

# MARRIAGE PREPARATION IN THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF SYDNEY



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*An outline of norms for the preparation  
of couples for marriage.*

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## FOREWORD

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Preparing engaged couples for the Sacrament of Marriage is a great joy and sacred responsibility of the family and the Church. *Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney* is the fruit of a marriage preparation review which involved contributions from priests, individuals and married couples who have served generously in this apostolate. It has drawn on their many years of pastoral experience in preparing couples for marriage.

*Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney* is a “blueprint” for priests, families and marriage preparation course providers. It illuminates and explains the core principles of Christian marriage and the human and spiritual formation the engaged couple should receive before their wedding day.

The Holy Father, Benedict XVI, has commented that marriage “*presents itself as a great missionary opportunity because today - thanks be to God - many people, even those who do not go to church often, still want to marry in church. It is an opportunity to make these young people face the reality of Christian Marriage, sacramental Marriage.*”<sup>1</sup> Couples who present for marriage within the Church sense to varying degrees, the significance and the greatness of marriage as a union made and blessed by God.

The Church desires to give the engaged couple every help and grace possible to ensure their happiness together and the happiness of their future children – to help them understand the reality of the sacrament and to discover its true beauty. For the engaged couple, the time of marriage preparation is a crucial re-encounter with Jesus Christ and his bride, the Church. It is an encounter which should invite and encourage the couple to make the Sunday Eucharist an indispensable part of their marriage and family life.

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<sup>1</sup> Meeting of the Holy Father with priests of the Diocese of Albano. Castel Gandolfo, August 31, 2006.

The Church recognises three stages of preparation for marriage – the remote stage, during childhood and adolescence; the proximate stage, when a young person reaches the age of courtship and begins to look seriously for a life partner; and the immediate stage, the time of engagement and preparation for a wedding. While this document focuses on the immediate stage, the earlier two stages are equally important in laying the foundation for a happy and enduring marriage. Marriage preparation begins in the home, where children learn how to give and receive love. It is where parents nurture their young people and prepare them for their vocation in life.

The Church's teaching on marriage is a treasure trove of riches for preparing couples for the Sacrament of Marriage. Some of its gems – including *Familiaris Consortio*, *Humanae Vitae*, *Evangelium Vitae* and *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* – have been integrated into the text of this document. It is my hope that those who read it will be drawn to a deeper love and appreciation of the richness of the Church's teaching – a theology that is not only spiritual, but profoundly human and practical in its insights and understanding of the couple. This teaching gives couples a strong foundation for a healthy and flourishing married life and a proper understanding of their role as spouses and parents – their unique and irreplaceable call to be a wife and mother, a husband and father.

The Church urges all of us to take marriage preparation seriously and to understand the greatness of the vocation to marriage and family life. As such I desire that all couples who are to be married in this Archdiocese be prepared in accordance with the norms outlined in *Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney*. It is my prayer that every engaged couple wishing to marry in the Church will be exposed to the richness and beauty of the Church's teaching on marriage and to the personal witness of Catholic married couples who love each other deeply, and who joyfully desire and welcome children into their lives. Through their marriage preparation formation experience, may all engaged couples be inspired to love and live their vocation to marriage, and to cherish it as a priceless gift from the Lord.

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "+ George Card. Pell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

GEORGE CARDINAL PELL  
ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY  
*February 2009*

## INTRODUCTION

THE fostering of the nobility of marriage and the family is one of the major pastoral concerns of the Church. Pope Benedict XVI commented on its importance in his call for all members of the Church to ‘work for this human institution, which is rooted in God’s loving plan and represents the irreplaceable model for the common good of humanity’<sup>2</sup>. Previously, Pope John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) had observed that preparing young people for this important sacrament is “more than ever necessary in our times.” He continued: “not only the family but also society and the Church should be involved in the effort of properly preparing young people for their future responsibilities.” The Pontifical Council for the Family (PCF) in its document *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* (1996) affirmed that “For Christians, marriage, which has its origin in God the Creator, also implies a real vocation to a particular state of life and grace. In order to be fully realised, this vocation requires adequate, particular preparation and a specific path of love within the Church and society.”

