

PREPARING FOR THE SACRAMENT OF  
HOLY MATRIMONY

Policy for the Diocese of Gallup

February 14, 2020

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### *Introduction*

1. To establish a consistent and updated marriage policy for our local Church that more adequately addresses the needs of today's engaged couples, this policy is inspired by and based on the document *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*. In conjunction with these norms, it is advised that everyone involved in marriage preparation in the diocese familiarize him or herself with this document (PSM) by the Pontifical Council for the Family.
2. These revised norms are not intended to complicate the marriage preparation process for the engaged, nor for the pastoral ministers who prepare them. While they are in some ways more "demanding" than previous policies, so are the pastoral needs of today's engaged couples more demanding than in the past. With God's grace, the leadership of pastors, and the united effort of all priests, deacons, and other pastoral workers in implementing this policy, the Church of Gallup can rise to the challenge of addressing these needs more adequately.
3. **Stages of Marriage Preparation**
4. *Remote Preparation*: Begins "in the womb" and continues throughout childhood, adolescence, and up to the period of engagement.
  - based primarily in the family with the assistance of the Church and schools
5. *Proximate Preparation*: Begins 9 months before the wedding and concludes approximately 10 weeks prior to the wedding.
  - process of evangelization and catechesis similar to the catechumenate
  - collaborative approach between parish and diocesan resources
6. *Immediate Preparation*: Last 10 weeks prior to the marriage celebration.
  - review and solidify prior preparation
  - prepare the wedding liturgy
7. *Celebration of Marriage*
  - marriage should be celebrated in the parish church
  - should be characteristic of a celebration of faith, normally within the context of the Eucharist

### **REMOTE PREPARATION**

8. The witness of the parents' own married love is the very foundation of remote marriage preparation.
9. "It is in the bosom of the family that parents are 'by word and example...the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation.'" Parents should realize that celibacy "for the kingdom"

(Mt 19: 12) is also a full participation - and even more directly so - in the "nuptial mystery" of Christ's love for the Church.

10. While parents are the primary educators of their children throughout childhood and adolescence, they need suitable assistance in fulfilling their responsibilities. The Church, schools, and the larger society all play increasing roles in preparing young men and women for marriage.
11. Two fundamental truths that must be instilled in this remote preparation are: "first, that man is called to live in truth and love; and second, that everyone finds fulfillment through the sincere gift of self." Today children grow up in a culture where the meaning of "truth" and "love" is continually eroded. Furthermore, sincere self-giving is often replaced by an ethic of self-indulgence.
12. Since children and adolescents are particularly susceptible to the influence of society, solid remote preparation is all the more essential.
13. *Key Points of Remote Preparation* (taken from PSM, nos.22-31)
  - a. Involves formation of character, self-control and self-esteem, the proper use of one's inclinations, growth in virtue, and respect for persons of the opposite sex.
  - b. Requires a solid spiritual and catechetical formation.
  - c. A faithful and courageous education in chastity and love as self-giving must be instilled. Chastity is a condition for real love. One cannot give himself away if he does not first possess himself.
  - d. The journey or conversion from a rather external and vague level of faith, typical of many young people, to a discovery of the "Christian *mystery*" is both essential and decisive.
  - e. Formation should arrive at a mentality and personality capable of not being led astray by ideas contrary to the unity and stability of marriage.
14. Most of today's engaged couples know very little about the rich teaching of the Church on marriage, sexuality, and family life. If remote preparation is carried out successfully, proximate and immediate preparation will only need to reinforce what couples have already learned throughout their lives.
15. *POLICY*: It is the task of the Church first to equip and then to assist parents in their role as primary educators of their children in the area of remote marriage preparation.

