** God's love for us is frequently described throughout the Scriptures using marital imagery. In the Old Testament, marriage is a symbol of the covenant bond that God has with us his people. God's eternal Word became incarnate in the person of Jesus, joining our nature to God's in a loving union that generates divine life for the transformation of the world. On the cross, Christ showed the depth of his love for us, His bride, the Church, laying down his life so that we could be saved from sin and death. As husbands and wives faithfully live out their married life, they make this same sacrificial love visible; as Christ loves the Church, so husbands love their wives. Hence, marriage is not just for the couple themselves but rather it serves the good of the whole Church and the whole world.

## What if we do not want to have any children?

- 15** Only love and trust in God – and the strength that comes from the grace, promises and intimacy of married life – can allow us to overcome the hesitation to devote our whole lives to the care of another person. Part of why God gives us marriage is so that our in-born tendency to focus only on ourselves can be overcome, and so that we can open our hearts to both give ourselves to another person, and also to be responsible for that other person as we receive their love. We discover that the more we give ourselves away, the better and happier we become, and that through our sexual, emotional and personal self-gift, the new life of children becomes possible.
- 16** This openness to sharing and receiving for the sake of new life is at the very heart of marriage. So central is it, that if one or both parties enter into a marriage intending not to have any children, then we do not consider it a marriage. A relationship that intentionally excludes the possibility of children cannot open up a husband and wife to the divine, transforming life of God in the way that he intends.

## What if we are not able to have any children?

- 17** Sometimes one or both parties in a marriage, through no act or intention of their own, is biologically not capable of having children, either because of age or some other medical condition. Unlike a same-sex union, a marriage in which one or both parties are sterile is still rooted in sexual difference and complementarity and therefore it may still truly be called a marriage. Such a union is still a reflection of the abundant love of God if the couple remains open to new life.
- 18** In this situation it is often appropriate to pray about the possibilities of adoption, or to seek assistance from fertility specialists who accept and understand the teachings of the Church on human sexuality. It is, however, never appropriate to try and overcome the challenging burden of sterility by seeking to create a new life by a means that separates the creative purpose of sexual intercourse from the very act of intercourse itself. In Vitro Fertilization would be one example of a means to attempt to have children that is contrary to the natural link of sexual intercourse and procreation and is therefore never permitted.

## Why does every single act of intercourse have to be open to children?

- 19** Married love is rooted in the desire for a husband and wife to truly become one, and the depth of such love allows for the creation of new life. These unitive and procreative elements of marriage that arise from our created nature, expressed in married love, can never be separated. Sexual intercourse is the ultimate expression of both of these elements which is why it is the heart of the marriage bond.
- 20** Every single act of intercourse is meant to communicate and deepen one fundamental reality: that a husband and wife are holding nothing back from each other. If the union of a husband and wife is to be total, then it must be sexually expressed in a manner that allows each spouse to welcome and embrace the fertility of the other. A relationship that welcomes fertility only some of the time, in some acts of intercourse, while intentionally sterilizing it in others is not a relationship of true unity because it is not a relationship of true love. A relationship of true love, on the other hand, is always expansive and is able to generate even more love and new life. True love welcomes the other person in his or her wholeness; it does not treat their fertility as a burden to be overcome.

## What's wrong with contraception and sterilization?

- 21** God intended sexual intercourse to always be both an act of profound unity between husband and wife always with the possibility of creating children in each act. Contraception and sterilization intentionally separate these two inseparable ends. Intentionally rendering ourselves infertile is an attempt to be unitive while not being procreative – an intention to change the unchangeable nature of sexuality. When the unitive and procreative aspects of sexuality are intentionally separated, be it one time or for the whole life of a marriage, then we cause a rupture within ourselves and within our marriages that diminishes God's ability to truly transform and save us. This is because we are doing something that fundamentally goes against our created and complementary nature.
- 22** When we engage in actions that go against our created nature – such as contraception and sterilization, which is what sin is – we fail to respect our own dignity, we turn ourselves inward, we erode our freedom, and we diminish our happiness. For all of these reasons, artificial contraception or sterilization are never allowed.

# Can a married couple decide they have enough children already?

## How are births supposed to be regulated?

- 23** It is important to remember that God is the creator of all life and that when a new person is created at conception, someone comes into existence that did not exist before. Only God can accomplish something so astonishing, and he does it through the expression of love between husband and wife. Therefore, we should adopt an attitude of humility when deciding when life should and should not be brought into the world.
- 24** Nonetheless, we have a responsibility to provide for the lives that God creates with us, which means that there can be good reasons not to bring any more children into a marriage. Sometimes those reasons also involve a health risk to the mother. If a couple has discerned this, then they are encouraged to abstain from sexual intercourse during a woman's fertile times of her menstrual cycle, and to engage in intercourse during the infertile times.
- 25** This requires that a married couple carefully learn and monitor the God-given cycle of their fertility, and that they continually communicate about sex and about why, or why not, to have more children. This fertility monitoring and communication pattern is known popularly as Natural Family Planning, or NFP. This method, or lifestyle, is one that respects the natural cycles of sexuality, encourages important communication between spouses, helps couples to grow in virtue and always allows God the opportunity to bring forth more children if he so wills it. When learned and lived well, it is a highly effective and safe method for regulating births. Our God-given free will is the first and most effective regulation of our sexual activity.

## Isn't Natural Family Planning the same thing as Catholic birth control? It sounds like contraception.

- 26** It is possible to abuse NFP and to practice it in such a way that is challenging or even hurtful to a spouse. That is why it requires continual patience, prayer and honesty. We can choose to avoid having children for the wrong reasons. However, practicing NFP is not the same as sterilization and contraception because with NFP there is always left open the possibility that life may come forth from each act of intercourse. The integrity of each sexual act as both a unitive and potentially procreative measure is maintained. Also, the practice of NFP is a recognition of the truth that God created fertility with its own natural contours that couples seek to respect; it is living in conformity with our created nature and the ends of sexuality rather than intentionally and directly opposing them. It is our free will that allows us to choose the appropriate time and place for sexual activity.

## What if some person or circumstance is forcing me to get married?

**27** The decision to enter into marriage must be entirely our own, as free persons. Marrying under pressure from some third party or out of deep fear of some consequence for failing to marry undermines the consent upon which marriage rests. It is very important to pray about the reasons why we are choosing to marry a particular person; fundamentally we should choose to marry someone because we discern that it is God's will for us to do so.

## Do I have to stay married to the same person for the rest of my life?

**28** On your wedding day you will promise, before God and the community of the Church, to honor each other as husband and wife for the rest of your life. To contemplate anything else should be a warning. In making such a promise, you must have the resolution to work each day to deepen your bonds to each other, especially in times of challenge, and never to seek an easy way out of your vows. Additionally, life-long marriage requires each spouse to avoid any other relationships or interactions that might undermine the total and mutual trust that is foundational in marriage. Defending the exclusive marriage bond of being husband and wife is a life-long activity. Sexual activity of any sort with anyone other than our spouse is never acceptable, nor is it appropriate to become emotionally attached to others in a way that diminishes our total dedication to our spouse.

