

*Archdiocese of Miami*  
*Marriage Preparation Updates*  
**Clergy Packet**



*Presbyteral Convocation*  
**2016**



# ARCHDIOCESE OF MIAMI

*Office of the Archbishop*

To: Priests and Deacons of the Archdiocese of Miami

From: Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski

Date: Feast of St Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist, September 21, 2016

Re: Guidelines for Marriage Preparation in the Archdiocese of Miami

Brothers,

The vocation of marriage is in crisis. We are witnessing a widespread secularization, including a decrease in the understanding of the nature of marriage and, for Christians, its sacramental character. We are also experiencing a decrease in the number of weddings in the Church, an increase in cohabitation and sexual relationships outside of marriage, a pervasive contraceptive mentality, and increased pornography use and addiction.

These realities are, among other things, contributing to a higher probability of divorce, and, sadly, those who remain married are frequently unhappily married. These challenges also negatively impact children. Of direct concern here, engaged couples often present themselves for marriage with many beliefs and practices that are incongruent with our Church's timeless wisdom and teachings. All this inevitably leaves us the challenging task and responsibility of doing something to strengthen this vocation.

Given the increase in couples living together outside of marriage (temporarily or permanently) and the many options for attempting marriage outside of the Church (the beach, hotels, reception halls, etc.), the engaged couple's decisions: 1) to marry at all, and 2) to marry in the Church should be met with joy and the couples should be welcomed and assisted in their laudable desire to enter into the vocation of marriage.

I present to you **a new way of approaching marriage preparation within the context of evangelization and the maturation of faith.**

This entire updated approach is *not* 'more to do', but a **vision, framework and support to help you** do what you are already doing, and want to do well, for today's couples. The Archdiocese is committed to providing you and those assisting you in this ministry the resources, training, and support to implement this updated process. The rewards will be life-giving for the couples you serve, their family, society, and the overall well-being of our local Church.

May God bless you, your faithful and tireless work, and the couples you prepare for the vocation of marriage.

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## *Preliminary Information*

### **NOTE REGARDING THE USAGE OF THE TITLE “PASTOR”**

Throughout the document, the title “pastor” is used consistently to indicate the primary role the pastor plays in the preparation process; however, it may be that he utilizes the assistance of a parochial vicar or deacon. In addition, various elements of a couple’s preparation (such as the pre-marital inventory, marriage preparation group program, or Natural Family Planning classes) are provided by qualified trained lay persons. Out of pastoral need, if appropriate elements are delegated to a non-clergy member, that person ought to be well formed and aware of the canonical and theological responsibilities of their work.

### **MARRIAGE PREPARATION TASK FORCE INFORMATION**

The Marriage Preparation Task Force was commissioned by Archbishop Wenski to provide recommendations as to how to best prepare engaged couples (through process and programs), including best practices for priests, deacons, and laity involved in marriage preparation. This Task Force met monthly for the past seven months.

Please see the information titled “Implementation Plan” for details as to how and when the various items in this update will be made available and able to be implemented.

### **MEMBERS OF THE MARRIAGE PREPARATION TASK FORCE:**

Deacon Eduardo and Rita Blanco, St. Raymond Parish  
Stephen Colella, Co-Chair, Cabinet Secretary for Parish Life  
Kari Colella, Co-Chair, Executive Director, *Annunciation Ministries, Inc.*  
Rev. Michael Davis, Church of the Little Flower  
Fernando and Laura Gomez, *Camino del Matrimonio* and Immaculate Conception Parish  
Rev. Reginal Jean-Mary, Notre Dame d'Haiti Mission  
Alicio and Nirma Pina, Our Lady of the Lakes Parish  
Deacon Dr. Norman and Carmen Ruiz-Castañeda, *NFP Task Force*, Epiphany Parish  
Rev. Robert Tywoniak, Blessed Sacrament Parish  
Rev. Richard Vigoa, Director of Worship and Liturgy  
Rev. Paul Vuturo, St. Louis Parish  
Msgr. Gregory Wielunski, Judicial Vicar of the Archdiocese of Miami Metropolitan Tribunal  
Sr. Elizabeth Worley, Chancellor  
Thomas and Sheryl Zavertnik, St. Gregory Parish  
*An additional ten NFP practioners and promoters provided advise.*

## DOCUMENT ABBREVIATIONS

- AL Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016).
- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994).
- CIC *Codex Iuris Canonici* (January 25, 1983).
- CLSA Canon Law Society of America, *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary* (1985).
- FC John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981).
- GS Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965).
- OCM *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (2016).
- PSM Pontifical Council for the Family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* (May 13, 1996).
- RM John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio* (December 7, 1990).
- SGS Second General Synod of the Archdiocese of Miami, *The Summary Report and Focus Teams Recommendations* (October 26, 2013).

# Clergy Overview and Checklist of the Marriage Preparation Process

Explanations follow pages 13-23.

NOTE: These elements are proposed according to a timeline and in preferred sequence; however, you may provide adaptations and additions based upon the couple's specific needs.

## **ELEMENT 1: Parish Connection** Preferably 9, at least 6, months prior to the Celebration of Matrimony.

- 1. Couple's first contact with parish:** The engaged couple's first contact with the parish should be welcoming and congratulatory; both for wanting to get married and wanting to marry in the Church. No wedding dates should be given or "held" over the phone. The goal is to congratulate the couple and to schedule a meeting for the engaged couple with the pastor.
- 2. Couple's first meeting with the pastor:**
  - A. Begin developing a warm, welcoming relationship and get to know the couple.
  - B. Provide an overview of the marriage preparation process.
  - C. Discuss "Form A" by meeting with each party *separately*.
  - D. Begin to address any areas of concern revealed by discussing "Form A."
  - E. Review the "Checklist for Marriage Paperwork" and explain what is needed.
  - F. Explain the elements of their *Marriage Formation*.
  - G. Explain the elements of their *Faith Formation*.
  - H. If it appears there are no impediments to marriage: 1) set the date for the Celebration of Matrimony; 2) explain the form titled "Engaged Couple's Agreement to Fulfill Marriage Preparation Elements;" 3) explain when you will discuss preparation for the Celebration itself.
  - I. Either offer or schedule a *Blessing of the Engaged Couple*.
- 3. Couple takes the Fully Engaged© pre-marital inventory, separately.**

## **ELEMENT 2: Marriage Formation** As soon as they can after initial meeting with pastor.

- 1. Couple attends a Marriage Preparation Group Program** (Transformed in Love, Camino del Matrimonio, or other approved parish program).
- 2. Couple checks-in with pastor afterward and before attending an NFP Course.**
- 3. Couple takes a Natural Family Planning Course** (live, live online, or self-paced online). Takes at least 3 months, some methods 7 months.
- 4. Couple discusses Fully Engaged with a trained facilitator(s).** If applicable, this would include discussion of unique situations (ecumenical marriage, previous attempts at marriage, blended families). Preferably 4 or more meetings, at least 2 meetings.