The process by which a couple enters into Catholic marriage is regulated by Church law, the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference and the particular policies of the local Church. These bodies work together to provide a program of adequate preparation for couples so that they are able to live out their call to holiness within their vocation to marriage and family.

The goal of this document is to establish a consistent and updated policy for marriage preparation within the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney that adequately addresses the needs of today’s engaged couples. In conjunction with the norms expressed here, it is advised that all those involved in the preparation of couples for marriage familiarise themselves with both *Familiaris Consortio* (FC) and *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* (PSM). The Life, Marriage

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<sup>2</sup> Address to Latin American Bishops on the ‘Marriage -Patrimony of Humanity’, December 16, 2005.



and Family Centre is the agency responsible for giving formal approval to those organisations wishing to conduct courses of marriage preparation within the Archdiocese of Sydney.

## STAGES OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION

TO ensure appropriate, timely and comprehensive marriage education the Church proclaims three stages of preparation for marriage. These cannot be rigidly defined but the following terms provide a useful model: remote, proximate and immediate (and a fourth or ongoing stage, which continues for couples after the wedding). The following points are relevant to all stages although they need to be addressed in a manner that reflects a sensitivity towards the particular stage of maturity of the person concerned:

- The development of character, self-control, virtue and respect for persons of the opposite sex
- Faithful education in chastity as self-giving and as a pre-requisite for real love
- Ongoing spiritual and catechetical formation

**Remote preparation** begins in the womb and continues through early childhood and adolescence, through wise family training and the example of Christian values. The witness of the parents' own married love is the very foundation of remote marriage preparation. While parents remain the primary educators of their children throughout childhood and adolescence, they need suitable assistance in fulfilling their responsibilities. The Church, schools and the wider society all play a role in preparing young men and women for marriage.

**Proximate preparation** involves the preparation for the sacraments, and the social, moral, religious and personal formation of young people. It is here that they acquire greater interpersonal skills and continue to experience family relationships and broaden their social relationships. Deeper reflection

on earlier experiences of family values provides young people with the appreciation of the call to live in truth and that real love finds its fulfillment in the gift of self for others. In this stage, greater importance is placed on personal and interpersonal formation through religious education by qualified teachers skilled in proven educational principles, curricula and processes. Diocesan educational bodies and youth and vocational ministries can assist schools, parishes and families in relationship education and guidance. Where the level of proximate preparation for a particular couple appears insufficient, a more extensive approach to immediate preparation may be required.

**Immediate preparation** for the celebration of marriage should take place in the last months and weeks immediately preceding the wedding. The engaged have an opportunity to rediscover and deepen the faith they received in Baptism. During this time the engaged are called to reflect on the “profound mystery” of Christian marriage and God’s plan for their lives. Preparation in this stage should include the Sacrament and its significance for the Church and the community; Church teaching on indissolubility and fidelity; the Rite of Marriage; the duty of couples to be open to children; the importance of communication within marriage and the mutual responsibility for couples to work to strengthen the marriage bond. Such an experience of evangelisation and catechesis enables a couple to embrace consciously and freely what the Church intends for them in marriage.

## **OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PREPARATION OF A COUPLE FOR MARRIAGE**

THE overall responsibility for ensuring an adequate and comprehensive marriage preparation experience for a particular engaged couple rests with the priest or deacon concerned. Where the celebrant is not the Parish Priest, the celebrant acts as his delegate. Various providers may assist the celebrant in

this regard and consult with him as appropriate. Providers should encourage couples to raise particular issues of significance with the celebrant where they deem it to be important for the marriage preparation experience of the couple. Marriage preparation course providers should also establish routine procedures for providing feedback to celebrants.