**29** The social sciences affirm the importance of life-long marriage not only for health and stability of husbands, wives and children, but also for the good of society. As Christians who seek to model the love of God for the world in our own relationships, we understand that we must maintain our commitments carefully and for life. Just as God's covenant with us is unbreakable, so too is the marriage bond.

## What if I've been married before?

**30** The bond of marriage, rightly entered into, is permanent and inscribed into our spiritual and emotional core. We do not recognize civil divorces as ending a marriage, and we consider all marriages as valid and binding until proven otherwise. Hence, a person with a prior marriage is not free to enter into a new marriage with someone else, regardless of what the civil law indicates. Since the bond of marriage between husband and wife is sealed both on earth and in heaven, only the God-given authority of the Church may make a determination about whether or not a prior marriage is valid. Therefore, any prior marriages in any setting or circumstance have to be examined by the Church before preparations for a new marriage can begin.

## Why are there so many rules that affect the shape of our own wedding ceremony?

- 31** A wedding ceremony is an act of worship before God the Almighty, and worship is supposed to shape and form us. As an act of prayer and worship, a wedding ceremony proceeds according to the liturgical traditions of the Church. These liturgical traditions, in the form of specific prayers and rituals, communicate several layers of meaning about what marriage is, and about its central place in God's plan of salvation. All of this is why many popular songs or familiar customs that take place in secular or other religious weddings are not allowed in Catholic weddings.

## If marriage is such a good thing, then why don't priests and religious get married?

- 32** Priests and religious embrace the discipline of celibacy and life-long virginity as a manner of expressing their love for God and for others. The socially radical choice for celibacy and virginity only proves the beauty and value of marriage – nothing is worth sacrificing meaningfully unless it is deserved in the first place. The disciplines of celibacy and virginity involve the renunciation of sexual, married love in order to communicate a different dimension of God's love and his plan of salvation than that of married life. Just as men and women are complementary by nature, so it is with celibacy or virginity and marriage; if we had only one and not the other, our understanding of God's love for us would be incomplete.
- 33** Celibacy and virginity are earthly reflections of the love we will know in heaven, where we are neither married nor given in marriage. The love of heaven transcends the bonds of exclusivity inherent in earthly, married love. Celibacy and virginity therefore become powerful reminders of the destiny we all hope to one day share – total union with God in heaven. These disciplines are also a reminder of our origins at the dawn of creation, when Adam and Eve recognized that their most primary longing was for God alone. For priests and religious, celibacy and virginity are outward signs of their internal transformation by Christ himself who draws them into a unique bond with him for the benefit of the salvation of the world.
- 34** Priests and religious need the witness of married couples to help them realize the spousal nature of their bond to Christ. Married couples need the witness of priests and religious to remind them that they will not find all of their satisfaction in this life, or in their spouse. Only God can satisfy all the longings of the human heart, and marriages succeed to the extent that spouses always seek to lead each other to heaven.

I. DEFINING MARRIAGE  
discussion questions

How do you understand your marriage vows as something different from a civil marriage, or from two people simply choosing to live together?

How will the commitment of your marriage vows enhance your relationship with each other?

\_\_\_\_\_

In what ways do the people who know you as a couple see the love that Christ has for the Church reflected in your own relationship?

\_\_\_\_\_

If someone you know does not understand the difference between your future marriage and a same-sex civil union, how would you explain it to them?

\_\_\_\_\_

When we receive the Eucharist, our Lord allows us to receive his Body into our own bodies as he draws us closer to himself. In what ways is this similar to the relationship of marriage?

\_\_\_\_\_

Identify concrete and specific ways that a husband and wife show sacrificial love for each other.

\_\_\_\_\_

If you discover that you are not capable of having children, how would you live out a marriage that is still open to life and is “life-giving?”

\_\_\_\_\_

How will you decide how many children to have?