## **PROXIMATE PREPARATION**

16. Proximate preparation begins during the earliest days of the engagement period and continues until the final weeks just prior to the marriage celebration. It involves a process of evangelization and a journey of faith similar to the catechumenate, providing an opportunity for the engaged to rediscover and deepen the faith they received in Baptism. Pastors are encouraged to establish rituals that incorporate the marriage preparation process into the life of the parish.
17. The engaged must be sensitized to the "profound mystery" of Christian Marriage through an explicit catechesis so that they will feel a need to prepare for it by embracing God's plan. However, "frequently many who present themselves for catechesis truly require genuine conversion.
18. Preparation in this stage is directed toward an evangelization and catechesis that enables a couple to embrace consciously and freely, what the Church intends by the Sacrament of Marriage. The way in which the engagement period is lived is certain to have an influence on the couple's ability or inability to do so.

19. *Key Points of Proximate Preparation* (taken from PSM, nos. 32-49)

- a. The foundation of this preparation must be a reflection in faith on the Sacrament of Marriage through the Word of God and the guidance of the Church's teaching. To become "one flesh" in Christ means that the couple's love will become a concrete expression of Christ's love for his Church.
  - b. "It is essential that the time and care necessary should be devoted to *doctrinal* preparation. The security of the content must be the center 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" (John Paul II).
  - c. Instruction in the *natural* requirements of marriage should include: freedom of consent; unity and indissolubility of marriage; the correct concept of responsible parenthood; the human aspects of conjugal sexuality; the conjugal act with its requirements and ends; and the proper education of children.
  - d. Especially with regard to total self-giving and responsible procreation, the theological and moral formation will have to be given special attention according to the clear teaching of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.
  - e. Adequate instruction in methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP) should be given to all. These methods must not be presented merely as a behavioral technique for regulating fertility but must be presented in the full context of a lifestyle that fosters authentic conjugal love.
  - f. The engaged should be helped to become aware of psychological and/or emotional shortcomings they may have that take away from their total commitment to one another (FOCCUS).
  - g. This should not only be a time for theoretical study but for formation of the engaged that prepares them to give themselves as a couple to Christ. Here premarital chastity takes on its full meaning. Any practices that violate this chastity must be abandoned with recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
  - h. It must not neglect formation for the family's role in the Church and society.
  - i. It should provide reflections on the themes of pertinent Church documents such as *Familiaris Consortio*, *Letter to Families*, *Evangelium Vitae*, *Humanae Vitae*, etc. with the goal of helping couples understand their rich content.
  - j. The engaged should be taught how to preserve and cultivate married love through marital communication and how to overcome the inevitable "crises" of married life.
  - k. The engaged must be given formation and strengthened in the values concerning the defense of human life in view of the fact that they will become "the domestic church" and "sanctuary of life."
  - l. The final result of proximate preparation should be a clear awareness of the essential characteristics of Christian Marriage: unity, fidelity, indissolubility, fruitfulness; the priority of the sacramental grace which associates the spouses to the love of Christ the Bridegroom of the Church; and the willingness to carry out the mission proper to families in the educational, social, and ecclesial areas.
20. *POLICY*: To ensure that the engaged couples have adequate time to prepare in a serious way, and to ensure that this stage of preparation is truly "proximate" and not "immediate," it should begin at least *nine months* in advance of the couple's anticipated wedding date and conclude no closer than ten weeks prior to that date.
21. Proximate preparation should generally consist of five sessions or components. Additional sessions may be appropriate for couples with specific needs. On the other hand, some parishes may wish to combine sessions (e.g. sessions 1 and 2 or sessions 3 and 5).