## **ELEMENT 3: Faith Formation** Throughout their preparation.

- 1. Couple participates in the Sacraments and parish life.**
- 2. First Holy Communion** (if applicable)
- 3. Confirmation** (if applicable)
- 4. Reconciliation** (as needed and especially before the Celebration of Matrimony)

## **ELEMENT 4: Final Meetings with the Pastor** At least 1 month prior to the Celebration of Matrimony.

- 1. Collect all documents needed for the Celebration of Matrimony.**
- 2. Discuss final readiness and have couples sign Form A.**
- 3. Assist couples in preparing for the liturgical Celebration of Marriage.**

## **ELEMENT 5: Post-Wedding Opportunities for Enrichment**

- 1. Annual archdiocesan celebration of special anniversaries.**
- 2. Parish-based marriage enrichment events and workshops.**
- 3. Referrals to archdiocesan marriage enrichment and support.**

## Clergy Checklist for Bride's Marriage Paperwork

Bride's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Wedding Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- Form A:** Probe with extra care regarding any previous attempts at marriage. See page 18 for more information.
- Form B**
- Engaged Couple's Agreement to Fulfill Marriage Preparation Elements:** This document is provided at the start of their preparation to ensure their understanding that any proposed wedding date, when assigned, is tentative until: 1) all aspects of preparation are complete; 2) freedom to marry has been established (if in question); and 3) you have moral certitude that the marriage may take place. At any point, any person (bride, groom, or pastor) is free to discuss reasons to pause, postpone, or not proceed with the preparation. An engagement is not a marriage. It is a time for further discernment and preparation for marriage. Just because a wedding date has been "held" for them does not mean the wedding must, or will, take place.
- Baptismal Record** (if baptized): This must be dated within six months and must be the original provided from the place of baptism.
  - Inquire about First Holy Communion Confirmation** (Ideal but not required, see "Element 3: Faith Formation" on page 24.)
  - Inquire about Confirmation** (Ideal but not required, see "Element 3: Faith Formation" on page 24.)

### Documentation that Bride is free to marry (please advise if needed):

- Letter of Freedom to Marry** (if not getting married in home parish)
- Original Decree of Nullity issued by the Tribunal** (if there was a previous attempt to marry declared null by the Ecclesiastical Courts)
- Death Certificate** (if married before and former spouse is deceased)
- Any Prior Wedding Certificates**
- Any Final Civil Divorce Decrees**
- Canonical Dispensations** (please advise)
- Canonical Permissions** (please advise)
- Marriage Preparation Group Program Certificate of Participation**
- Natural Family Planning Course Certificate of Participation**
- Fully Engaged Discussion Certificate of Participation**
- Civil Marriage License or Certificate** (for those seeking convalidation)
- Marriage Preparation Evaluation:** Every couple preparing for marriage in the Archdiocese of Miami is invited to complete an evaluation form of the process. This helps us to learn what was helpful and what areas need improvement.

## Clergy Checklist for Groom's Marriage Paperwork

Groom's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Wedding Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- Form A:** Probe with extra care regarding any previous attempts at marriage. See page 18 for more information.
- Form B**
- Engaged Couple's Agreement to Fulfill Marriage Preparation Elements:** This document is provided at the start of their preparation to ensure their understanding that any proposed wedding date, when assigned, is tentative until: 1) all aspects of preparation are complete; 2) freedom to marry has been established (if in question); and 3) you have moral certitude that the marriage may take place. At any point, any person (bride, groom, or pastor) is free to discuss reasons to pause, postpone, or not proceed with the preparation. An engagement is not a marriage. It is a time for further discernment and preparation for marriage. Just because a wedding date has been "held" for them does not mean the wedding must, or will, take place.
- Baptismal Record** (if baptized): This must be dated within six months and must be the original provided from the place of baptism.
  - Inquire about First Holy Communion Confirmation** (Ideal but not required, see "Element 3: Faith Formation" on page 24.)
  - Inquire about Confirmation** (Ideal but not required, see "Element 3: Faith Formation" on page 24.)

### Documentation that Groom is free to marry (please advise if needed):

- Letter of Freedom to Marry** (if not getting married in home parish)
- Original Decree of Nullity issued by the Tribunal** (if there was a previous attempt to marry declared null by the Ecclesiastical Courts)
- Death Certificate** (if married before and former spouse is deceased)
- Any Prior Wedding Certificates**
- Any Final Civil Divorce Decrees**
- Canonical Dispensations** (please advise)
- Canonical Permissions** (please advise)
- Marriage Preparation Group Program Certificate of Participation**
- Natural Family Planning Course Certificate of Participation**
- Fully Engaged Discussion Certificate of Participation**
- Civil Marriage License or Certificate** (for those seeking convalidation)
- Marriage Preparation Evaluation:** Every couple preparing for marriage in the Archdiocese of Miami is invited to complete an evaluation form of the process. This helps us to learn what was helpful and what areas need improvement.

# Why Update Our Marriage Preparation Process?

## 3. The Current State of Affairs

- Some engaged couples present themselves for the Sacrament of Matrimony with a lively active faith; however, **the far majority of couples are not active in the faith and live in ways incongruent with the wisdom and teachings of the Church.**
- ‘Our engaged couples’: According to anonymous exit surveys of engaged couples attending the *Transformed in Love* diocesan programs in 2015 and 2016:
  - 88% identified themselves as Catholic
  - 91% said they were sexually active
  - 74% were living together
  - 18% said they knew before the program what NFP was and why the Church supports it
  - 16% said they were active in the faith prior to the program
  - 15% said they could have explained the main beliefs of Catholicism before the program
  - 9% said they could have explained why marriage is sacrament before the program.<sup>1</sup>
- Staggering ‘big picture’ statistics:
  - Marriages have declined more than 50% from 1970 to 2010.<sup>2</sup>
  - The divorce rate is twice that of 1960; even though it has declined since highest in 1980s.<sup>3</sup>
  - For the average couple marrying for the first time, the lifetime probability of divorce or separation now falls between 40 and 50%.<sup>4</sup>
  - More than 60% live together before marriage.<sup>5</sup>
  - Couples who live together before marriage have a 46% greater risk of divorce than couples who do not live together before marriage.<sup>6</sup>
  - Only 2-3% of Catholics use NFP.<sup>7</sup>
  - 66% of 18-34 year old men visit a pornographic site every month.<sup>8</sup>
  - 47% of Christians say pornography is a major problem in the home.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These statistics are based on two programs in the Archdiocese of Miami, 154 participants total. These statistics dramatically changed after the program which reveals that marriage preparation can change a couple’s understanding and behaviors. For those statistics, see #5: “Hopeful Preliminary Results”.

<sup>2</sup> The National Marriage Project, *State of Our Unions: Marriage in America 2012*; Figure 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Figure 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Figure 8.