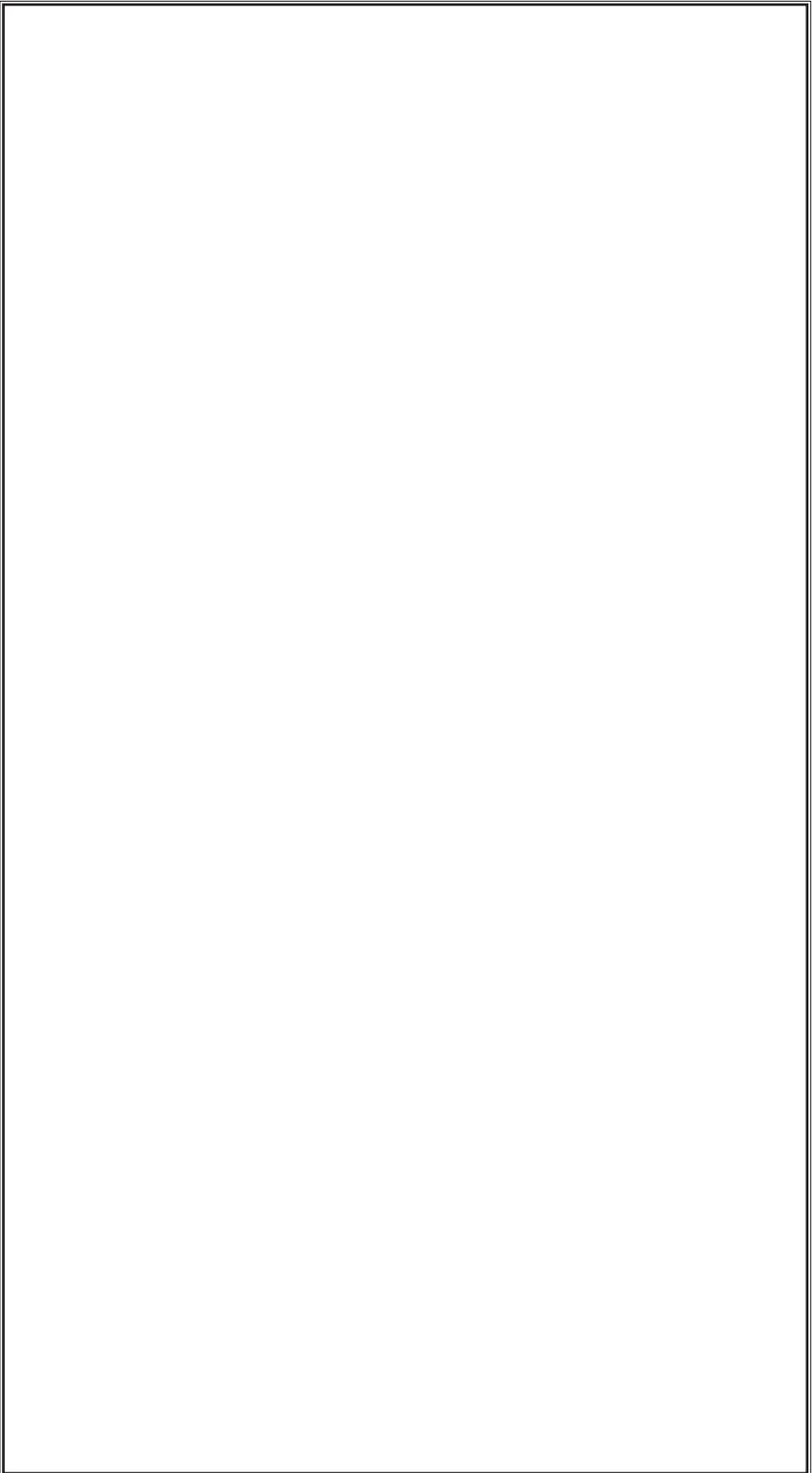
\_\_\_\_\_

How does being open to the possibility of creating new life in every single act of intercourse affect your relationship with each other and with God?

\_\_\_\_\_

What are you most afraid of about practicing Natural Family Planning?  
What do you find appealing about it?





THE THEOLOGY OF  
**marriage**

---

II. what you bring to marriage

### Why shouldn't we live together before we get married?

- 35 It is now common for couples to live together and be sexually active before their wedding day, and it is also common for men and women to live together without even intending to get married. Perhaps this is done to save money, or for convenience; some couples consider it a trial for their future marriage. For many people the practice is viewed as so widespread that it does not occur to them to question its legitimacy. Regardless of the reasons, living together without being married poses a serious risk to future happiness, and it dramatically increases the likelihood of getting a divorce.
- 36 Both the wedding day itself and the life-long commitment of marriage are shaped by the binding nature of vows. A vow is a solemn promise made before God and the members of the community to live in a specific manner without any exceptions, and to do so for the rest of our lives. Therefore the act of making a vow always brings about a profound change in the way we live even the smallest details of our daily lives; we become new creations as we make a vow. There are few things more life-changing than entering into marriage. If our daily actions, routine and life are no different before our wedding day than after, then we have not really made a vow – we have uttered empty words and made no real promises to God or to anyone else. We have not allowed the vows to transform us.
- 37 The most intimate way that a spoken vow brings about a change of action relates to sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse is the physical expression of wedding vows already spoken; an expression of promises to always seek the good of someone else ahead of our own, and to give and receive another person totally. Just as spoken vows without an accompanying new lifestyle are empty of real meaning or love, so too engaging in sexual intercourse without the prior mutual promises of wedding vows is empty of real meaning or love. It goes against the created nature of sex as a truly unifying act that is always open to new life. Engaging in sex outside of marriage undermines our happiness and violates our dignity while at the same time emptying our future marriage vows of any real meaning. “Those who are engaged to marry are called to live chastity in continence. They should see in this time of testing a discovery of mutual respect, an apprenticeship in fidelity and the hope of receiving one another from God. They should reserve for marriage the expressions of affection that belong to married love. They will help each other grow in chastity (CCC 2350).”

## What if we don't share a bed – can we still live together before marriage?

- 38** Living together means sharing not only a bed but also finances and everyday household responsibilities, which forces a couple to deal with their points of disagreement and personality differences in such a deeply personal way that it reshapes them as people. Only the binding and transformative quality of marriage vows offers a married couple the freedom to truly confront their daily differences and to develop authentic patterns of communication so that their union will endure.
- 39** When a man and woman live together without having already made a solemn vow to honor and respect each other and to never abandon each other, they grow into patterns of communicating and behaving on a daily basis that develop around their freedom to terminate their commitment should serious conflict arise. Important differences between them are never truly dealt with because they are afraid to upset their living arrangement made in the absence of a binding commitment. If the man and woman do finally get married, rarely do they re-learn a new, marital, daily pattern of living and communicating that is shaped around the permanency of vows.

### If living together before marriage is not allowed, then how are we going to know if our marriage is going to work?

- 40** While there are many practices and habits to cultivate both as individuals and as a couple that are essential for maintaining the life-long commitment of marriage, it is not possible to guarantee that a marriage will never fail. That is because any commitment in life requires that we open ourselves anew, each day, to God and to others, and our freedom always allows for the possibility that we will one day fail to do so. Such a failure is made more likely, not less, by living in a way that goes against our created nature as men and women, which is what we do when we live a “practice marriage” by living together without marriage vows.
- 41** Living together before marriage actually diminishes our ability to make a sound and objective decision about a potential marriage because of the emotional bonding that results from sexual activity; within marriage such bonding is crucial, but outside of marriage it distorts our attempts to know and view another person in their entirety.

## It seems unrealistic to expect that a man and woman will not engage in sex before their marriage.

**42** There is no question that embracing the authentic nature and understanding of our sexuality is not easy. But that will be just as true during married life as it is prior to it; entering into marriage is not a license to engage in sex on demand. A husband and wife express their respect and love for each other most deeply not only by their engagement in sexual intercourse, but also by their continual attentiveness to each other's periodic wish to refrain from sex. The respect for the other person in this area, and the self-mastery required to guard it, is an essential aspect of the sacrificial nature of real love, and it is a pattern of loving that must be practiced before marriage if it is to be successfully practiced during marriage.

## What about my past sexual experiences with people other than my intended spouse?

**43** Sexual relationships leave especially deep imprints on our hearts and memories for the rest of our lives, and it is important that couples speak honestly about these facets of themselves leading up to, and after, their wedding day. Couples preparing to be married have to engage in their own personal reconciliation with their past. Certainly this requires the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It also requires an internal resolution to live in the present – embracing the real life qualities of their spouse rather than internally longing for some relationship they once had. This requires the daily decision to clear the memory of past sexual encounters, and it requires distance from past acquaintances. Continuing to be in contact with past boyfriends or girlfriends poses a serious threat to married life.

## Does my sexual history include masturbation? That seems trivial.

**44** Masturbation is an act that turns our sexuality and our personal orientation inward, back to the self and into isolation; it possesses no unifying or life-giving quality which makes it contrary to the created nature of sex. Therefore it is always wrong. It moves our sexuality out of real life and into the realm of the imagination and fantasy. Therefore masturbation undermines authentic communication and healthy relationships. Masturbation seriously weakens our ability to have control over our sexual urges, making us more likely to use and mistreat our spouse sexually. It is a highly addictive behavior that eliminates freedom and happiness. When masturbation is accompanied by the use of pornographic materials, a further layer of gravity is added to an already sinful action.