## **CONTENT OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION FORMATION EXPERIENCE**

THE Marriage Preparation Formation Experience which a couple receives encompasses all those preparatory elements which are experienced by an engaged couple in the months prior to the wedding. These elements may include discussions with the celebrant concerned together with any formal marriage preparation course program(s). A comprehensive formation experience is called for which encompasses an understanding of the interpersonal and sacramental aspects of marriage together with an awareness of the necessary skills required by couples for the ongoing flourishing of their marriage.

The document *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* (1996) enumerated key topics for incorporation within the latter stages of preparation. The engaged should be aware of: the interpersonal relationship between a man and a woman in God's plan for marriage and family; freedom of consent as the foundation of that union, the unity and indissolubility of marriage, the correct concept of responsible parenthood, the human aspects of conjugal sexuality, the nature of conjugal love as total, exclusive, faithful and fruitful, and the scientific basis and moral principles of natural family planning(n. 35). This preparation is not only a time for theoretical study but also a time of reflection in faith through the Word of God and Christ's love. In addition, it is also a time for pastoral guidance. Couples should be helped to become aware of social and/or emotional shortcomings, risk factors associated with difficult family backgrounds or cohabitation and attain the skills and understanding to deal with them.

In accordance with the guidance above, all marriage preparation formation experiences are to offer common core content as specified below. A thematic approach which integrates the various aspects and presents them in a manner in keeping with Catholic teaching should be employed. Such core content is to include:

*(Note: The quotations below are included to assist in illustrating the meaning and scope of each core content point.)*

**The human person individually and in relationship.** This should include a treatment of the human person's creation out of love as a being in relationship with God, how the communion of man and woman in marriage is a reflection of the Creator's design and how men and women can fulfil their calling to love through a sincere gift of self.

- *“Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person in its entirety, to love: marriage and virginity or celibacy. Either one is, in its own proper form, an actuation of the most profound truth of man, of his being “created in the image of God.” (Familiaris Consortio, 11)*

**Complementary nature of men and women.** This should include a treatment of how such differences complement one another in the service of marital unity. Any treatment of the differences between men and women should extend beyond mere biology to the entire psycho-spiritual essence of the person. Marriage preparation courses should foster a culture that encourages the authentic expression of masculinity and femininity and the equal but complementary contributions of husbands and wives and of fathers and mothers.

**Human sexuality and the expression of love including Catholic sexual teaching on pre-marital and extra-marital intercourse, contraception and abortion.** Couples should be helped to understand the rich themes contained

within *Familiaris Consortio* (FC), *Evangelium Vitae* (EV) and *Humanae Vitae* (HV). As they will become ‘the domestic church’ and ‘the sanctuary of life’, couples should be formed and strengthened in the values concerned with the defence of human life. Instruction in Natural Family Planning (NFP) should not be presented as merely a behavioural technique for regulating fertility but should be presented in the complete context of a married life that fosters authentic conjugal love. This should incorporate an appropriate treatment of the relevant aspects of John Paul II’s Theology of the Body, including the importance of mutual respect between spouses, of responsible parenthood and of faithfulness to God’s plan for how human life should be transmitted and nurtured<sup>3</sup>.

- *“The only “place” in which this self-giving in its whole truth is made possible is marriage, the covenant of conjugal love freely and consciously chosen, whereby man and woman accept the intimate community of life and love willed by God Himself which only in this light manifests its true meaning”. (FC, 11)*
- *Attacks on early human life strike it “at the time of its greatest frailty, when it lacks any means of self-defence. Even more serious is the fact that, most often, those attacks are carried out in the very heart of and with the complicity of the family - the family which by its nature is called to be the “sanctuary of life”... (through) innocuous medical terms which distract attention from the fact that what is involved is the right to life of an actual human person”. (EV, 11)*
- *“Only respect for the link between the meanings of the conjugal act and respect for the unity of the human being make possible procreation in conformity with the dignity of the person” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2377)*

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<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, Wednesday Audiences 121 of August 1, 1984 to 125 of September 5, 1984.