<sup>6</sup> www.ForYourMarriage.org/factsfigures as accessed, September 1, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Fehring, R. et al, *The Influence of Religiosity on Contraceptive Use Among Roman Catholic Women in the United States*, Linacre Quarterly, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> *Transformed in Love Engaged Couple Workbook*, pg. 151; See also Archdiocese of Omaha Anti-Pornography Task Force pornography statistics, September 25, 2012

<sup>9</sup> *Transformed in Love Engaged Couple Workbook*, pg. 151; See also Jill Manning, Testimony, “Hearing on Pornography’s Impact on Marriage & the Family,” November 10, 2005

## 4. Marriage Preparation Should Be Seen Within the Context of Evangelization and Maturation of Faith

- **Our new approach as directed by Archbishop Wenski:**
  - All pastors, priests, deacons and lay people working together to prepare our couples for marriage are asked to journey with the engaged so that they have opportunities both to grow in faith and to be well prepared practically for the vocation of marriage.
  - Couples should be assisted and pastorally cared for in their maturation of faith. This includes assisting those who have not received all of the Sacraments of Initiation to do so with suitable instruction.
  - Any areas of belief, understanding or practice that are incongruent with the Church's teachings (such as weak faith practices, cohabitation, sexual activity, intention to use contraception, etc.) should be pastorally addressed prior to the *Celebration of Matrimony*.<sup>10</sup>
  - The newly formed Office for Marriage and Family Life will support you in these efforts by offering trainings, resources and workshops.
  
- **Second General Synod of the Archdiocese of Miami:**
  - "The availability of programs and support services for our families is first and foremost; we all are a part of families, and whatever form that family may take, there are times when guidance, prayer and fellowship with others is necessary. The Focus Team also discussed ways to ensure the proper formation and training for the leaders of marriage and family life ministry. Finally, the need to clearly and efficiently communicate among the various parishes and ministries is considered a priority."<sup>11</sup>
  - "We also envision adequate staff and volunteers both in parishes, and in the Archdiocesan Marriage and Family Life Office to oversee and be present to family life ministries, and the people being served. Finally, it is our hope that marriage and family life ministry in all its diversity will be thriving, and that training, formation, and affirmation programs will be central to the growth and vitality of all ministry work."<sup>12</sup>
  
- **The Pontifical Council for the Family:**
  - "The Church must therefore promote **better and more intensive programs of marriage preparation**, in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favor positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "When in spite of all efforts, engaged couples show that they reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls cannot admit them to the celebration of marriage. In spite of his reluctance to do so, he has the duty to take note of the situation and to make it clear to those concerned that, in these circumstances, it is not the Church that is placing an obstacle in the way of the celebration that they are asking for, but themselves." Ibid. For more, please see the Appendix "Celebration of Marriage and Evangelization of Non-believing Baptized Persons" from *Familiaris Consortio*.

<sup>11</sup> SGS p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> PSM, n. 4.

- **The Pontifical Council for the Family (continued):**
  - “The importance of this preparation **involves a process of evangelization which is both maturation and deepening in the faith. If the faith is weak or almost nonexistent it must be revived.** Thorough, patient instruction that arouses and nourishes the ardor of a living faith cannot be excluded. Especially where the environment has become paganized, it will be particularly advisable to **offer a "journey of faith, which is similar to the catechumenate"** (FC 66), and a presentation of the fundamental Christian truths that may help acquire or strengthen the maturity of the faith of the persons contracting marriage. **It would be desirable if the favorable moment of marriage preparation could be transformed, as a sign of hope, into a New Evangelization for the future families.**”<sup>14</sup>
  - **“Marriage preparation must be set within the urgent need to evangelize culture — by permeating it to its roots** (cf. *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19) — in everything that concerns the institution of marriage: **making the Christian spirit penetrate minds and behavior**, as well as the laws and structures of the community where Christians live (cf. *CCC*, n. 2105).”<sup>15</sup>
  - **“Once more there appears in all its urgency the need for evangelization and catechesis before and after marriage, effected by the whole Christian-community, so that every man and woman that gets married celebrates the sacrament of Matrimony not only validly but also fruitfully.”**<sup>16</sup>
- **Pope Francis:**
  - “The complexity of today’s society and the challenges faced by the family **require a greater effort** on the part of the whole Christian community in preparing those who are about to be married.”<sup>17</sup>
  - “...the Synod Fathers agreed on the need to involve the entire community more extensively by stressing the witness of families themselves and by **grounding marriage preparation in the process of Christian initiation** by bringing out the connection between marriage, baptism and the other sacraments.”<sup>18</sup>
- **The NEW Order for Celebrating Matrimony:**
  - “Led by the love of Christ, **pastors are to welcome engaged couples and, above all, to foster and nourish their faith: for the Sacrament of Matrimony presupposes and demands faith.**”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, n. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, n. 20.

<sup>16</sup> FC, n. 68.

<sup>17</sup> AL, n. 206.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> OCM, n. 16.

- **Saint Pope John Paul II:**

- “Looking at today's world from the viewpoint of evangelization.. ...there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where **entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith**, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. **In this case what is needed is a "new evangelization" or a "re-evangelization."**<sup>20</sup>
- “The sacrament of Matrimony has this specific element that distinguishes it from all the other sacraments: it is the sacrament of something that was part of the very economy of creation; it is the very conjugal covenant instituted by the Creator ‘in the beginning.’ **Therefore the decision of a man and a woman to marry in accordance with this divine plan, that is to say, the decision to commit by their irrevocable conjugal consent their whole lives in indissoluble love and unconditional fidelity, really involves, even if not in a fully conscious way, an attitude of profound obedience to the will of God, an attitude which cannot exist without God's grace. They have thus already begun what is in a true and proper sense a journey towards salvation, a journey which the celebration of the sacrament and the immediate preparation for it can complement and bring to completion, given the uprightness of their intention.**”<sup>21</sup>

## 5. The Responsibility of Pastors

- “The faith of the person asking the Church for marriage can exist in different degrees. **It is the primary duty of pastors to bring about a rediscovery of this faith and to nourish it and bring it to maturity.**”<sup>22</sup>
- Pastors are obliged to see that couples are well prepared for marriage.<sup>23</sup>
- Pastors are the primary person to walk with, guide and direct the couple in this journey of *maturation of faith and preparation for marriage*.
- These updates and the resources of the diocese seek to help pastors in this important task by providing an outline and support for best practices for both process and programs.
- Pastors are asked to ensure that these updated processes and programs are employed uniformly throughout the Archdiocese.

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<sup>20</sup> RM, n. 33.

<sup>21</sup> FC, n. 68

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> “Pastors of souls are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the Christian faithful the assistance by which the matrimonial state is preserved in a Christian spirit and advances in perfection. This assistance must be offered especially by: **1/ preaching, catechesis adapted to minors, youth, and adults, and even the use of instruments of social communication, by which the Christian faithful are instructed about the meaning of Christian marriage and about the function of Christian spouses and parents; 2/ personal preparation to enter marriage, which disposes the spouses to the holiness and duties of their new state; 3/ a fruitful liturgical celebration of marriage which is to show that the spouses signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church; 4/ help offered to those who are married, so that faithfully preserving and protecting the conjugal covenant, they daily come to lead holier and fuller lives in their family.**” CIC. n.1063.

### 3. The Responsibility of Pastors (continued)

- “The pastoral usefulness and positive experience of marriage preparation courses show that **they can be dispensed with only for proportionally serious reasons.**”<sup>24</sup>
- Though these elements are proposed as the standard process and programs for marriage preparation in the Archdiocese, **pastors have the right to waive or supplement elements if they have sufficient reason to do so.** For example, the Natural Family Planning Class requirement may be waived for older couples who are past child bearing age or the pastor may recommend additional professional assistance for cases of concern before proceeding, etc.