**45** Masturbation is a serious issue to be confronted both inside and outside of marriage; men and women must be open with each other about their struggles with it, before and during marriage, and must actively help each other to bring an end to such activity. Regular recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation is essential to overcoming this behavior. Habits and patterns that exist before marriage in this area are often carried forward into married life; within marriage itself, masturbation is nothing less than marital infidelity.

### Isn't the use of pornography and the act of masturbation a private act? How does it affect my spouse?

**46** Pornography, masturbation and adultery undermine intimacy in a direct manner because they call into question the sincerity of a spouse's sexual expression, which is the deepest expression of who we are and also our most vulnerable mode of communication. When our communication and the authenticity of our sexual expression are made to be inadequate or suspect on such a deeply personal level, it destroys the marriage bond.

**47** Sin of any sort is never a merely private action because it undermines all the relationships that we are in: with God, with others and our own selves. The use of pornography is always seriously wrong for all of the same reasons that masturbation is seriously wrong, with the added problem that it supports an industry that destroys human dignity and advances evil. This is true even if our spouse never finds out about these actions.

**48** For all of these reasons, pornography and masturbation can have no place in our lives; couples must be very honest with each other before their wedding day about their history with these actions and about the concrete steps they are taking to overcome them.

### What if one or both of us has children from a prior relationship?

**49** Any prior marriage needs to be examined by the Church before a new marriage can be entered into. Even if the Church determines that a new marriage may take place, it is crucial for the new couple to communicate honestly about the kinds of contact and communication that are expected to occur with the parties from a prior marriage.

**50** This is even more crucial when children are involved, whether there was a prior marriage or not. It is especially challenging to blend old and new families together; natural parents are always obligated to ensure that the needs of their biological children are provided for, even if they are no longer living in the same household. A future spouse must be aware of the unique demands that children who are not biologically theirs will place on them. Continual patience, prayer and communication are needed so that children from a prior relationship are never seen, or made to be seen, as a wedge between a newly-married couple. A newly-married couple should thoroughly discuss what roles each spouse will have in the care and upbringing of any children from a prior relationship. If one or both parties to a new marriage already have children, it is important to discuss the openness, by both parties, to new children in the new union.

## If I've had an abortion, can I still get married in the Church?

**51** Having an abortion leaves a wound in both the father and the mother of the unborn child for the rest of their lives; this is a wound that they will take into a marriage and it needs to be dealt with prayerfully, honestly and lovingly. If either party to a new marriage has had an abortion or been impacted by abortion, they should share this fact with their intended spouse before the marriage takes place. Both parties should be especially attentive to the myriad of emotions that will accompany such a discussion, before and during a marriage, and both should devote their energies to best fostering the necessary process of healing and recovering.

**52** The Sacrament of Reconciliation is essential to the process of healing that needs to take place after an abortion; it is also a required part of the process for ensuring that the mother or father is in full communion with the Church before a wedding can take place. This situation should always be discussed with the minister preparing the couple for marriage.

## Is pregnancy a reason to get married?

**53** While it is certainly true that children have the right to be brought into the world within the confines of a stable marriage between both biological parents, a pregnancy by itself is not a sufficient reason to get married. A couple in this situation should discuss very carefully and honestly what the other reasons are for them to be married – on how firm a foundation their relationship rests. For a marriage to occur, the bond between them should consist of more than just the child they have in common. If the couple decides not to marry, it does not relieve either biological parent from their life-long obligation to ensure that the child is provided for. This situation should always be discussed with the minister preparing the couple for marriage.

## It's been a long time since I've been to church. Does that matter?

- 54** Ideally, your marriage ceremony should be celebrated in the parish where one of you has been and both will continue to be regular participants in the sacraments. Preparing for marriage can be a good opportunity to rediscover why faith, prayer and regular worship are essential for a life of happiness. This is true for us as individuals, and it is also true for a married couple. Husbands and wives must entrust their marriage every day to the grace of God if they are going to have a marriage that is lifelong, faithful, fruitful and fulfilling. The community of the Church sustains and supports us in our commitments, communicates the presence of God to us, and challenges us to become better people. Our own homes and families will take shape as dwelling places of God to the extent that they are directly connected to the parish family to which we belong. Our worship habits prior to marriage will carry over into married life. For all these reasons, it's crucial that we develop the routine of regular prayer and weekly worship.
- 55** The process of reconnecting with regular prayer and worship always begins with the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and celebrating this Sacrament should be an essential component of your wedding preparations. Once you have done so, it will be up to you to maintain a regular habit of weekly worship and parish involvement.

## How do we work out our religious differences as a couple?

- 56** Our faith practices and religious beliefs are among our defining attributes as people. Therefore couples of different faith backgrounds, or of differing Christian traditions, should honestly and seriously pray about what it will mean to live with, and raise children with, a person who does not share their own religious beliefs. Frequently the religious convictions of one spouse come to dominate the marriage and household. Catholics are required to maintain their practice of the Catholic faith before and during a marriage, and it is the expectation of the Church that the children of the new marriage will be raised as Catholics. If a couple preparing for marriage senses that their religious differences will be a point of tension, then it may be a sign that they are not meant to be married; such differences must never be minimized.
- 57** Religious differences are especially challenging if one spouse has no faith at all or even rejects faith outrightly. Such a marriage should be entered into with great caution and only after much honest discussion about the core values of both parties, and about the example that each parent will provide of faith and values to their future children, and of the ongoing place of religion in the home during married life.

## II. WHAT YOU BRING TO MARRIAGE

### discussion questions

Describe what a vow means to you. Describe what a vow means to God and to the community of the Church.

---

If you are currently living together without being married, what concrete steps are you going to take to change this situation before your wedding day?

---

What have you done to create distance between you and your past relationships?

---

How does your fiancée feel about the fact that you have already engaged in sex with someone other than them? If they have done this with someone other than their spouse once, how have they convinced you that this is not going to happen again?

---

What concrete steps are you going to take to end any habits involving pornography or masturbation before your wedding day? How will you allow your fiancée to help you in this area?

---

Describe your understanding of divorce. How does your fiancée feel about your prior marriage and your former spouse?

---

If one of you is not Catholic, describe what your Sunday worship habits as a family will look like.

---

If you already have children from a prior relationship, discuss how your fiancée is going to be a vital part of their future upbringing and support. What will you do when your child comes between you and your future spouse?

---

If you already have a child/children together, describe how entering into marriage is going to change your daily life as a family in concrete and specific ways.





THE THEOLOGY OF  
**marriage**

---

III. living the vocation  
of marriage well

## How does married life help us to become holier, better people?

**58** Being holy simply means that we enter ever more deeply into friendship with God, a friendship that will come to perfection in the communion of Heaven. We do not enter into friendship with God in a vacuum; it always occurs as a response to his love for us and within the setting of our relationships with others, because it is in relationships that we learn how to give, how to sacrifice, how to love, and that we are a gift. The relationship of marriage is a beautiful pathway to holiness and to union with God in this life and in the next. This is what it means to say that marriage is a vocation, or a calling by God. A married couple discerns that God has called them together so that he can call them both to himself, making them holy as they live life together.