- *“The right and lawful ordering of birth demands, first of all, that spouses fully recognize and value the true blessings of family life and that they acquire complete mastery over themselves and their emotions. . . This is especially clear in the practice of periodic continence. Self-discipline of this kind. . . fosters in husband and wife thoughtfulness and loving consideration for one another. It helps them to repel inordinate self-love, which is the opposite of charity. It arouses in them a consciousness of their responsibilities. And finally, it confers upon parents a deeper and more effective influence in the education of their children”.* (HV, 21)
- *“The choice of the natural rhythms involves accepting the cycle of the person, that is the woman, and thereby accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self- control. To accept the cycle and to enter into dialogue means to recognize both the spiritual and corporal character of conjugal communion and to live personal love with its requirement of fidelity. . . In this way sexuality is respected and promoted in its truly and fully human dimension, and is never ‘used’ as an ‘object’ ”* (FC, 32)

### **Sacrament of Marriage and its significance for the Church and the community.**

This should include an understanding of marriage as a vocation and as a call to unity. Thus the couple’s love becomes an expression of Christ’s love for his Church and an explanation of the importance of the family’s role in the Church and in the society.

- *“By virtue of the sacramentality of their marriage, spouses are bound to one another in the most profoundly indissoluble manner. Their belonging to each other is the real representation, by means of the sacramental sign, of the very relationship of Christ with the Church”.* (FC, 13)

- *“The social role of the family certainly cannot stop short at procreation and education, even if this constitutes its primary and irreplaceable form of expression. Families therefore, either singly or in association, can and should devote themselves to manifold social service activities, especially in favor of the poor ... The social role of families is called upon to find expression also in the form of political intervention: families should be the first to take steps to see that the laws and institutions of the State not only do not offend but support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family”. (FC, 44)*

### **Catholic teaching on indissolubility, fidelity and the gift of children.**

This should adequately address the essential nature of the indissolubility of the marriage bond and the need for mutual and lasting fidelity. Here the distinction between a Church proclamation of the annulment of a marriage and a civil divorce should be made clear. A civil divorce does not end a validly contracted marriage. However, an annulment may be granted where a Church tribunal determines that the necessary conditions for a valid marriage, such as a person’s freedom or readiness to marry, were not sufficiently present. Couples should be also informed of the importance of desiring that their marriage is fruitful. There should be an adequate explanation of the significance of total and exclusive self-giving in a marriage and why the disposition to be open to having children and to welcome them is a key aspect of Christian marriage.

- *“Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death”. (FC, 11)*

- *“According to the plan of God, marriage is the foundation of the wider community of the family, since the very institution of marriage and conjugal love are ordained to the procreation and education of children, in whom they find their crowning” (FC, 14)*
- *Married love is called to reflect a fully human relationship involving a free and total gift of self to one’s spouse in a faithful and exclusive lifelong relationship that is open to new life (cf HV, 9)*

### **Rite of Marriage and meaning of commitments made including consent and mutual responsibility for one another.**

A detailed exploration of the Rite of Marriage is a vital step in ensuring that engaged persons have sufficient awareness of what they are contracting in Christian marriage and of the profoundly rich nature of God’s plan for their life together. In particular, this should address the mutual responsibility of a husband and wife to support one another and to assist their spouse on their journey to holiness. The Rite of Marriage and the specific commitments contained therein should normally be dealt with to some significant extent by the celebrant concerned.

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



**Marriage as ‘for Family’ including the importance of having and educating children in the Catholic Faith.** The work of having and educating children in faith should be presented as one of enormous privilege and responsibility. This should incorporate an adequate explanation of the duty and obligation of a couple to strive to have children through morally acceptable means. (Since forms of IVF and maternal surrogacy sever the essential link between sex, love and procreation their moral impermissibility should be made clear). A properly disposed couple should both be open to the gift of new life and desire to have children. They should also have sufficient awareness of their roles as the ‘first educators’ of their children and of their important responsibility as parents to pass on the Catholic faith.