### 4. The Goals of Updating the Marriage Preparation Guidelines

- **For those called to the vocation of marriage:**
  - To inspire and equip *today’s* couples to make and sustain valid, licit and thriving marriages.
  - For the good of the engaged couple and the well being of their family life.
- **For our parishes:**
  - To assist pastors in their responsibility of preparing couples for marriage.
  - To provide a framework for upcoming workshops, trainings and support.
- **For our archdiocese:**
  - To solidify marriage preparation within the context of evangelization and maturation of faith.
  - To communicate and establish the essential elements of marriage preparation.
  - To create a uniform process that is employed throughout the Archdiocese.
- **For the common good:**
  - To strengthen the marriage vocation—the foundation of society. “The future of humanity passes by way of the family.”<sup>25</sup>
- **Most importantly:**
  - For the salvation of souls and God’s greater glory.

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<sup>24</sup> PSM, n. 51. “Therefore, if couples present themselves with the urgency of celebrating their marriage soon and without proximate preparation, the parish priest and his co-workers will have the responsibility of offering them some occasions to make up an adequate knowledge of the doctrinal, moral and sacramental aspects set out in the proximate preparation for marriage and finally include them in the phase of immediate preparation.” Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> FC, n. 86.

# *Details of the Marriage Preparation Process*

## **ELEMENT I: Parish Connection**

### **1. Couple's first contact with the parish.**

- ***Begin with a positive, welcoming tone.***
- The first impression the engaged couple has, and which sets the tone for the entire process, comes from the very first conversation they have with the parish, often the parish secretary.
- The parish staff member should congratulate the couple on their engagement and thank them for their interest to marry and to marry in the Church.
- ***No wedding dates should be given or “held” over the phone.***
- ***Schedule a meeting for the engaged couple with the pastor.***
- In the initial contact the couple's information is taken and referred to the pastor. A person or persons have the right to the pastoral care necessary to prepare them for matrimony. They do not have to be already “registered” in the parish to request this care. The pastor, in conversation with the couple, will guide them to a fuller life in the parish community of faith as in being a registered stewardship members in the case they need such development.

### **2. Couple's first meeting with pastor.**

***NOTE: In light of the context of evangelization, the following is provided for your reflection on how to approach those seeking marriage who: 1) reside in your parish boundary yet may not be registered; 2) do not reside within your parish boundary, yet choose to register in your parish; and 3) approach your parish and your parish is neither where they reside nor do they intend to register as they are parishioners elsewhere.***

**Scenario I: Regarding those who reside in your parish boundaries yet may not be registered:** Canon 1115 makes the point that marriages are to be celebrated in a parish where either of the contracting parties has a domicile, quasidomicile, or a month long residence. It allows also for it to be celebrated elsewhere. How one acquires a proper pastor is clearly explained in canon 107, by domicile and quasidomicile. There is no requirement “to register”, “to receive envelopes”; the fact of residence in the territory establishes a relationship. As the commentary of the Canon Law Society of America states “...domicile puts the individual in relationship to the local church, both to the parish and the diocese. Accordingly, domicile signifies a communitarian context. That is, it represents the place wherein the individual Catholic is going to work out his or her salvation both historically and personally according to the responsibilities associated with the individual's proper state in life.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> CLSA p. 146.

**Scenario 2: Regarding those who do not reside within your parish boundary, yet choose to register in your parish:** Likewise, a person may attend a parish or join a parish as he or she has found it to be the community of faith that provides the path to his or her salvation. The parish attracts the person to a life in Christ and His Church due to the movement of the Holy Spirit in that parish. The attraction may appear superficial at first. Nevertheless, it is a moment of evangelization. The person chooses to join the parish and has shown such by participating in its liturgies and approaching the pastor for the pastoral care needed to prepare for Matrimony. In the spirit of evangelization such people are welcomed and considered for pastoral care. The pastor and the couple, in this case, discuss the couple's sincerity of intention for asking for his pastoral care.

**Scenario 3: Regarding those who approach your parish and your parish is neither where they reside nor do they intend to register as they are parishioners elsewhere.** Couples may approach your parish for their wedding (for reasons such as location, aesthetics, etc.) yet they may be registered elsewhere. In such cases, their pastor and home parish ought to oversee their preparation and provide a letter to you indicating that they are doing so. Your role, as the host parish for their wedding, is to assist the engaged couple in connecting with their home parish for their preparation.

**NOTE: Each situation ought to be handled separately and delicately.** The presumption of the Church is that people have a natural right to marry. Therefore, the Church is to provide a welcoming presence to couples, regardless of whether they are registered parishioners or not. For those who are not, they may be encouraged to register in the spirit of discipleship in the parish and to make a commitment to the faith community in which they are to celebrate their marriage. By all means the Church is to recognize that, for whatever reason, a couple has presented itself in the pastor's office to be married. This is a precious moment to fan the flame of faith in them with little obstacle to doing so.

**A. Begin developing a warm, welcoming relationship and get to know the couple.**

- Invite the couple to share basic biographical information, the story of their relationship, their faith backgrounds and practices; etc.
- For those who are Catholic, inquire if they are fully initiated into the Catholic Church (Baptism, First Holy Communion, Confirmation). If not fully initiated, see ELEMENT 3: FAITH FORMATION details below.

**B. Provide an overview of the marriage preparation process.**

- Explain this general process, not in detail yet. After completing *Form A*, you will have a better sense of how to tailor the process for them as a couple. Then you can explain the elements in detail and how they apply to them specifically.
- Explain that the reason for all of the elements (the meetings with the pastor, the marriage formation components, the faith formation components, the liturgical preparations and the opportunities available to them after their wedding) is to be sure that the couple is well prepared for marriage in the Catholic Church.

- Explain that these components are not “hoops to jump through” but care that the Church provides to assist the couple to make and sustain a thriving marriage. We want them to be well-prepared and equipped with the vision and tools to help them make and sustain a thriving bond.
- Engaged couples should be encouraged to “check-in” with the pastor after completing each element of their preparation. This can be in person, after a Sunday mass, or via phone. The purpose is to allow for continued relationship and journeying alongside the couple to understand how they are receiving the formation and to ascertain any necessary adaptations or supplemental materials.

**C. Discuss Form A by meeting with each party separately.**

- NOTE: Prior marriages of either party can be an impediment. Particular care must be taken when a non-Catholic party has any type of a previous marriage. Since they are not bound to a form as Catholics and Orthodox are, the Church recognizes as valid their marriages amongst themselves as valid whether it be civil or religious. Consultation with The Tribunal is a must if any doubt arises.
- There are two sets of questions on *Form A*; one for the groom and one for the bride. Due to the nature of the questions, each party should be asked the questions in private and under oath. This is very important and should be upheld in every case.
- An effective pastoral practice could be to discuss *Form A* (in order to gather the necessary information to ascertain their freedom, ability and intentions and to tailor their preparation) but withhold the signatures until later in the process. Later, after all elements of their preparation are complete, the pastor could review their *Form As* (again individually) confirm their answers and collect the signatures. This practice could serve as the two bookends (introduction and confirmation) of their freedom, ability and intentions to enter into marriage.
- While the pastor is meeting with one party, the other can be completing the premarital inventory *Fully Engaged*© (see the next step below) and vice versa.