## What are virtues and what place do they have in marriage?

**59** A virtue is a consistent habit, or disposition, toward goodness. It is a practiced and willed ordering of the body, mind and soul toward right and true behavior. Much like physical exercise, growing in virtues requires consistent effort and self-mastery, and we cannot obtain such discipline without God's grace alive in our hearts. The virtues, or our consistently good habits, help to keep our passions always directed in ways that are healthy for us and for our relationships. Without virtues, our passions and appetites could take control of our lives and take away our freedom, erode our happiness and separate us from God.

**60** A fulfilling marriage is not possible without living a life of virtue; and married life is also a daily means to grow in virtue as we are forced to undergo the hard but rewarding work of self-improvement. Without virtue we would turn away from commitments; without virtue we would commit actions that violate the dignity of our spouses.

## What are some essential virtues in married life?

### What is love and what does it mean?

**61** Central not only to married life but also to life in general are the three Theological Virtues of faith, hope and love. Love within marriage is closely related to the virtues of chastity, gratitude and hospitality. These dispositions shape our daily thinking and behavior in such a way that God is placed always at the center of our life. Love is often misunderstood to be merely an emotion or a feeling. Love is actually the consistent daily choice, an act of the will, to seek the benefit and good of someone else – to raise someone else up to God.

62 Love is always rooted in sacrifice and therefore it is rarely easy. It goes against our fallen nature to set our own wishes aside, but there is no other way to love, and marriage requires such a disposition in order to flourish. Love means that we continue to be sincerely devoted to the well-being of our spouse even when they are poor or infirm, when they challenge us, when they fail and when all emotions or sentiments of attraction seem to have worn off. The more we learn to love, and are loved, the better we become as people and the closer we grow to God.

## What does chastity have to do with marriage?

63 As a virtue, chastity is the good habit or disposition of expressing sexual love in such a way that it is always other-centered and always respects human dignity, both our own and that of others. Everyone must seek to grow in chastity, especially married couples; failure to grow in chastity allows our sexual appetites and passions to control us, thereby taking away our freedom and creating a life centered on our own gratification. Without chastity, sexuality loses its beauty and becomes an agent of destruction that consumes us as individuals, and erodes mutual respect between spouses.

64 Chastity requires that we gain an authentic understanding of sexuality and of our personal dignity. As we grow in this understanding and self-mastery, we also experience the virtues of gratitude and hospitality in married love. Couples who always seek to grow in chastity also experience real joy and thanksgiving as they rejoice in the sacrifices they make for each other, and they make more and more room in their hearts and lives for the gift of the other person. Couples who understand chastity, gratitude and hospitality also welcome children as the natural outgrowth of all these dispositions.

65 Therefore, chastity does not mean that a married couple does not ever engage in sexual intercourse; it means that they see each act of intercourse in its proper light as a total expression of married love, as a totally other-centered action, and as an action that is truly unifying and open to new life. With chaste hearts, sexual intercourse leads to deeper love, gratitude, joy, hospitality, faith and hope. If sexual intercourse is simply the selfish fulfillment of passion and sexual appetites (lust), then it destroys respect, fosters resentment and turns spouses inward into isolation and away from love.

## Are there marital practices that hinder a growth in chastity?

- 66** Growth in chastity, as with all the virtues, requires God's grace and the hard work of self-improvement and continual behavioral adjustment. While there are actions that can help, or hinder, our growth in chastity, it is important to remember that chastity within marriage requires more than simply following clean-cut rules; it is the result of much prayer, patience, trial and error as husbands and wives continually strive to see the face of God in their sexual embrace and in each other.
- 67** The practices that undermine chastity are those that direct sexual expression back on ourselves, inwardly, and that separate the inseparable connection between the unifying and life-giving aspects of sexuality. Some examples of such actions include masturbation, viewing pornography, focusing on sexual fantasies, using contraception or sterilization, sexual acts with anyone other than our spouse and attempted sexual acts between two people of the same sex.
- 68** Beyond these specific examples, even if each act of intercourse is open to the creation of new life, chastity is undermined whenever a married couple engages in sex in a manner that fails to view sex as a sacred act, or fails to see all sexual activity as a means to lead up to sexual intercourse – specifically, intercourse during which each spouse is carefully attentive to the wishes, intentions and expressions of the other. Sexual intercourse cannot be an act centered on the self, or an act performed in a state of mental isolation; spouses must never view each other as objects for their own self gain, use sex as a manipulative tool, use sex to dominate or engage in sex against the wishes of their spouse. At the heart of chaste sexual expression is total attentiveness to the other person, rooted in self-emptying, sacrificial love.

## How does practicing Natural Family Planning help with growth in chastity and authentic married love?

- 69** There is no easy formula that facilitates growth in chastity. The Church recommends the practice of Natural Family Planning to married couples as a means to not only regulate the number of children they conceive, but also as a means to help them grow in chastity. Natural Family Planning requires that a couple be attentive to the God-given cycles of fertility, and requires them to abstain from sexual intercourse during fertile periods if they do not wish to conceive children.

70 The discipline required to practice Natural Family Planning makes it more difficult for husbands and wives to adopt a casual attitude about sexuality, and it requires continual communication about sexuality; it forces couples to learn the freedom of self-mastery of their passions, and to learn non-sexual ways to express love. It requires that couples be continually attentive to each other's sexual moods and needs, which is an important way of communicating respect for each other. When lived well, the practice of Natural Family Planning allows sexual expression to truly be the deep form of self-expression that it is created to be. In all these ways, Natural Family Planning can be very beneficial to married love, and can be a helpful way to grow in chastity.

### What are some other important practices for maintaining a healthy marriage?

71 The key points of tension in most marriages revolve around finances, children, sexuality and faith. The key to successfully navigating all of these is open communication and agreement on what issues are of the highest priority. Faith is always the foundation for every other issue, which means that a successful marriage depends upon a consistent habit of prayer and worship. Husbands, wives and their children should always make weekly attendance at Sunday Mass a top priority, along with regular celebration of Reconciliation. It is important for the home to be a place of prayer not only as individuals but also as an entire family. Husbands and wives should always remember that God is their constant partner in married life, and that he offers his love and grace in abundance.

72 Natural Family Planning is strongly encouraged as a lifestyle that facilitates open communication about children and sexuality. Communication about finances always revolves around the differing values and priorities of each spouse; a habit of regular contributions to a parish or charity is a helpful way to keep generosity at the heart of family financial discussions.