22. A "tag team" approach between parish and diocesan programs and resources offers continued flexibility in format at the parish level, while seeking to ensure a measure of consistency for all engaged couples throughout the diocese.
23. The breakdown of sessions is as follows:
- Session I: Initial Interview (parish)
  - Session 2: Pre-nuptial Inquiry & Inventory (parish)
  - Session 3: Review of Inventory (parish)
  - Session 4: Pre-Sacramental Retreat
  - Session 5: Natural Family Planning Instruction (parish or existing apostolates)
24. *Session I Initial Interview*  
Couples approaching the Church for marriage are usually enthusiastic but also unaware of most diocesan and parish policies concerning marriage preparation. It is critical that the first person they encounter be positive and welcoming. The initial interview should be given by the parish priest or deacon. The goals of this interview are to:
25. Begin developing a warm, welcoming relationship with the couple.
26. Begin to ascertain the couple's attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about themselves and their desire for marriage in the Church. At this point the Sacrament should be explained and discussed with the couple to provide them with greater clarity and knowledge of the obligations and nature of matrimony. This interview and discussion should take place before filling out the prenuptial questionnaire.
27. Begin the process of assessing the couple's readiness for the sacrament. (Is the couple living an active Christian life?) Some may wish to conduct the pre-nuptial inquiry required by canon law at this time (if so, refer to Session 2).
28. Explain to them what is involved in their proximate and immediate preparation for the sacrament and assist them in planning accordingly (scheduling of the inventory, presenting potential dates for the instructional sessions, parish programs, etc.).
29. In explaining the process of preparation, the priest or deacon should stress that it is a positive aid to the couple. As in preparing to receive any of the sacraments, proper formation is necessary to ensure that marriage is celebrated in faith and established on the sure foundation which is Christ.
30. *Session 2: Pre-nuptial Inquiry & Inventory.*  
The pre-nuptial inquiry should be led by the parish priest or deacon. If necessary, the marriage preparation inventory can be administered by a properly trained lay person. The goals of this session are to:
31. Conduct the pre-nuptial inquiry required by canon law (MA, MB, and MC forms). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has decreed that the following should be observed:
- Parties should be questioned as to their freedom to marry;
  - Catholics should present a recently issued annotated baptismal certificate;
  - If necessary, additional documentation (such as affidavits from parents) attesting to a Catholic party's freedom to marry should be presented;
  - Baptized non-Catholics should present satisfactory proof of baptism and freedom to marry;
  - Unbaptized persons should present satisfactory proof of freedom to marry.
32. Ensure that nothing stands in the way of a valid and licit marriage (see reasons to deny or delay marriage in *Supplement*).

33. Set a *tentative* wedding date. Couples should be advised not to make definitive plans for reception sites, etc. until it is determined that they are properly disposed towards the sacrament and a definitive wedding date has been set.
34. Administer the FOCCUS or other marriage preparation inventory.
35. During the pre-nuptial inquiry, the prospective bride and groom should be interviewed individually so as to allow complete freedom in each of their responses. If a Catholic has not yet received the Sacrament of Confirmation, "they are to receive it before being admitted to marriage, if it can be done without grave inconvenience".( Canon 1065 n.1)
36. Analysis of the data from diocesan Tribunals indicates that a large number of couples attempt marriage without understanding to what they are committing themselves. Therefore, direct and specific instruction must be given on the meaning and implications of the canonical promises of indissolubility, fidelity, and openness to children to ensure that couples intend what the Church intends by marriage.
37. Furthermore, pastoral workers who administer the FOCCUS Inventory should be very familiar with the means of doing so as explained in the facilitator's guide. Prior to the third session, the instrument should be scored.
38. *Session 3: Review of Marriage Preparation Inventory*  
This session can be led by the priest, deacon, or lay minister who administered the inventory. This is also an excellent opportunity to enlist the help of properly trained "mentor couples" in preparing the engaged for marriage. The goals of this session are to:
  - a. Review with the couple the results of their FOCCUS (or other) inventory.
  - b. Affirm the unique gifts each brings to the relationship and help the couple address any "problem" areas. If the issue of cohabitation or premarital sex has not yet surfaced, it should be discussed (see the Appendix "Pastoral Care of Sexually Active/ Cohabiting Engaged Couples" in the *What God Has Joined-Supplement*).
  - c. Based on the issues brought up by the inventory and the previous sessions, assess the general readiness of the couple to proceed with the normal process of marriage preparation. (If this session is carried out by a mentor couple or other qualified lay person, close collaboration with the priest or deacon will be necessary).
  - d. In some instances, it won't be possible to review the inventory adequately in one session. Additional sessions should be scheduled as needed. Again, a very successful approach is to have properly trained mentor couples facilitate the review in their homes over the course of one to three meetings, as needed. The experience of established married couples who are actively living their faith provides an invaluable witness for the engaged (when appropriate, mentor couples can combine the review of the FOCCUS inventory with instruction in the "life skills" required of Session 5).
39. *Session 4: Pre-Sacramental Retreat*  
Couples are encouraged to fulfill this component of proximate marriage prep by attending a one of several approved options at least several months in advance of their planned wedding.
  - a. *Catholic Engaged Encounter* weekend
  - b. A one-day day Marriage Preparation Workshop conducted by the Diocese (under development)
  - c. Other marriage preparation retreats or workshops at a parish or elsewhere, approved by the Diocese.