**D. Begin to address any areas of concern revealed by discussing Form A.**

- Within the framework of seeing marriage preparation as an opportunity for evangelization and a deepening faith, any areas incongruent with the Church’s vision for marriage and family should, in a pastoral way, be brought to the couple’s awareness in this first meeting, or if pastorally appropriate, at a subsequent meeting.
- These areas include, but are not limited to: intentions against the essential characteristics of Christian marriage: unity, fidelity, indissolubility, fruitfulness; impediment; bonds still remaining; abuse; addictions; pre-marital sexual relations; cohabitation; lack of practice of the faith; etc.
- These concerns will likely not be resolved in one meeting; however, they should be introduced as areas needing further discussion as the process unfolds.
- The hope is that the process and formation programs will allow for further growth in understanding that will eventually lead toward changes in these areas of concern.
- It is the responsibility of the person overseeing the preparation to address special circumstances as needed with each couple such as: pregnancy; youthful marriage; reasons for delaying the marriage; addictions; abuse; cohabitation; pornography use; pre-

marital sexual relations; con-validation; inter-faith marriages; second unions; older couples; persons with disabilities; and when to recommend additional elements (such as counseling or additional educational programs) in the couple's preparation such that these areas can be resolved prior to the *Celebration of Matrimony*.

- Many of the above issues will be covered from an educational point of view in the *Marriage Preparation Group Programs*; however, pastors are responsible to journey with the engaged couple in their individual awareness, provide necessary referrals, and ultimately support them in appropriating changes where needed.

**E. Review the “Checklist for Marriage Paperwork” and explain what is needed.**

- The checklist provides explanations for each element. Based upon what was revealed by discussing *Form A*, indicate which items the couple needs to provide.

**F. Explain the elements of Marriage Formation.**

- For details on the Marriage Formation elements, see the details in ELEMENT 2: MARRIAGE FORMATION below.
- Based upon what was revealed by discussing *Form A*, indicate which items the couple needs to complete.

**G. Explain the elements of Faith Formation.**

- For details on the Faith Formation elements, see the details in ELEMENT 3: FAITH FORMATION below.
- Based upon what was revealed by discussing *Form A*, indicate which items the couple needs to complete.

**H. If it appears there are no impediments to marriage, set the date for the Celebration of Matrimony and explain the form titled “Engaged Couple’s Agreement to Fulfill Marriage Preparation Elements.”<sup>27</sup>**

- Engaged couples should be made aware that the marriage preparation process is a time when both the couple and you, the pastor, discern together that the bride and the groom are well prepared to enter into the vocation of marriage.
- Reasons for pausing include items discussed on *Form A* and any related concerns that may reveal themselves during the preparation process.
- The form titled “*Engaged Couple’s Agreement to Fulfill Marriage Preparation Elements*” was developed as an instrument to communicate to the engaged couples that any proposed wedding date, when assigned, is tentative until: 1) all aspect of preparation on this checklist are complete; 2) freedom to marry has been established (if in question); and 3) the pastor has moral certitude that the marriage may take place. At any point any person (bride, groom, or pastor) is free to discuss reasons to pause, postpone, or not proceed with the preparation.
- An engagement is not a marriage. It is a time for further discernment and preparation for marriage.
- Couples may make an appeal to The Tribunal.

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<sup>27</sup> “Before a marriage is celebrated, it must be evident that nothing stands in the way of its valid and licit celebration.” CIC, n.1066.  
“All the faithful are obliged to reveal any impediments they know about to the pastor or local ordinary before the celebration of the marriage.” CIC, n.1069.

### **I. Either offer or schedule a Blessing of the Engaged Couple.**

- The new *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* provides a *Blessing for Engaged Couples*. Couples should receive this blessing at some point during their preparation and each parish may create their own process in line with the guidelines provided, some of which follow.
- The blessing “may be used either by the parents, or by a Priest, a Deacon, or another layperson, who while maintaining the chief elements and structure of the rite, should adapt the individual parts to the circumstances. If the engagement has already taken place, this order of celebration may also be used when couples are brought together for catechetical preparation for Marriage. A betrothal or a special blessing of an engaged couple, however, is never to be combined with the celebration of Mass.”<sup>28</sup>

### **3. Each party takes the Fully Engaged© pre-marital inventory.**

- *Fully Engaged* is an inventory of about 200 questions that is completed separately by pen and paper at the parish, online, or at a separate meeting with a trained facilitator. The inventory is designed to help the couple identify their expectations in a number of areas. It is scored (to reveal areas of agreement or disagreement) and the results are sent to you or trained designated facilitators who will then meet with the couple to facilitate discussion regarding areas of agreement and difference.
- *Fully Engaged©* is thoroughly Catholic and catechetical and is designed to help engaged couples solidify the foundation upon which they, together with Christ, will build their Sacrament of Marriage. The topics and discussion will build upon the topics introduced in the *Marriage Preparation Group Programs*. The discussions with a trained facilitator will help the engaged couple further discuss their appropriation of the materials and teaching presented and will further help them on their journey of preparation and maturation of faith.
- Since 2013, *Fully Engaged©* has been the standard premarital inventory used in the Archdiocese. It is now the only pre-marital inventory to be used in the Archdiocese.
- Your parish can set up its own process for the engaged couples to take and discuss their answers.
- The Archdiocese recommends that the trained lay facilitators be a married couple to allow the engaged couple the opportunity to develop a mentor type relationship. If this is the case, the married couple is to complete the “Fully Engaged Discussion Report” and submit it back to you confidentially.
- If the timing allows, the Archdiocese also recommends that the discussion takes place **AFTER** the engaged couple has attended a *Marriage Preparation Group Program*. This would allow the couple to benefit from the formation they received in the program such that it could inform their discussions and expectations, especially in regards to any areas not previously known or practiced (such as faith practices, cohabitation, pre-marital sexual relations; family planning methods; etc).
- Engaged couples should meet with their Faciliator(s) preferably four or more time, but two times minimally. *Fully Engaged’s©* preference is that couples meet with their Faciliator at least four or more meetings. This allows for a full discussion of all topics

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<sup>28</sup> OCM, n. 220, 221.

and the time to complete more of the activities from the Workbook in between meetings. Due to schedule demands, two meetings are permissible but not recommended.

## **ELEMENT 2: Marriage Formation**

### **I. Couple attends Marriage Preparation Group Program.**

#### **a. *Marriage Preparation Group Programs cover all recommended topics by the Pontifical Council for the Family, the USCCB, and the Archdiocese of Miami.***

- Marriage preparation group programs are to cover the following topics: 1) self-knowledge and family of origin; 2) communication and conflict resolution skills; 3) expectations; 4) finances; 5) sexuality and intimacy; 6) an introduction to Natural Family Planning; 7) the vocation and sacrament of marriage; 8) marital spirituality. The *Marriage Preparation Group Program* is to include an opportunity for Confession and to participate in Holy Mass.
- Programs ought to include a combination of teaching presentations, witness presentations, prayer experiences and couple discussion time.