- *“Christian marriage and the Christian family build up the Church: for in the family the human person is not only brought into being and progressively introduced by means of education into the human community, but by means of the rebirth of baptism and education in the faith the child is also introduced into God’s family, which is the Church”. (FC, 15)*
- *“However, the fruitfulness of conjugal love is not restricted solely to the procreation of children, even understood in its specifically human dimension: it is enlarged and enriched by all those fruits of moral, spiritual and supernatural life which the father and mother are called to hand on to their children, and through the children to the Church and to the world.” (FC, 28)*

**Importance of forgiveness and mutual respect.** This should involve a treatment of the importance of respecting the inherent dignity of one’s spouse with whom they have become ‘one body’ and the potential role of each as a father or mother. The need to seek and accept forgiveness should also be addressed, alongside the value of regularly drawing on the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

- *“It should be so especially between husband and wife and within the family, through a daily effort to promote a truly personal community, initiated and fostered by an inner communion of love.” (FC, 64)*

**Importance of prayer.** The engaged should be taught how to preserve and cultivate married love through regular couple and family prayer.

- *“One of the essential aspects of this deepening self-giving of the engaged couple is that they spend time praying together... Prayer together deepens their self-giving... (and) is a common statement that their love does not close them in on one another, as though they were completely dependent on each other for their happiness... Rather, it is a common declaration that they both depend on the Lord, and that it is only in Him that they find their perfect happiness and peace.”<sup>4</sup>*
- *“The family is the most appropriate place where...parents can carry out sacred acts and administer some sacramentals, such as for example in the context of Christian Initiation, in the joyful or sad events of daily life, in saying grace at meals. A special place should be given to family prayer.” (PSM, 56)*
- *“Family prayer has for its very own object family life itself, which in all its varying circumstances is seen as a call from God... Joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, births and birthday celebrations, wedding anniversaries of the parents, departures, separations and homecomings, important and far-reaching decisions, the death of those who are dear, etc.-all of these mark God’s loving intervention in the family’s history.” (FC, 59)*

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<sup>4</sup> Reflections on Certain Aspects of Handing on the Faith in the Domestic Church in the Light of Familiaris Consortio’, Alfonso Cardinal Lopez-Trujillo, President, Pontifical Council for the Family, July 18,1998.

### **Importance of communication, decision making and conflict resolution.**

Couples should receive instruction in the value of marital communication and how this can be used to overcome the inevitable difficulties of married life. Such instruction should include the treatment of communications skills, strategies for making decisions as a couple and appropriate ways for dealing with conflict.

**Importance of ongoing character and virtue formation.** The ongoing development of personal virtues is essential for success in marriage. Virtues such as honesty, compassion, humility, optimism, creativity, self-restraint, mercy, courage, self-awareness, etc are important for the development of intimate and life-giving marriages. Marriage preparation courses should foster an awareness of the contribution of such virtues and, whenever possible, include experiences that encourage couples to further develop these virtues in themselves. For example, in teaching communication skills, the virtues of honesty, self-awareness and compassion could be highlighted. In teaching about conflict resolution, the virtues of self-restraint, creativity and courage might be the focus.

**Strengthening the marriage bond.** This refers to the need for couples to devote time and effort to regularly affirm one's love and commitment to both spouse and family. Every marriage should seek to foster an understanding of love as a decision – to listen, to share, to compromise when necessary, etc. This calls for the sharing of appropriate priorities and expectations. Spouses also need to undertake to promote life-giving attitudes and behaviours in marriage and to strive for unity where each can grow as a person with the support of the other. This unity is particularly important in those times of challenge which are a part of every marriage. In addition, it is also important for the engaged to be provided with a preparation experience which gives them an awareness of those behavioural factors which can inhibit the flourishing of married life.

**Additional content that should be considered for inclusion where circumstances permit:**

**Expectations of marriage and the influence of family background.**

An exploration of the family of origin of each of the engaged parties and of how this shapes a person's expectations of marriage and family life can provide a useful resource for further discussion. This may be treated as a dedicated topic or appropriately addressed within the context of other related aspects.