40. These workshops will be held on a regular basis during the year in various locations throughout the diocese. The goal (as resources permit) is to offer all engaged couples an opportunity to attend a class in their own area (dates and locations are made available through brochures given to each parish). At the completion of the course, couples will be given a certificate of attendance to be placed in their prenuptial file.
41. The purpose of these activities is to explain in a positive, contemporary way the timeless wisdom of Catholic teaching on God's plan for marriage and human sexuality and offers practical suggestions on how couples can implement it in their own lives. The presentations should be evangelistic in nature, seeking to reawaken people's faith, stressing the importance of making Christ the foundation of marriage. Honest, positive discussion throughout these events serves to demonstrate that embracing God's plan for marital love is not a burden, but a joy.
42. The pre-Sacramental retreat is not intended to replace the efforts of the parish to evangelize and catechize the engaged, which remains indispensable. It is designed to *reinforce* those efforts and provide a measure of consistency for engaged couples throughout the diocese. Pastors who wish to host or develop a workshop at their own parish are encouraged to contact the diocese.
43. The retreats will address matters of self-knowledge, knowledge of one's future spouse, handling conflict, decision making, communication, career expectations, finances, family of origin, etc. - all these issues demand certain "life skills" for a successful marriage.
44. Parishes are encouraged to establish a team of exemplary Catholic couples, who, either in a class setting, or through the "couple-to-couple" approach, can help couples evaluate and develop their "life skills" in the pertinent areas. This activity is effective as a follow-up to the pre-Sacramental retreat as it helps the couple to individually address the skills introduced at the retreat.
45. *Session 5: Natural Family Planning Instruction*  
Instruction in NFP is one of the most practical ways that the Church can help couples conform to the will of God in their lives. As far as practical realities permit, a course of NFP instruction should be a regular part of proximate marriage preparation.
46. The number of certified NFP instructors in the diocese is growing. Still, more instructors are needed to ensure the adequate instruction of all those preparing for marriage. Ideally, every parish should have its own certified NFP instructor or teaching couple. With a united effort on the part of pastors and the lay faithful to promote NFP at the parish level and recruit more instructors, this is an achievable goal.
47. Until then, instructors will need to be shared between parishes as far as is possible. For those who are particularly motivated, home-study courses in NFP are also available. See the Supplement or contact the diocese for a complete list of NFP instructors.

## **IMMEDIATE PREPARATION**

48. Immediate preparation consists of the final meetings between the engaged and pastoral workers in the last ten weeks (approximately) prior to the celebration of the sacrament. Its aim is to solidify the formation received in prior preparation (if necessary), prepare the wedding liturgy, and make final preparations for the couple's worthy celebration of their sacrament.
49. *Key Points of Immediate Preparation* (taken from PSM. nos. 50-59)
  - a. It should provide a review of previous preparation, especially its doctrinal, moral, and spiritual content according to the couple's needs.
  - b. It should include experiences of prayer.