#### **b. *Marriage Preparation Group Programs are run by a team of trained and qualified married couples and clergy.***<sup>29</sup>

- Teams should be made up of faith-filled and trained married couples of all ages and life stages and ordained clergy members, preferably a priest (minimally for the sacramental aspects of the program: mass and reconciliation) and also a deacon (if there is a married deacon available to help).
- According to *Getting It Right: Marriage Preparation In The Catholic Church; A Study of the Value of Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church for Couples Married One Through Eight Years*: “Marriage preparation is perceived as most valuable when it is administered by a team. A team made up of clergy, lay couples and parish staff was the instructor combination that yielded the highest perceived values. To be noted here is the critical role of clergy on this team. Respondents judged the absence of *clergy* from the marriage preparation process to be seriously detrimental to the process.”<sup>30</sup>
- Team members “must have a solid doctrinal preparation and unquestionable fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church so that they will be able to transmit the truths of the faith and the responsibilities connected with marriage with sufficient in-depth knowledge and life witness. It is quite obvious that these pastoral workers, as educators, will also have to be capable of welcoming the engaged, whatever their social and culture extraction, intellectual formation and concrete capacities may be. Moreover, their faithful life witness and joyful giving are indispensable conditions for carrying out their

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<sup>29</sup> “The above implies the need for an adequate formation program for the pastoral workers. The formation leaders' preparation should prepare them to present the fundamental guidelines of marriage preparation which we have spoken about with clear adherence to the Church's Magisterium, a suitable methodology and pastoral sensitivity, and also enable them to offer their specific contribution, according to their own expertise, to the immediate preparation. The pastoral workers ought to receive their formation in special Pastoral Institutes and be carefully chosen by the Bishop.” PSM, n. 44.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/marriage-preparation/getting-it-right-marriage-preparation-in-the-catholic-church.cfm>

task. Based on their own experiences in life and human problems, they can offer some starting points for enlightening the engaged with Christian wisdom.”<sup>31</sup>

- The Archdiocese will offer training for Team Members.
- c. **Marriage Preparation Group Programs are offered by parishes, the diocese and by approved apostolic groups in various formats (multiple sessions, weekend program, etc.) but all must meet for a minimum of 16 hours.**<sup>32</sup>
  - Within the framework of seeing marriage preparation as an opportunity for evangelization and a deepening faith, parishes are encouraged to offer programs locally for their parishioners. Parish-based programs provide a sense of belonging within a community and a greater parish connection for after the wedding. If a given parish does not have enough weddings to warrant running its own program, they could collaborate with nearby parishes to serve the local community together.
  - In addition to parish-based programs, the Archdiocese and *Camino del Matrimonio* will continue to provide regular programs for couples who cannot attend a parish program (due to availability or schedules).
  - All programs must meet for a minimum of 16 hours. This allows for the uniform content to be adequately covered without presenting an undue burden of time on the engaged couples and team members.<sup>33</sup>
  - In the Archdiocese of Miami, *Camino del Matrimonio* and *Transformed in Love* are approved programs. Parishes wishing to offer a parish-based program are encouraged to utilize *Transformed in Love*. Other parish-based programs, however, will be accepted if approved by the Archdiocese by meeting the content standards set above and the training for the ministry.
  - In exceptional circumstances couples may participate in the online program called *CatholicMarriagePrep.com*© which provides 20 hours of formation, facilitated by a mentor couple, in nine sessions. This program may only be taken with the permission of the pastor and for reasons such as: military; difficult schedules; cannot attend live program; distance relationship; etc.
  - Couples may register through: [www.MiamiArch.org/MarriagePrepGroupProgram](http://www.MiamiArch.org/MarriagePrepGroupProgram).

## **2. Couple checks-in with pastor after attending the Marriage Preparation Group Program and before attending an NFP Course.**

- This will help them process their experience, ask any questions and will help the pastor ascertain their openness to the next portion of their preparation, the *Natural Family Planning Course*.
- If necessary, the pastor can provide more information or explanation as they continue in their “journey of faith” and preparation for marriage.

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<sup>31</sup> PSM, n. 43.

<sup>32</sup> “The course can be carried out in the individual parishes, if there are enough engaged persons and well-prepared collaborators, in the Episcopal or forane vicariates, or in parish coordinating structures. Sometimes they can be given by persons in charge of family movements, associations or apostolic groups guided by a competent priest. This is an area which should be coordinated by a diocesan organism that works on behalf of the Bishop.” PSM, n. 48.

<sup>33</sup> “There are a number of legitimate ways to structure programs of marriage preparation, and each local Church will discern how best to provide a suitable formation without distancing young people from the sacrament. [...] Quality is more important than quantity, and priority should be given – **along with a renewed proclamation of the kerygma** – to an attractive and helpful presentation of information that can help couples to live the rest of their lives together “with great courage and generosity”. AL, n. 207.

### 3. Couple takes a Natural Family Planning Course.

- While *Marriage Preparation Group Programs* include an introduction to Natural Family Planning, engaged couples are asked to also attend a full course in any method of Natural Planning Family.
- Courses range from three classes spread out over three months to seven classes spread out over six months.
- Courses are offered live, live online and self-paced online.
- Couples may register for courses through: [www.MiamiArch.org/NFP](http://www.MiamiArch.org/NFP).
- This course requirement should take place **AFTER** the couple has attended the *Marriage Preparation Group Program* and **AFTER** they have had their “check in” with the pastor.
- The *Marriage Preparation Group Program* will include an introduction to NFP and the reasons why the Church promotes NFP as an acceptable method of family planning. This information, if not known before, will help the engaged couple further understand this aspect of their preparation.
- Likewise, their “check in” with the pastor will allow them to discuss their understanding and readiness to proceed with this aspect of their preparation.

### 4. Couple discusses **Fully Engaged** with a trained facilitator(s).

- See ELEMENT 1, item 3 for general information on *Fully Engaged*.
- a. It is highly recommended that this portion of the couple’s preparation take place AFTER the Marriage Preparation Group Program. This will allow the engaged couple to incorporate any new learning or insights from the group program into these discussions, with the goal of assisting them to appropriate the Church’s vision for married life more fully into their lives and relationship.**
  - *Fully Engaged*© covers topics similar to what is covered in the *Marriage Preparation Group Programs*.
  - The purpose of the discussions is to allow the engaged couple to become more aware of each other’s expectations and to allow them together to have a safe and nurturing place to discuss their understanding, appropriation, and readiness to accept and live out the essential elements of marriage.
- b. If possible, it is highly recommended that the Facilitators be a married couple.**
  - The Facilitator can be the pastor or a married couple. The benefit of having a married couple is that the engaged couple will have the opportunity to develop a relationship with another couple in their parish. This will allow for sharing of experiences and wisdom and will nurture an on-going connection with the parish.
  - Training is provided for Facilitators by the Archdiocese.
- c. Engaged couples should meet with their Facilitator(s) preferably four or more time, but two times minimally.**
  - *Fully Engaged’s*© preference is that couples meet with their Facilitator at least four or more meetings. This allows for a full discussion of all topics and the time to complete more of the activities from the workbook in between meetings.
  - Due to schedule demands, two meetings are permissible but not recommended.