73 Lastly, it is very important for husbands and wives to maintain healthy friendships outside of their marriage and to turn to other married couples for support in times of trouble, and to share joy with them in times of blessing. We should avoid any relationships in life that can lead us to compromise our commitments, and we should cultivate the relationships that help us to become better as people, better in our vocations and better disciples of Christ. The community of the Church is always ready to embrace and support couples in their pursuit of life-long, fulfilling marriage, and couples should reach out to the Church for support whenever they are in need.

---

## discussion questions

---

How does knowing and loving your fiancée challenge you to be a better person? In what ways do you challenge your fiancée to be better?

---

Once married, the best way to change your spouse is to *change yourself*.

What are your own best and worst qualities that you will be offering to your relationship?

---

What are the best attributes of your fiancée? What are the worst?

---

Describe some daily practices that help a husband and wife to remain married for life.

---

How do you help your fiancée grow in faith and in generosity?

---

How do you help your fiancée grow in chastity?

---

What are the non-sexual ways that you show affection for your fiancée?

How do you give love? How do you let yourself be loved?

---

Discuss the ways that both of you experience love not as an emotion but instead as a choice. Talk about the role of obligation in your relationship.

---

How do you know that your fiancée truly respects you?

How do they show this?

---

Describe your prayer together as a couple.

---

What sorts of daily activities will you and your spouse engage in with your children to teach them how to be Catholic? Describe your role as your child's primary instructor in the faith.

---

What will your family have to offer to the parish community that you will be a part of once you are married? What can the community of the parish do to help your marriage and your children?

---

Describe your own experiences with the Sacrament of Reconciliation and of regular Sunday Mass attendance. What do these things mean to you both?

---





PASTORAL GUIDELINES for  
marriage  
preparation

“AUTHENTIC MARRIED LOVE IS CAUGHT UP INTO DIVINE LOVE AND IS GOVERNED AND ENRICHED BY CHRIST’S REDEEMING POWER AND THE SAVING ACTIVITY OF THE CHURCH, SO THAT THIS LOVE MAY LEAD THE SPOUSES TO GOD WITH POWERFUL EFFECT AND MAY AID AND STRENGTHEN THEM IN SUBLIME OFFICE OF BEING A FATHER OR A MOTHER.”

*Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*  
AAS 57 (1965), pp. 15-16; 40-41; 47

# PASTORAL GUIDELINES

## preface

---

---

Marriage is a sacred relationship. For you as individual persons, it is a moment of profound richness and dignity. For the community, it is an institution that serves as one of the basic bonds which holds our society together. For the Church, it is a sacramental event that gives a visible sign of God's presence and graceful intervention in our lives.

The Church has a rich tradition in its teaching on marriage. Throughout the Old Testament the authors speak of God making a covenant with the chosen people and promising that they will never be forsaken. The authors of the New Testament speak of Jesus Christ as the new covenant and compare the relationship of Christ with the Church to the relationship of a husband and wife.

The sacredness of marriage as upheld by the Church throughout the centuries is central to marriage preparation. You, as a couple, are assured of God's graces as you face the struggles and joys of a lifelong journey of faith together. It is your responsibility to evaluate your readiness for marriage and to create an environment of support and love in which you as a couple can succeed. Through marriage preparation, you will be given an opportunity to reflect upon your decision to marry.

In order to provide strong support and care for you as you enter the sacred state of marriage, the Catholic Dioceses of Wisconsin have prepared these Pastoral Guidelines for Marriage Preparation. These guidelines have been written to help you more deeply realize the serious and sacred, yet joyful and life-giving nature of marriage. The intention of the marriage preparation process established in these pastoral guidelines is to enable you, as a couple, to pray together in the community of the Church, to be God's witnesses in the world, and "after a happy old age, together with the circle of friends that surrounds [you], may [you] come to the Kingdom of Heaven" (*Rite of Marriage, Option C, Roman Missal, Third Edition*).

# I

## Location of Preparation and the Wedding Liturgy

The wedding liturgy is central to your marriage celebration. The following guidelines will assist you in determining in which parish you should marry and how to proceed if your marriage is to be celebrated in a parish other than one in which one of you resides.

### GUIDELINES

Your wedding liturgy and your preparation for marriage ordinarily take place in the parish in which at least one of you is resident.

If the marriage will not take place at the parish where one or both of the engaged are registered, due to the location of family and friends, the pastor(s) of their parish(es) must be notified of the couple's plans for marriage. The pastor(s) must give permission for the wedding to take place in another church.

# II

## Early Contact with the Parish

The guidelines advising early contact with your parish are intended to ensure that you have adequate time to pastorally prepare for your marriage and your wedding celebration. They also provide an opportunity for you to develop a relationship with the priest, deacon, parish director or pastoral ministers.

### GUIDELINES

Your preparation for marriage will begin when you announce your engagement, even if that is a year or more before your proposed wedding date. You are required to contact your parish a minimum of six months prior to the anticipated date of your wedding so that all preparation requirements can be fulfilled.

It is recommended that your immediate formal preparation be completed at least six weeks prior to the anticipated date of your wedding.

## III Engagement Blessing

Following the engagement announcement, your parish may provide an opportunity for your family and members of the parish community to affirm your decision to marry through an engagement blessing.

## IV The Marriage Preparation Process

### PROXIMATE PREPARATION

#### A. The Initial Session

The Church wants your marriage to be successful and to be a source of happiness and blessing throughout your lives. This initial meeting will help explain the marriage preparation process, determine your canonical and civil eligibility for marriage and explore the possibility for the Sacrament of Confirmation if one of you is a Catholic who has not been confirmed.

#### GUIDELINE

Your initial session with the priest/deacon, parish director or pastoral minister will occur as soon as possible after you inform the parish that you have decided to marry.

#### B. Program of Preparation for Marriage

This section of your marriage preparation presents the essential Christian and human aspects of marriage so that you may come to a deeper understanding of all the dimensions of the marriage covenant. It provides you with concrete means to reflect on your relationship in light of the factors and issues that are usually involved in marriage. It emphasizes the ongoing nature of marital development and love including a deeper understanding of God and your relationship with God in prayer.

#### GUIDELINES

Your relationship as a couple and your readiness for marriage will be explored through a premarital inventory or an equivalent experience. You, as an engaged couple, will participate in an instructional program provided by the diocese or parish program that follows the criteria of the Arch/diocesan guidelines.

One important area to be discussed is Natural Family Planning. Natural Family Planning (NFP) methods represent authentic Catholic family planning. They can be used both to achieve and to postpone a pregnancy. NFP makes use of periodic abstinence from sexual intercourse based upon the observation of the woman's natural signs of fertility, in order to space births or to limit the number of children when there is serious reason to do so.\* Your pastor can refer you to an expert in NFP.

At the completion of this process, the priest, deacon, parish director or pastoral minister (with input from designated marriage preparation ministers) will proceed with your marriage unless a serious obstacle arises that might prevent you from entering a permanent marriage. (These may include: inability to assume the obligations of marriage due to psychological causes, an expressed intention to deny the other a permanent and exclusive union, a decision by either to permanently prevent children and refusal of the Catholic to make every effort to provide for the Catholic formation of children.)