**Finances, budgeting and home buying.** These aspects are often best addressed by persons who have particular expertise in these areas.

**Pre-Marriage Inventories.** There are a variety of pre-marriage inventories (eg. FOCCUS, PREPARE/ENRICH) which consist of a questionnaire to be completed by each person. A trained facilitator can use the collated answers to identify couple strengths and weaknesses.

## **PREPARATION SESSIONS**

### **1. INITIAL INTERVIEW(S) WITH CELEBRANT**

- a. Couples should be strongly encouraged to give at least six months formal notice of their intention to marry. This is to allow an appropriate time for adequate preparation. If it is possible, even longer notice is desirable. Priests should give some public acknowledgement at a parish level of this intention of the couple concerned where one or other of the parties is known to parishioners.
- b. The initial interview is an opportunity to ascertain the couple's attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of themselves and their desire for marriage in the Church.

- c. The preparation process should be explained during the initial interviews with the priest. It should be portrayed as something that is a positive aid to their future life together. In preparing persons for any sacrament, proper formation is important. This will assist in ensuring that their marriage is celebrated in faith and established on the sure foundation of Christ.
- *The pre-nuptial inquiry form required by canon law may also be completed at this time (or at a second interview). This form needs to be accompanied by appropriate certificates including full certificates of Baptism. Any necessary actions with regard to permissions or dispensations may also need to be initiated at this stage.*

## 2. FORMAL PROGRAM OF FORMATION (VARIETY OF OPTIONS)

THE involvement in the formation program of married couples who are prepared to witness to the special nature of the sacrament and to the realities of marriage and family life is regarded as fundamental to ensuring an adequate preparation experience. The essential nature of their contribution should be seen in the light of their witness as persons who are already living the sacrament and testifying to its intrinsic value and importance. All marriage preparation formation experiences are to involve a witnessing married couple. The following marriage preparation formation experiences are currently available within the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney:

- a. **Celebrant** with the assistance of married couple(s) as witnesses to the lived experience of marriage
- b. **CatholicCare Program** - in association with the Celebrant and with witnessing married couples. There are three options. Each option has a focus on communication skills, decision making, family of origin, romance and commitment. Sessions on the sacramentality of marriage and on Natural Family Planning are also included:

i. Becoming One

ii. Intimate 1 (also includes a question and answer inventory)

iii. Intimate 2 (a one-on-one program with an inventory)

**c. Catholic Engaged Encounter Program** – in association with the celebrant. This weekend course has a focus on the relationship of the couple and on their own relationship with God. It assists couples to discern their goals and priorities, deals with the importance of forgiveness and treats the sacramental nature of marriage.

**d. Together As One Program** – in association with the celebrant. A weekend program that considers factors which contribute to the formation of enduring and satisfying marriages as well as assisting couples to deal with relationship challenges. The sacramental significance of marriage is also addressed.

**e. Of Life and Love Program** (Catholic Adult Education Centre)– in association with the celebrant. A weekend course designed to give special emphasis to the spiritual and sacramental dimensions of marriage while also addressing practical aspects such as communication and financial considerations.

**f. Embrace / Engage Program** – in association with the celebrant. An integrated program which combines the sacramental nature of marriage and John Paul II's Theology of the Body with contemporary relationship theory. It involves the use of a mentor couple in a personal couple-to-couple format.

Further details regarding these courses can be obtained via the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney website at [www.sydney.catholic.org.au](http://www.sydney.catholic.org.au) or from the

Life, Marriage and Family Centre on 02 9390 5283. **All organisations who wish to conduct formal courses of marriage preparation must obtain prior approval from this agency.**

### **3. DISCUSSIONS WITH CELEBRANT REGARDING THE PROGRAM OF FORMATION EXPERIENCE AND THE MARRIAGE RITE**

THE final months and weeks before the wedding are the opportunity for the couple, together with their priest or deacon, to solidify the formation received and to prepare the wedding liturgy. It is an opportunity to deepen a couple's awareness of the profound truth, goodness and beauty of marriage and family and of its attendant moral responsibilities. Further reflection on the Rite of Marriage and the specific commitments and duties contained therein would be appropriate during this time. Where a non-Catholic party is involved, it is important to ensure that both spouses are aware of the responsibility of the Catholic spouse to strive to raise any children of their union in the Catholic faith. In addition, the Catholic partner must declare his/her willingness to remove all dangers to their own faith.