- c. It must introduce the couple to the Rite of Marriage helping them to understand the meaning of liturgical actions and texts.
  - d. It should include a suitable liturgical preparation envisaging the active and informed participation of the engaged.
  - e. A special invitation to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation must be extended to all Catholics as a means of encouraging the worthy celebration of marriage.
  - f. A special place should be given to the importance of family prayer and creating an atmosphere of faith within the home. The engaged should be reminded that as parents they will carry out their mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Life through educating their children in the ways of faith.
50. **POLICY:** Securing appropriate means of addressing the key points listed above is left to the discretion of the pastor. The particular needs of each couple will dictate the appropriate steps to take in this final stage of preparation. In general, three sessions are recommended (these can be combined when necessary and appropriate):
- a. Session 1: Review of Previous Preparation
  - b. Session 2: Time of Prayer / Opportunity for Reconciliation
  - c. Session 3: Planning of the Liturgy
51. *Session 1: Review of Previous Preparation*  
It is recommended that the priest or deacon witnessing the marriage meet with the couple at least once in the immediate stage of preparation to review and synthesize the previous preparation (as the couple's needs dictate) and answer any remaining Questions the couple may have about the Church's vision of marriage and their final preparations for the sacrament. The wisdom and experience of a mentor couple can also be of great service at this stage of preparation.
52. *Session 2: Time of Prayer / Opportunity for Reconciliation*  
In light of the rates of cohabitation and premarital sexual activity, it is particularly important for couples to be reconciled to Christ, the Church, and one another before celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage. Pastoral sensitivity will recognize the appropriate ways of encouraging the couple to set aside extra time for prayer and reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
53. The interrelation of the Sacraments of Marriage, Reconciliation, and the Eucharist should be stressed. The experience of a mentor couple can also be of great service in helping engaged couples learn how to pray together and establish a marital spirituality.
54. Attendance at a *Catholic Engaged Encounter Weekend*, if it was not already part of a couple's proximate preparation, could also be an excellent part of immediate preparation. Beyond covering important life skills, *Engaged Encounter* offers a retreat setting for the couple to reflect on their relationship with Christ and His Church, and an evening devoted to helping couples learn to pray together.
55. *Session 3: Planning of the Liturgy*  
Pastors, liturgists, and/or other pertinent pastoral workers should devote appropriate time with the engaged couple to ensure their active and informed participation in the liturgy. Care and sensitivity should be taken in explaining what is and what is not appropriate in the context of the wedding liturgy.

## **The Celebration of Marriage**

56. The journey of preparation leads the couple to the celebration of marriage, the source and origin of their conjugal life. "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."<sup>14</sup>

57. While some couples desire outdoor weddings, canon law requires that a marriage between Catholics, or a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic, be celebrated in the parish church (canon 1118). Only by permission of the local Ordinary may it be celebrated in another designated church or oratory. Patient care must be demonstrated in explaining the sound pastoral reasons for this. Such patience most often enables couples to see that the parish church is the appropriate place for the celebration of their sacrament.
58. *Key Points of the Celebration of Marriage* (taken from PSM. nos. 6072)
- a. Pastoral workers should take care to follow and make comprehensible what is already set down and established by the liturgical rite.
  - b. Extraneous customs that are not provided in the Ritual should not be introduced into the celebration of the sacrament without express permission from the bishop.
  - c. The active participation of those present is to be favored in every way. Suitable materials should be provided to help them comprehend the richness of the rite.
  - d. The celebrant should help those present to understand the structure of the rite.
  - e. The homily (which is obligatory) should have as its center the presentation of the "great mystery" of marriage (as spoken of by St. Paul in Eph. 5).
  - f. Care should be taken that the details of the marriage celebration are characterized by a restrained, simple, and authentic style.
59. **POLICY:** It is the responsibility of the priest presiding at the marriage with Mass or the deacon in a marriage taking place outside of Mass to ensure that the above criteria are met. A checklist is provided in the supplement.

## Implementation

60. The requirements of this policy should be implemented immediately to extent possible. However, the change in required advance preparation, circumstances of long-range planning and advertisement of policy changes will dictate a progressive implementation. Full compliance is expected by January 1, 2021.