## **ELEMENT 3: Faith Formation**

*In addition to the faith formation provided in the Marriage Preparation Group Programs, the following additional practices and formation are recommended.*

### **1. Engaged couples participate in the Sacraments and parish life.**

- Given the larger perspective of understanding marriage preparation as an opportunity for evangelization and a deepening of faith, engaged couples should be encouraged to participate in the full life of the parish, including Sunday mass.<sup>34</sup>
- There are numerous ways the engaged couple could be supported or welcomed to become active members of the parish.
- Pastors may want to incorporate prayers for those preparing for marriage in the Prayers of the Faithful.
- Parishes could also post announcements, banns and photos of those preparing for marriage in the bulletin or on a bulletin board asking the community to offer prayers for them.
- Engaged couples could also be encouraged to attend mass with their *Fully Engaged*® Facilitator couple and introduced and welcomed explicitly.

### **2. First Holy Communion: (if applicable)**

- If either party has not received First Holy Communion, the pastor will provide options for them to receive Holy Communion.

### **3. Confirmation: (if applicable)**

**a. “Catholics who have not yet received the sacrament of confirmation are to receive it before they are admitted to marriage if it can be done without grave inconvenience.”<sup>35</sup>**

**b. It must be noted that lack of Confirmation is not an impediment to marrying in the Church.**

- Confirmation is not required before marriage; however, given the larger perspective of understanding marriage preparation as a "journey of faith, which is similar to the catechumenate,"<sup>36</sup> couples should have the opportunity to be formed for, and receive, this sacrament if they have not done so already.
- This should take place after any impediments have been resolved, including any areas of the relationship incongruent with the Church's vision for marriage and family (such as pre-marital sexual relations or cohabitation).
- Canon 889 §2 states that “to receive confirmation licitly outside the danger of death requires that a person who has the use of reason be **suitably instructed**, properly disposed and able to renew the baptismal promises.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> CIC, n. 1065 §2. To receive the sacrament of marriage fruitfully, spouses are urged especially to approach the sacraments of penance and of the Most Holy Eucharist.

<sup>35</sup> CIC n. 1065, §1.

<sup>36</sup> PSM n. 2.

<sup>37</sup> CIC, n. 889 §2.

#### **4. Reconciliation: As needed and especially before the Celebration of Matrimony.**

**a. To receive the sacrament of marriage fruitfully, spouses are urged especially to approach the sacrament of penance.<sup>38</sup>**

- This could be offered to couples at numerous times: 1) after the first meeting; 2) during the *Marriage Preparation Group Program*; 3) before the *Blessing of Engaged Couples* (if scheduled at a separate time); 4) at the last meeting with the pastor before the Rehearsal; 5) at the Rehearsal.
- Engaged couples should be educated as to the value of participating in the sacrament, especially if there were areas of the relationship incongruent with the Church's vision for marriage and family (such as pre-marital sexual relations or cohabitation).
- Participation in this sacrament can become a significant moment of grace and preparation to receive the sacrament of marriage fruitfully.

#### **ELEMENT 4: Final Meetings with the Pastor<sup>39</sup>**

##### **1. Collect all documents needed for the Celebration of Matrimony.**

- All documents should be collected and those needing to be sent to the Tribunal should be done two months, at least one month, prior to the *Celebration of Matrimony*.

##### **2. Discuss final readiness and have couples sign Form A.**

- Pastors discuss with the engaged couples their entire preparation process to ascertain their experience, readiness and appropriation of information they have gained throughout the process.
- A good tool for doing this is to review *Form A* individually and discuss any changes in understanding or practices since the first time is discussed.
- If there remain any unresolved concerns, these need to be addressed at this point before proceeding further and signing the form.

##### **3. Assist couples in preparing for the liturgical Celebration of Matrimony.**

**a. Engaged couples are to be encouraged to both be actively involved in making thoughtful choices for the liturgical Celebration of Matrimony.**

- The new *Order for Celebrating Matrimony* should be reviewed and the couples should be aware of their options for making the Celebration their own.
- Information should also be provided regarding options for the entry procession, which may not be known to the couple.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> "If a suitable itinerary and specific courses have been followed and have worked well during the period of proximate formation (cf. n. 32ss.), the aims of immediate preparation could consist of the following: a) A synthesis of the previous preparation, especially its doctrinal, moral and spiritual content, thus filling in eventual gaps in basic formation; b) Experiences of prayer (retreats, spiritual exercises for the engaged) in which the encounter with the Lord can make them discover the depth and beauty of the supernatural life; c) A suitable liturgical preparation which also envisages the active participation of the engaged, with special attention to the Sacrament of Reconciliation; d) Good use the canonical talks that are envisaged with the parish priest, so that everyone can get to know one another better. These ends will be achieved through special meetings of a more intensive nature." PSM, n. 50.

- The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* may be used in the Liturgy as of September 8, 2016, the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and its use is obligatory as of December 30, 2016, the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. From that date forward, no other edition of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* may be used in the dioceses of the United States of America.

## **ELEMENT 5: Provide Opportunities for Enrichment After Their Wedding**

- *Parishes should continue to provide opportunities to support couples after their wedding, in the form of marriage enrichment opportunities.*
- These opportunities could include:
  1. Annual celebration of special anniversaries.
  2. Parish-based marriage enrichment events and workshops.
  3. Referrals to archdiocesan marriage enrichment and support.
- These opportunities could also include: 1) meetings of couples living in the same neighborhood; 2) brief retreat for couples; 3) top experts on concrete issues facing family; 4) marriage counseling; 5) home missionaries who help couples discuss their difficulties and desires; 6) social services in dealing with family problems like addiction, infidelity and domestic violence; 7) programs of spiritual growth; 8) workshops for parents (including those with troubled children and extended family).<sup>40</sup>
- “The initial years of marriage are a vital and sensitive period during which couples become more aware of the challenges and meaning of married life. Consequently, pastoral accompaniment needs to go beyond the actual celebration of the sacrament. In this regard, experienced couples have an important role to play. The parish is a place where such experienced couples can help younger couples, with the eventual cooperation of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities. Young couples need to be encouraged to be essentially open to the great gift of children. Emphasis should also be given to the importance of family spirituality, prayer and participation in the Sunday Eucharist, and couples encouraged to meet regularly to promote growth in their spiritual life and solidarity in the concrete demands of life. Liturgies, devotional practices and the Eucharist celebrated for families, especially on the wedding anniversary, were mentioned as vital factors in fostering evangelization through the family.”<sup>41</sup>
- “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, according to the norm of the Directory of Pastoral Care of the Family.”<sup>42</sup>
- “Often the engagement period is not long enough, the decision is precipitated for various reasons and, what is even more problematic, the couple themselves are insufficiently mature. As a result, the newly married couple need to complete a process that should have taken place during their engagement.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See AL, n. 229.