### **4. PLANNING OF LITURGY**

WHERE both couple members are Catholic and 'to indicate a clearer relationship between the nuptial sacrament and the paschal mystery, the celebration of marriage is normally set within the celebration of the Eucharist' (PSM n 53). An active and informed participation of the engaged couple in the wedding liturgy is to be promoted. Care and sensitivity should be taken in explaining what is and what is not appropriate in the context of the wedding liturgy. This may be of particular relevance where a non-Catholic party is involved and marriage is celebrated outside of Mass. In accordance with canon law, marriages between Catholics or between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic must be celebrated in a church. A ceremony at another location requires the permission of the local Ordinary, in this case the Archbishop.

## 5. TIME OF PRAYER/OPPORTUNITY FOR RECONCILIATION IN PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

MAKING sufficient time for prayer and the Sacrament of Reconciliation is an important consideration for Catholics and should be addressed in a manner which affirms their significance for the persons involved particularly for their future life together. Where a non-Catholic party is involved, the important issue of the sacramental preparation of their future spouse should be addressed within a climate that reflects the sensitivities involved.

- *“Those who will take an active part in the liturgy should be invited also to prepare themselves properly for the sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.” (PSM, 55)*

## 6. CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

THE celebrant should help those present to understand the structure of the Marriage Rite and the homily should have as its centre the presentation of the ‘great mystery’ of marriage (cf Eph. 5)

- *“The solemn blessing of the spouses recalls that the gift of the Holy Spirit is invoked in the sacrament of Marriage... In the framework of this celebration, it will certainly be appropriate to present the Holy Family of Nazareth as a model of life for Christian spouses.” (PSM, 72)*
- *“It should be explained to the witnesses that they are not only the guarantors of a juridical act, but also representatives of the Christian community which, through them, participates in a sacramental act relevant to it, because a new family is a cell of the Church.” (PSM, 55)*



## 7. SUPPORT FOR THE NEWLY MARRIED (PARISH LEVEL)

Formation and education are life-long. After the wedding, couples should allow and value time for reflection. They can also gain much enrichment in their marriages through further formation, dialogue and participation in formal programs, activities and movements that support marriage and family life. These further formation experiences are available via local marriage preparation providers and may also be facilitated at a parish level. If significant difficulties arise in a marriage, the decision to seek counselling assistance should be seen as a strength not a weakness.

- *Especially in the first five years of married life, it would be desirable to follow up the young couples through post-marriage courses, to be carried out in parishes or deaneries. (PSM, 73)*

## CONCLUSION

IN summary, it seems useful to recall what Pope John Paul II stated in a concluding discourse to the General Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family:

*“It is essential that the time and care necessary should be devoted to doctrinal preparation. The security of the content must be the centre and essential goal of the courses in a perspective which makes spouses more aware of the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage and everything that flows from it regarding the responsibility of the family. Questions concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage, and all that regards the meaning of the union and of procreation in married life and its specific act, must be treated faithfully and accurately, according to the clear teaching of the Encyclical Humanae Vitae (cf. n11-12). This is equally true for everything that pertains to the gift of life which parents must accept responsibly and joyfully as the Lord’s collaborators. The courses should not only*

*emphasise what concerns the mature and vigilant freedom of those who want to contract marriage, but also their own mission as parents, the first educators of their children and their first evangelisers”.*<sup>5</sup> (PSM, 48)

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<sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II, Discourse to the General Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family held from September 30-October 5, 1991





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