## **IMMEDIATE PREPARATION**

### **C. Liturgical Preparation**

These guidelines indicate the ritual to be followed as you prepare and celebrate your wedding liturgy. It is also strongly encouraged that Catholic parties partake of the Sacrament of Penance and Most Holy Eucharist.

## GUIDELINES

You as an engaged couple, along with the priest, deacon, parish director or pastoral minister, are to follow the Catholic Rite of Marriage and diocesan guidelines in preparing your wedding liturgy.

In particular instances, a wedding liturgy can be celebrated in a location other than a Catholic church for a reasonable cause. The marriage preparation sessions are to be completed and a dispensation obtained by the Catholic priest or deacon. Please contact your Chancery office with specific questions.

\*See [\*USCCB, Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan\*](#) (Washington, DC, USCCB, 2009) p.21

## V Delay of Marriage

Sometimes it is wise to delay a marriage. The guidelines in this section emphasize the importance the Catholic community places on the permanence and sacredness of marriage. The guidelines indicate that there might be a just cause for delaying your marriage and present a process for you to follow if a delay is recommended.

### GUIDELINES

For a just cause, a marriage can be delayed. Common causes include: non-practice of the faith by the Catholic with no intention of practicing the faith after marriage, substantial lack of appreciation of the spiritual aspects of marriage, refusal to cooperate in the marriage preparation process and unmet obligations to a person or children arising from a prior union.

If a delay is recommended, you will be offered resources to help you remove the cause(s) of delay, and you will be advised of the process of appeal.

## VI Appeal Process

In the unlikely event that you and the priest/deacon, parish director or pastoral minister disagree as to whether the marriage should proceed, the appeal process protects the rights of all concerned and provides you with the opportunity to have diocesan personnel review your case.

### GUIDELINES

If your marriage is delayed, you may ask to have your situation reviewed by the designated diocesan office or agency.

The recommendations arising from the appeal process shall be referred to the bishop or his delegate for final determination in a timely and strictly confidential manner.

## VII

# Marriage Between a Catholic and a Baptized Non-Catholic (Mixed Marriage)

Your religious convictions and values can be a rich source of strength and blessing in your marriage, but serious differences may arise from these convictions. The following guidelines address these issues and recommend a sound approach to ensure that these differences become a blessing in your marriage and prevent possible difficulties that may otherwise arise. The required additional sessions are meant to be informational for both the Catholic and non-Catholic and are not meant to put any pressure on the non-Catholic to convert.

### GUIDELINES

When a Catholic plans to marry a person of another church, ecclesial community, denomination, religion or faith, the couple is to participate in additional sessions about the Catholic faith.

If the wedding is celebrated in a church other than the Catholic Church, the couple is required to complete Catholic marriage preparation and the proper dispensation (Canonical Form) is to be obtained.

## VIII

# Marriage Between a Catholic and a Non-Baptized Person (Disparity of Cult)

In these marriages, greater catechesis is needed to assist the Catholic party with a deeper understanding of their faith in marriage and the non-baptized party to come to an understanding of what marriage in the Catholic Church entails. Similar to the mixed marriage scenario above, participation in additional sessions about the Catholic faith will be expected.

When a Catholic marries a person who is not baptized, the marriage is not a sacrament because a sacramental marriage only takes place between two baptized persons. It is a valid marriage if all conditions for validity are fulfilled. A dispensation from the impediment of disparity of cult is required from the bishop of the Catholic party's diocese. The marriage is invalid without this dispensation.

# IX

## Marriage of Non-Practicing Catholics

The following guideline is intended to help you develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of your Catholic faith, if either of you is a non-practicing Catholic.

### GUIDELINE

When one or both of the parties entering marriage is a non-practicing Catholic, the couple is to participate in additional sessions about the Catholic faith.

# X

## Special Circumstances in Marriage Preparation

Sometimes special circumstances warrant special attention in your marriage preparation. This section of the guidelines addresses a number of circumstances that may arise.

### GUIDELINES

#### **A. ABSENT PARTNER/LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS**

When the application of these guidelines is not possible due to absence or distance, you will be offered alternative ways to carry out the spirit of the guidelines. When suitable alternatives cannot be found, delay of your marriage may be appropriate.

#### **B. DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

In relationships where physical, chemical, sexual or emotional abuse is evident or use of/addiction to pornography is present, your marriage should be delayed until appropriate remedial action has been taken.

#### **C. COHABITATION**

Many couples choose to live together in a sexual relationship prior to marriage. Couples offer various reasons for cohabiting, ranging from economics to convenience. Frequently, they have accepted the widespread societal belief that premarital cohabitation is a prudent way to determine whether they are truly compatible.\* Current research, however, finds that this is not the case. Priests, deacons, parish directors or pastoral ministers will explain and discuss with you the teachings of the Church regarding human sexuality and marriage, and the reasons for the Church's disapproval of cohabitation before proceeding with your marriage.

\*See USCCB, *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan* (Washington, DC, USCCB, 2009) p.27

#### **D. ETHNIC, CULTURAL AND RACIAL DIFFERENCES**

Marriage guidelines will be pastorally and sensitively interpreted in light of your ethnicity, culture and race.

#### **E. HIV AND MARRIAGE**

While the Code of Canon Law does not list HIV/AIDS as an impediment to marriage, it is essential that you receive proper counsel prior to any decision to marry if either of you have tested positive to HIV/AIDS.

If you have tested positive to HIV/AIDS and are contemplating marriage, you must inform your prospective spouse of the virus infection.

In situations where one or both partners have HIV/AIDS you will be requested to explore the unique issues you face with a qualified representative of the Church.

#### **F. MARRIAGE OF PERSONS UNDER AGE NINETEEN**

If either of you is not yet nineteen years of age, additional meetings with you and your parents are advised to determine if it is appropriate to proceed with your wedding at this time. Other professional counsel will be recommended if necessary.

#### **G. MARRIAGE OF OLDER COUPLES**

The marriage preparation process is to be adapted to your age and maturity as a couple but preparation should not be eliminated.

#### **H. MARRIAGE OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

In general, persons with disabilities have a right to marry, but certain physical and mental disabilities may be an impediment to marriage. Priests, deacons, parish directors or pastoral ministers should extend appropriate pastoral care.

#### **I. PREGNANCY**

Pregnancy should not be the determining factor in proceeding with or delaying a marriage, nor is it sufficient reason to omit the marriage preparation process.

#### **J. REMARRIAGE**

Preparation for remarriage includes a process to determine your canonical freedom to marry and to implement the marriage preparation guidelines, while sensitively addressing the unique challenges you may face. If a Church process is necessary to address a previous marriage, a date for marriage cannot be set until that process, with an affirmative outcome without restriction, is completed.