<sup>41</sup> AL, n. 223.

<sup>42</sup> PSM, n. 73.

<sup>43</sup> AL, n. 217.

# *Implementation Plan*

## **1. We need your help!**

1. We need pastors to partner in this new approach.
2. We need parishes to run parish-based (or deanery-based) marriage preparation programs. This is the most effective and appropriate place for the engaged couples to be prepared for marriage. We will train and support you to do this!
3. If you are not running a program, we need you to recommend a team of married couples to be trained to help the diocese run the diocesan programs.

## **2. Trainings (and/or online webinars) for:**

1. Pastors, Priests, and Deacons
2. Parish or Deanery Marriage Prep Teams
3. Archdiocesan Marriage Prep Teams
4. Parish Staff and Secretaries
5. NFP Teachers

## **3. Materials to be developed:**

1. December 30, 2016: Professional, branded materials for distribution to the Engaged Couples.
2. December 30, 2016: Updated websites at [www.MiamiArch.org](http://www.MiamiArch.org).
3. January 2017: Standard evaluation form that all couples preparing for marriage are invited to complete. This form will be available online or hardcopy and all results will be reviewed by the Family and Marriage Office.
4. March 2017: Talking points and leading questions to help you to get to know the couple.
5. March 2017: A supplement to the Guidelines to assist pastors to address special circumstances as needed with each couple such as: pregnancy; youthful marriage; reasons for delaying the marriage; addictions; abuse; cohabitation; pornography use; pre-marital sexual relations; convalidation; inter-faith marriages; second unions; older couples; persons with disabilities; and when to recommend additional elements (such as counseling or additional educational programs) in the couple's preparation.
6. September 2017: Updated Guidelines (that reflect these changes and resources)

# *Appendix 1: Celebration of Marriage and Evangelization of Non-believing Baptized Persons<sup>44</sup>*

*Familiaris Consortio*

*Note: This is the entire paragraph 68 from Familiaris Consortio. It is included as reference in light of updating the marriage preparation process within the context of evangelization and maturation of faith.*

## **“Celebration of Marriage and Evangelization of Non-believing Baptized Persons**

68. Precisely because in the celebration of the sacrament very special attention must be devoted to the moral and spiritual dispositions of those being married, in particular to their faith, we must here deal with a not infrequent difficulty in which the pastors of the Church can find themselves in the context of our secularized society.

In fact, the faith of the person asking the Church for marriage can exist in different degrees, and it is the primary duty of pastors to bring about a rediscovery of this faith and to nourish it and bring it to maturity. But pastors must also understand the reasons that lead the Church also to admit to the celebration of marriage those who are imperfectly disposed.

The sacrament of Matrimony has this specific element that distinguishes it from all the other sacraments: it is the sacrament of something that was part of the very economy of creation; it is the very conjugal covenant instituted by the Creator "in the beginning." Therefore the decision of a man and a woman to marry in accordance with this divine plan, that is to say, the decision to commit by their irrevocable conjugal consent their whole lives in indissoluble love and unconditional fidelity, really involves, even if not in a fully conscious way, an attitude of profound obedience to the will of God, an attitude which cannot exist without God's grace. They have thus already begun what is in a true and proper sense a journey towards salvation, a journey which the celebration of the sacrament and the immediate preparation for it can complement and bring to completion, given the uprightness of their intention.

On the other hand it is true that in some places engaged couples ask to be married in church for motives which are social rather than genuinely religious. This is not surprising. Marriage, in fact, is not an event that concerns only the persons actually getting married. By its very nature it is also a social matter, committing the couple being married in the eyes of society. And its celebration has always been an occasion of rejoicing that brings together families and friends. It therefore goes without saying that social as well as personal motives enter into the request to be married in church.

Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that these engaged couples, by virtue of their Baptism, are already really sharers in Christ's marriage Covenant with the Church, and that, by their right intention, they have accepted God's plan regarding marriage and therefore at least implicitly consent to what the Church intends to do when she celebrates marriage. Thus, the fact that motives of a social nature also enter into the request is not enough to justify refusal on the part of pastors. Moreover, as the Second

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<sup>44</sup> FC, n. 68.

Vatican Council teaches, the sacraments by words and ritual elements nourish and strengthen faith": that faith towards which the married couple are already journeying by reason of the uprightness of their intention, which Christ's grace certainly does not fail to favor and support.

As for wishing to lay down further criteria for admission to the ecclesial celebration of marriage, criteria that would concern the level of faith of those to be married, this would above all involve grave risks. In the first place, the risk of making unfounded and discriminatory judgments; secondly, the risk of causing doubts about the validity of marriages already celebrated, with grave harm to Christian communities, and new and unjustified anxieties to the consciences of married couples; one would also fall into the danger of calling into question the sacramental nature of many marriages of brethren separated from full communion with the Catholic Church, thus contradicting ecclesial tradition.

However, when in spite of all efforts, engaged couples show that they reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls cannot admit them to the celebration of marriage. In spite of his reluctance to do so, he has the duty to take note of the situation and to make it clear to those concerned that, in these circumstances, it is not the Church that is placing an obstacle in the way of the celebration that they are asking for, but themselves.

**Once more there appears in all its urgency the need for evangelization and catechesis before and after marriage, effected by the whole Christian-community, so that every man and woman that gets married celebrates the sacrament of Matrimony not only validly but also fruitfully."**

## *Engaged Couple's Agreement to Fulfill Marriage Preparation Elements*

Dear Engaged Couple:

Congratulations on your engagement!

We are thrilled you want to get married, and that you want to get married in the Catholic Church. We are pleased that you have chosen \_\_\_\_\_ Parish to prepare you for your wedding. Your love has brought you to the point of wanting to commit yourselves to one another in marriage. This is a beautiful and honorable desire, worthy of our support, energy and assistance.

We want to do our best not only to help you enter into marriage validly, but also to help you build a solid foundation for the rest of your lives. To that end, we offer you these various different elements of preparation desiring to provide you concrete, practical assistance so that your love and marriage may be valid and thrive. We invite you to participate whole-heartedly in the process.

Please also remember, that an engagement is not a marriage. It is a time for further discernment of your readiness to marry. As such, we look forward to journeying with you and pray that it is a time filled with many graces for you both.

Sincerely,

Pastor of \_\_\_\_\_

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By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read, understand and agree to complete the various elements of the marriage preparation process. **I also understand that the wedding date provided is tentative until:** 1) all of the elements of preparation are complete; 2) our freedom to marry has been established; and 3) the pastor has determined that we are ready to marry.

I understand that at any point, any person (bride, groom, or pastor) is free to discuss reasons to pause, postpone, or not proceed with the preparation. **The pastor reserves at any time the right for any spiritual or canonical reason to postpone or cancel this wedding.** In such a case, I agree to release the parish, pastor and the Archdiocese of Miami from all expenses, losses or harm incurred.

Tentative Wedding Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Groom's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Groom's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Bride's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Bride's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

PASTORS: Provide copies of the completed Agreement for the Bride and Groom and keep the original in the couple's file.