# XI

## Validation of a Marriage

If you as a couple have married outside the Church and now wish to have your marriage validated, your understanding and appreciation of the sacrament you are entering will be deepened through marriage preparation.

### GUIDELINE

Couples approaching the Church for validation of their marriage must participate in an appropriate marriage preparation process before the marriage is validated.

# XII

## Pastoral Care After Marriage

The Church is concerned that your love will continue to grow and your marriage relationship will be strengthened and deepened throughout your years of marriage. You are encouraged to participate in marriage and family enrichment programs that will be available to you through your parish and diocese.

### GUIDELINE

Priests, deacons, parish directors and pastoral ministers are to take practical steps to ensure that the parish continues to support you as you seek to live out the sacrament of marriage.

# resources

for YOUR MARRIAGE

“WE URGE A RENEWED COMMITMENT BY THE ENTIRE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY TO HELPING THOSE CALLED TO THE VOCATION OF MARRIED LIFE TO LIVE IT FAITHFULLY, FRUITFULLY AND JOYFULLY. WE PLEDGE TO BE A MARRIAGE-BUILDING CHURCH, DRAWING STRENGTH FROM GOD’S GRACE WHILE USING CREATIVELY THE GIFTS AND RESOURCES ENTRUSTED TO US.”

*Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, USCCB

①  
Vatican Documents/Statements

**PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD (GAUDIUM ET SPES)**

Second Vatican Council, 1965

**MARRIAGE BETWEEN ROMAN CATHOLICS AND ORTHODOX**

Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches, 1967

**APOSTOLIC LETTER ON MIXED MARRIAGES**

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1970

**CHARTER OF THE RIGHTS OF THE FAMILY**

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1983

**CODE OF CANON LAW**

Pope John Paul II, 1983

**INSTRUCTION ON RESPECT FOR HUMAN LIFE IN ITS ORIGIN AND ON THE DIGNITY OF PROCREATION (DONUM VITAE)**

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1987

**CODE OF CANON LAW OF THE EASTERN CHURCHES**

Pope John Paul II, 1990

**DIRECTORY FOR THE APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES AND NORMS ON ECUMENISM**

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1993

**LETTER TO THE BISHOPS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH CONCERNING THE RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION BY THE DIVORCED AND REMARRIED MEMBERS OF THE FAITH**

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1994

**CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000

**CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING PROPOSALS TO GIVE LEGAL RECOGNITIONS TO UNIONS BETWEEN HOMOSEXUAL PERSONS**

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2003

①  
Papal Statements

**ON THE REGULATION OF BIRTH (HUMANAE VITAE)**

Pope Paul VI, 1968

**ON THE FAMILY (FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO)**

Pope John Paul II, 1981

**ON THE DIGNITY AND VOCATION OF WOMEN  
(MULIERIS DIGNITATEM)**

Pope John Paul II, 1988

**LETTER TO FAMILIES (GRATISSIMAM SANE)**

Pope John Paul II, 1994

**THE GOSPEL OF LIFE (EVANGELIUM VITAE)**

Pope John Paul II, 1995

**GOD IS LOVE (DEUS CARITAS EST)**

Pope Benedict XVI, 2005

**THEOLOGY OF THE BODY**

Pope John Paul II, 2006 translation

①  
Pontifical Council for the Family Documents

**PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE**

1996

**VADEMECUM FOR CONFESSORS CONCERNING SOME  
ASPECTS OF THE MORALITY OF CONJUGAL LIFE**

1997

**EMBRYONIC REDUCTION**

2000

**FAMILY, MARRIAGE AND “DE FACTO UNIONS”**

2000

**ENCHIRIDION ON THE FAMILY**

2004

②  
United States Bishops' Statements

**FOLLOW THE WAY OF LOVE: A PASTORAL MESSAGE  
TO FAMILIES**

1993

**ALWAYS OUR CHILDREN: A PASTORAL MESSAGE  
TO PARENTS OF HOMOSEXUAL CHILDREN AND  
SUGGESTIONS FOR PASTORAL MINISTERS**

1997

**BLESSINGS OF AGE: A PASTORAL MESSAGE ON  
GROWING OLDER WITHIN THE FAITH COMMUNITY**

1999

**U.S. NORMS FOR MARRIAGE PREPARATION**

2000

**WHEN I CALL FOR HELP: A PASTORAL RESPONSE TO  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

2002

**BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN: QUESTIONS  
AND ANSWERS ABOUT MARRIAGE AND  
SAME-SEX UNIONS**

2003

**MARRIED LOVE AND THE GIFT OF LIFE**

2006

**MARRIAGE: LOVE AND LIFE IN THE DIVINE PLAN**

2009



All resources listed here may be found  
online at [FORYOURMARRIAGE.ORG](http://FORYOURMARRIAGE.ORG)

DETACH HERE

IN  
*perfect*  
UNION

---

---

living the sacrament of marriage

PLEASE READ THE STATEMENT BELOW, SIGN, DETACH  
AND SUBMIT TO YOUR PARISH OFFICE TO BE KEPT ON FILE.

We have read the contents of this marriage  
compendium and have discussed the materials with  
our priest/deacon/parish director/pastoral minister.

---

GROOM SIGNATURE

DATE

---

BRIDE SIGNATURE

DATE

---

PREPARER SIGNATURE

DATE



STATE OF WISCONSIN  
CATHOLIC MARRIAGE COMPENDIUM



In restoring to marriage its original meaning and beauty, Jesus proclaims what the Creator meant marriage to be “in the beginning.” He does so because marriage will be made into the visible embodiment of his love for the Church. In his espousal of the Church as his Bride, he fulfills and elevates marriage. He reveals his own love to the end (Jn 13:1) as the purest and deepest love, the perfection of all love. In doing this he reveals the deepest meaning of all marital love: self-giving love modeled on God’s inner life and love.\*

MAY GOD BLESS YOU BOTH!

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION,  
PLEASE CONTACT:

Archdiocese of Milwaukee  
[www.archmil.org](http://www.archmil.org)

Diocese of Green Bay  
[www.gbdioc.org](http://www.gbdioc.org)

Diocese of La Crosse  
[www.dioceseoflacrosse.com](http://www.dioceseoflacrosse.com)

Diocese of Madison  
[www.madisondiocese.org](http://www.madisondiocese.org)

Diocese of Superior  
[www.catholicdos.org](http://www.catholicdos.org)



FOR AN INTERACTIVE ELECTRONIC VERSION OF  
THIS CATHOLIC MARRIAGE COMPENDIUM, VISIT  
[www.johnpaul2center.org/nazarethproject.htm](http://www.johnpaul2center.org/nazarethproject.htm)

\*See USCCB, *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan* (Washington, DC, USCCB, 2009) p. 33

